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**Rethinking Misogyny:
Men's Perceptions of Female Power in Dating
Relationships**

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PhD Gender Studies

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted, in whole or in part, to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signed: _____ Anna Imogen Arrowsmith

Dated: _____

Preface

Materials used in the writing of this thesis were derived from sources acknowledged in the text, references and bibliography. This thesis is also based upon original research conducted solely by the author.

Acknowledgements

In writing this thesis, I would like to recognise the support given by Prof Sue Thornham as well as the additional supervision by Prof Clarissa Smith and Prof Feona Attwood. I also wish to acknowledge the extremely useful (yet minor!) revisions at the point of viva voce from Prof Eric Anderson and Dr Sharif Mowlabocus.

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It is also important to state that without the time given to me by my interviewees, who answered what were often probing and personal questions, my studies and the writing of this thesis would not have been possible. I am forever grateful for their honesty and generosity. I also wish to acknowledge the incredible responses I received from the sex workers whose words unfortunately are not included in the final draft for reasons of focus and space. Their insights, however, run throughout this work.

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX**Anna Imogen Arrowsmith****PhD Gender Studies****Rethinking Misogyny:
Men's Perceptions of Female Power
in Dating Relationships****Summary**

My PhD research explores the role of men's subjective accounts of interactions with the women they date, especially with reference to whether they experience women to have power in dating relationships. It comprises a qualitative analysis of the responses gained from semi-structured interviews conducted with 20 British men and 10 Pick Up Artists (men who attended classes to learn how to increase their confidence when dating women) all aged 21-40.

Current debates around gendered power are largely focused on female subjectivities, and are core to political and theoretical differences between second and third-wave/post-feminisms. I argue that in order to understand the workings of (heterosexual) gendered power relations, we must pay attention not only to issues of structural power but also to men's perceptions of the lived experiences of such relationships. At a time of increased uncertainty about gendered identity and increased pressure to see the 'self' as a project, such perceptions may be both very varied and at variance with accepted structural analyses of gendered power.

Following three introductory chapters in which I trace the debates around masculinity and a contemporary social order focused on risk and individuality, I analyse the interviewees' responses in order to explore how the men position themselves within the gender and dating discourses that are available to them. The effects of what Ulrich Beck described as 'individualism' and the use of 'constructed certitude' are explored, as is how the men deal with conflicting ideas borne out of living in an age when ideals from both hegemonic and inclusive masculinities co-exist. Whether men acknowledge their own insecurities or whether they focus on perceived external triggers, such as female culpability, and whether men respond to insecurities by focusing on an active process of overcoming them (thus remaining inside hegemonic ideals), is also a focus.

Subject areas explored include the role of homosocial behaviour in dating, the gendered dating process, the power of female beauty, men's bodily anxieties, media representations of dating, men's body image, unwanted pregnancies and female aggression. I conclude that we cannot dismiss men's perceptions of female power in dating as mistaken, as has been argued. If men's realities include such perceptions, then their un/willingness to relinquish 'more' power needs to be understood if equality between the sexes is to be increased.

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1.0 – Introduction

The dating experience is culturally represented as a time of excitement, affection, exploration and personal development but also of risk, insecurity and pain. Heterosexual dating is represented in popular culture as a time of the bringing together of a man and a woman 'as one', yet simultaneously the differences between the sexes are highlighted. Pertinent to understanding these representations are the male sexual drive discourse, which states that men are predominantly interested in regular sex with lots of different women, and the have/hold discourse, where women are thought to want long term secure relationships in preference to short term sexual gratification (Hollway 1984). A man and a woman must overcome the obstacle of gender in order to unify, or so it is thought. In this logic it is implicitly understood that the opposite sex is necessarily enigmatic and only forming a close relationship will enlighten one of one's partner's emotional similarities to oneself.

My own dating history has been a story of much insecurity and distrust of men, insecurity bolstered by a popular culture, which paints a picture of men's dating motivations as almost entirely negative, as I perceived it. It wasn't until my mid-30s when I met my husband that I was able to trust a man enough to fall in love with him. I had hitherto often wondered why my trust of men was so scarce since I grew up with a good and solid relationship with my father and my brother whilst young and was also able to sustain male friendships fairly easily. Entering into dating relationships was another matter however, and my chosen means of dealing with anxiety was to use bravado to cover up my insecurities, which mainly focused on a boyfriend's faithfulness. This ensured that I was known as a confident person and, ironically, I often sensed that men were unsure of themselves in comparison to such an 'assertive' woman. When I was younger, the idea that men had their own insecurities, especially around dating women, would have appeared as an anomaly. This was the case even though I had plenty of anecdotal experience that many men were daunted by women, to the extent that female friends often spoke of avoiding exhibiting some behaviour in order not to 'scare him off'. Yet still my own overall philosophy did not incorporate male insecurity.

As someone who has extensive experience producing professional adult films I have witnessed men's insecurities around their bodies and levels of attraction to women first hand, yet I have not found male insecurity adequately explored or represented in academic study focussed on gender. This frustrated me on two levels. Firstly, I felt my own power as a woman was not being fully recognised and also men's situation remained unknown when surely their perspective was of value. Practically, I was sure my privileged position within the adult industry would enable me to undergo research interviewing men which was unique and valuable. Indeed, my own previous work enabled me to gain access to the sex worker and Pick Up Artist (see below) communities as part of my PhD research whose voices are often denied. Both groups were keen to talk to somebody who had a background in the sex industry or at least was clearly unfazed by being asked to talk about sex, including erection issues and other negative aspects of the sex act.

I therefore decided to review existing research on male experiences in dating relationships which spoke of men's perceptions of female power, or lack thereof, and found it to be a surprisingly under-researched area of Gender Studies. When initial reading was completed, it was concluded that much as men's effeminophobia, or fear of being perceived as feminine, was a subject area populated by a number of articles and books (for instance Richardson 2009; Bergling 2001), but whether or not men experienced fears, concerns, or whether they can cite examples of female power, are areas of exploration almost entirely missing from the literature.

Whilst writing up my thesis, I visited a male friend and his new fiancée one evening at their house for dinner. He spoke at length about how much happier he was getting married the second time than he had been with his first marriage, which was to a woman he strongly disliked. I asked him why it was he had married somebody he did not like and he replied that he had done so because he was scared of her; she was older than him and even though she was physically smaller, was prone to violence. He then spoke about instances of her violent and bullying nature, to which he had responded by physically turning his back on her while she attacked him, waiting for the attack to end. When describing this

relationship, he said something very telling: “If I were a woman, it would be a classic case of me being a battered wife.” It then struck me how he has no reference point for his experience as a recipient of domestic violence because he is male. The term ‘battered husband’ or an equivalent does not exist because men are not free to take up the position of the victim of domestic violence because they are socially required to live by prescribed masculine ideals, which dictate that a man would be considered weak if he were the recipient of female perpetrated violence.

A lack of a ‘battered-husband’ type script for male victims of domestic abuse, such as in this case, has important consequences. Firstly, it appeared to me that my friend had some difficulty in communicating his experiences, not only to others but also to himself. Without an appropriate label for the things he had experienced which is socially scaffolded by discourses around the victim’s innocence and the perpetrator’s guilt, as well as a more accurate description of the distribution of power within such relationships, how is my friend to understand himself? At what point can he call himself the ‘victim of a crime’ as opposed to a person who exists within a tumultuous marriage, and work towards extracting himself from it and processing what he experienced? If we bear in mind men’s reticence to admit to weaknesses for fear of both homosocial rejection and rejection by important women in their lives, we can see that men who experience such abuse can feel lost. Secondly, without ‘achieving’ the label of victim, my friend would not have access to structural support in the form of police protection, temporary accommodation, custody of any children, as well as any financial support, all of which are often available to female victims of domestic violence.

1.1 – Research Aims

To speak of women’s power in dating relationships is not to say that female power necessarily means complete or even the majority of power, nor is such a focus ignoring structural power which disadvantages women in favour of psychological power. I want to move on however from a tacit appreciation of men as the most powerful partner in a

relationship towards one which sees power to be more fluid and something that is exercised incrementally between partners. My aims therefore are:

- 1, To explore and understand how these men perceive and respond to contemporary heterosexual relationships including how they feel about dating women.
- 2, To explore how these men understand power relations in dating relationships.
- 3, To understand the findings as part of the current cultural context around dating relations between men and women, including how men themselves represented and explored these themes between themselves as part of a homosocial setting. Where, if ever, did men voice their feelings about dating women? What were the discourses available to men to understand their experiences, and how were any dissonances between cultural norms and personal experiences experienced?

In this study I present a snapshot of men's current attitudes towards dating women, as discussed by 30 men aged 21 to 40 years old who come from varying demographic backgrounds (yet predominantly white). The men were made up of two groups: dating men, who were selected randomly through various advertising means (and who are referred throughout the paper by their name only), and Pick Up Artists (PUAs) who are men who join online forums or attend boot camps in order to gain more confidence and skills in approaching women (who will have the prefix 'PUA' appear before their name throughout). I asked my interviewees about various subjects in order to explore how they feel about dating relationships, women and themselves, which make up the three chapter headings.

Using poststructuralist gender theory, a postmodernist epistemological framework, hegemonic masculinity theory and inclusive masculinity theory, as well as theories of individualisation (all outlined below), I explore the findings and then relate them to the current wider discussions around gender especially with regard to the idea that we live in a

time of great gender flux, that is, a historically unique period of rapid change in gendered roles thought acceptable in society, which necessarily both simultaneously open up and foreclose possibilities of masculine performance. My intention is to add empirically based research to the debate in order to help form a bridge in our understanding of whether and how the current academic gender and online debates are reflected in the perceptions of the men I interviewed. I also wish to add to the argument that academic studies on gender should include more representations of men's words and experiences in order that a more rounded understanding can be achieved of how gender works between the sexes. Finally, I will argue that gender researchers should in their own research enquire about possible female-to-male power perceptions held by men.

2.0 – Theorising Masculinity

Since the 1970s there have been men's groups which have campaigned alongside second-wave feminist consciousness-raising groups, such as the male anti-sexist activists involved in *Achilles Heel* magazine, which was founded in 1978 (Seidler 1992). Many of these men's groups believed men were subject to similar gender restrictions as women (albeit mirrored), resulting in men being alienated from themselves and their emotional potentialities. This premise of shared victimhood was criticised for the omission of a focus upon structural power to which women were subjected to a far higher degree than men (Messner 1997). Not only were women constricted by femininity (as men were by masculinity), they were also structurally disadvantaged since they did not have equal access to positions of power. Yet it was felt by many men that they themselves did not individually hold the level of power which was assumed they did as patriarchal figures (see Messner 1997). Connell's Hegemonic Masculinity Theory (1987) set to rectify this omission by explaining how men both existed in a superior position to all women – as per the theory of patriarchy – but unlike patriarchy, which focussed on the similarities between men, her¹

¹ In 2006 Robert W Connell declared herself to be a transsexual woman and has since referred to herself as Raewyn Connell. I therefore use the pronoun 'she' throughout, even when referring to her work previous to this date.

theory explained differences between them, such as race, class and sexuality, aspects of identity which rendered some men less powerful than others.

Using Gramsci's theory of hegemony, which explains why a particular class group can claim and sustain a legitimised superior position through indoctrination of subordinate peoples by means of a shared worldview belonging to the superior class, Connell developed her concept of a 'gender order' – "a historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women and definitions of femininity and masculinity ... a structural inventory of an entire society" (Connell 1987, 99) – into Hegemonic Masculinity Theory (HMT), a theory of masculinity, which was to become the most influential of such in the last 30 years (although it has not penetrated so deeply into all countries (Hearn et al 2012)). A recent study by Messerschmidt (2012) found that a 2005 reformulated version of the theory had been cited 540 times, with 128 articles utilising it as a core concept.

At the top of the gender hierarchy is hegemonic masculinity, the ideal masculinity few men attain. The secondary tier is called 'complicit masculinities', which Connell sees as living in bad faith, accepting the power without taking responsibility for it (Connell 1987, 214). Finally there are the 'subordinated masculinities', such as gay or black men. Below these come femininities. Women take up the lowest rung in the power ladder, under black men, gay men, poor men and disabled men. This is because all men share what she refers to as 'the patriarchal dividend', a surplus of power awarded to them for simply being male. This dividend can take the shape of financial gain, but also "authority, respect, service, safety, housing, access to institutional power and control over ones life" (Connell 2002, 142).

When men do not meet hegemonic masculine ideals, they are often cognizant of how their behaviour differs from these and then often use strategies, such as focusing on one aspect of themselves which does fit the hegemonic ideal, e.g., skill at football, in order to compensate for areas in which they lack knowledge or ability. This is done in order to take their and everyone else's attention away from any perceived weaknesses they may have (Coles 2008; de Visser 2009). Frosch notes that unconsciously men are aware of the

incoherence of a masculinity based upon a constant denial of weakness and dependence (Frosch 1994, 99). Men's insecurity around their own masculinity has also been shown to lead to compensatory behaviour in order to feel more masculine, which often has negative effects on women (Joseph & Black, 2012).

Ambiguity in the definition of the hegemonic ideal man has been highlighted. As Whitehead asks: "Is it John Wayne or Leonardo Di Caprio; Mike Tyson or Pele? Or maybe, at different times, all of them?" (Whitehead 2002, 93). Connell argues that any of these examples could be hegemonic because, importantly for Connell's theory, a hegemonic masculinity changes over time and context, morphing itself into the most legitimised version of patriarchal control which is currently applicable (mirroring masculinity's own inherent relational nature; it exists only in contrast to femininity) so when women change, for instance by demanding more equality, both masculinities in general and hegemonic masculinity in particular will respond according to the context in which women's claims are made. Hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed character type (although it has been mistakenly used as such (Beasley 2008; Messerschmidt 2008) and is always contestable.

Men's commitment to a hegemonic masculinity ideal is struck through with doubt and conflict, which is not surprising in a structure which is based around individuals reaching standards. However, critics of the theory have argued that men are not as simply constituted as HMT implies. One major criticism of HMT concerns how it is used in the Academy to create new knowledge. When researchers draw on the theory, they are encouraged to look for abuses of power by men and disregarding the everyday experiences of men's lives (including lacking power). Thus Hearn (2004) argues that we should be thinking in terms of the hegemony of men rather than hegemonic masculinity per se.

2.1 – Extended Adolescence

Another key theorist of masculinities from the last thirty years is sociologist Michael Kimmel who similarly utilises a structural set of power relations between the sexes. For

him, regardless of the advances made by women in the last four decades, the situation is not getting substantially better. In *Guyland* (2008) he argues that the time between male adolescence and adulthood has transitioned into a separate life stage since the 1990s, with men delaying taking on traditional masculine responsibilities until later in life. He refers to this period in the American male's lifetime as 'Guyland' but sees similarities to the British 'Laddism' phenomenon, the French 'Tanguys' and the Italian 'Bamboccinonii', where half of all Italian men aged between 25 and 34 live with their parents (Kimmel 2008, 13). Adolescence is starting earlier and adulthood later and the intervening life stage is extended up to around 30 years of age. Guyland, argues Kimmel, rests on three cultural dynamics: entitlement, silence and protection (Kimmel 2008, 59). Between the authority of the mother and the authority of work, men between boyhood and manhood take comfort in fraternal bonds where joking or showing hostility towards women operates as a means to ward off the loss of control associated with intimacy. Kimmel sees this extended adolescence largely in terms of a privileged masculinity, whereas others such as Arnett, (2000a, 2000b, 2007,) in his theory of 'Emerging Adulthood', have highlighted the role of individual men's economic realities, which inform their likelihood of experiencing a delay to adulthood, as well as the strive for individualistic self-sufficiency and desire to find a partner and a job that fits in with one's identity development (as a reason to delay marriage and parenthood), issues Kimmel omits entirely. Arnett is also critical of society's tendency to see such young people in entirely negative terms and as functioning worse than previous generations as a result of an inflated self-esteem, something he argues is mistaken (Arnett 2013).

The Guy Code, that is, the set of behaviours deemed acceptable by this type of man, relies on silence when weaker men are bullied. Young women express this silence too and, Kimmel argues, stay silent because they want the 'big guys' to look upon them as preferable partners. Kimmel is quite strong on his insistence that the women who socialise with 'guys' are very much fixed within a hegemonic male framework in which their only access to power is through appeasing and pleasing the hegemonic males. Their silence adds to a culture of shame which men are aching to free themselves from. In effect, women are

therefore partially blamed for the Guy Code whilst simultaneously seen as incapable of changing it. In addition, with Kimmel's theory, women's promotion of hegemonic males is not explored. Instead a belief prevails in his work that it is men rather than women who define what an attractive man is, that men are defined solely in terms of homosocial pressure, and that women do not help form what types of men attain respect and regard. There is clearly a knowledge gap here which needs to be filled with more research into how men are affected by women.

Both Kimmel's and Connell's arguments therefore can be problematized in terms of their reliance on a hierarchical power structure, their basis on a secure male subject, the central role they give homophobia in the formation of modern men, and their underestimation of (and lack of focus upon) the role of female power in gender relations. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the challenges made to theories of masculinity such as HMT, and how theories of masculinity have developed in response to these challenges through more recent research and empirical data which shows men are more heterogeneous and less hierarchical now than can be explained by HMT. I will then show how these more recent developments, as well as the older masculinity theories, such as those of Kimmel and Connell, are useful as a backdrop for understanding the responses from men in this current study.

2.2 – Homophobia/Homohysteria

How can we define masculinity? Whitehead and Barrett describe it as "those behaviours, languages and practices, existing in specific cultural and organisational locations, which are commonly associated with males and thus culturally defined as not feminine" (Whitehead & Barratt 2001, 15-16). Masculinity is therefore variable across cultures (variety) yet also usually instantaneously recognisable as unlike femininity (a pattern). It can also be seen here as being defined as twofold: as a set of clearly identifiable performed acts and traits appreciated as masculine traits; and equally in its depiction as being not feminine. As Connell puts it, "Masculinity is shaped in relation to an overall structure of power (the subordination of women to men), and in relation to a general symbolism of difference (the

opposition femininity and masculinity)” (Connell 1996, 223). Key to this type of top-down hypothesis is the belief that those higher up the scale don’t want to be mistaken for those lower down.

Crucial to HMT is the idea that men police each other’s gender performance to ensure that they are not acting feminine, a form of homosocial surveillance Kimmel calls “homosocial enactment”. Central to this is homophobia which is experienced both as being accused of being homosexual and as not being ‘a real man’. This fear has been termed elsewhere ‘effeminophobia’ (Sedgwick 1991; Richardson 2009) and ‘sissyphobia’ (Bergling 2001).

Both Kimmel and Connell believe the repudiation of the feminine becomes central to a boy/man’s character, as a continual denial of desire for men and as a continual rejection of the mother/feminine. Thus homophobia is woven throughout men’s lives and culture, whilst men secretly feel other men are manlier than themselves. The potential exposure of this lack forms a constant fear. Kimmel argues:

I have argued that homophobia, men's fear of other men, is the animating condition of the dominant definition of masculinity in America, that the reigning definition of masculinity is a defensive effort to prevent being emasculated. In our efforts to suppress or overcome those fears, the dominant culture exacts a tremendous price from those deemed less than fully manly: women, gay men, non-normative-born men, men of color. This perspective may help clarify a paradox in men's lives, a paradox in which men have virtually all the power and yet do not feel powerful. (Kimmel 2005, 39)

More recent studies on masculinities however have shown that a shift is occurring in men’s behaviour, especially with reference to whether men still police each other’s gender performance in a homophobic or effeminophobic way. Within the gay community, Bergling (2001) studied gay dating sites and found that sissyphobia, that is “the fear and loathing of men who behave in a ‘less manly than desired’ or effeminate manner” (Bergling 2001, 3), was rife. He did find, however, that there was a generational difference, with younger men embracing softer performances of masculinity more than older men. There is also an

established genre in gay pornography featuring young, svelte, sometimes androgynous men called 'twinks', previously known ten years ago as 'Euro boys'. This would also imply a broadening of the acceptability of varying masculinities within the gay community. This relaxation around male performance mirrors Anderson's and McCormack's research findings from the 1990s to the present date, focused on heterosexual men's attitudes towards male homosexuality (Anderson: 2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2012, 2013; Anderson & McCormack: 2010a, Anderson & McGuire: 2010; Adams & Anderson, 2012; Adams, Anderson & McCormack: 2010a, 2010b; Bush, Anderson & Carr: 2012; Kian, Anderson, Vincent & Murray: 2013; Magrath, Anderson & Roberts: 2013; Ripley, Anderson, McCormack & Rockett: 2012; Southall, Nagel, Anderson, Polite & Southall: 2009; Anderson, McCormack & Lee: 2012; McCormack: 2012, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; McCormack & Anderson, 2010a).

Specifically Anderson argues the driving force behind 'orthodox masculinity' (hegemonic masculinity) is not homophobia, as Kimmel argues, but homophobia. Homophobia, which has existed since the trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895 but reached a peak in 1987/1988 (Anderson, 2011b), is the result of a culture which combines homophobia, femmephobia (effeminophobia) and compulsory heterosexuality (Anderson, 2009) and can be described as the fear of being 'homosexualised'. Key to homophobia is the 'mass cultural suspicion' that one/someone might be gay; homophobia alone is not sufficient. Homophobia keeps men emotionally distant from each other, yet in recent years there has been expansion of acceptable masculine behaviour and a proliferation of different types of masculinity. The differences between masculinity and femininity and between sexual preferences are also diminishing according to Anderson. As fear of the feminine and of being perceived as gay is central to both Connell's and Kimmel's theses, if these fears are in decline, then this will have ramifications for how masculinity, especially hegemonic versions of it is structured.

Anderson argues that HMT does not capture the complexity of what happens when homophobia diminishes. When it does, two dominant forms of masculinity, orthodox and inclusive masculinities, exist simultaneously and both are equally strong and neither

retains cultural hegemony. He uses the term 'orthodox' rather than 'hegemonic' masculinity primarily in order to avoid the term 'hegemonic masculinity' being understood as an archetype rather than a system of relations, but also because he is arguing that there is no one hegemonic masculinity today. The theory of inclusive masculinity incorporates HMT during high periods of homophobia yet also challenges it at times when it diminishes.

Anderson uses both social constructionist and poststructuralist theories to argue that masculinity has become more fluid in its identity and in the power relations between different types of men, with power emanating from both institutions and individuals, as Foucault has argued (Foucault 1977).

2.3 – The Challenge to Hegemonic Masculinity Theory from Poststructuralism

When women challenge the dominance of a group of men, Connell (1987) argues, new dominant male groups will emerge based upon new hegemonies which enable their members to retain control, albeit in a different guise. She acknowledges that the State has afforded women more power in recent decades and agrees there is room for future female empowerment if men and women work together, yet the status quo remains unchanged in her view: women are at the bottom of the hierarchy because they do not have access to the power to dominate men, even though they cause hegemonic men to reformulate their performances. She notes that hegemony does not mean total cultural dominance, just the ascendancy of a favoured position, which subordinates rather than eliminates alternatives. Thus hegemonic masculinity is not all-powerful yet it is simultaneously unsurpassable.

This idea of power as something that represses, that some people possess and others do not, and which is passed between people, is contested by Foucault who sees power as both restrictive (*puissance*) and productive (*pouvoir*), something that circulates among a network that is not part of a hierarchy. Power, for Foucault, is a chain or a net in which

everybody exercises, rather than exchanges power. Foucault perceives people as “prime effects” of power, as its vehicle. Power, he argues, cannot just be repressive:

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network, which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (Foucault 1980b, 119)

One reason that a top-down hypothesis such as patriarchy or HMT would not be supported by poststructuralist thinkers such as Foucault is because of its simplicity and its ease of utility to explain everything from structural formations which discriminate against women to subjective and personal experiences of ‘everyday sexism’; in other words, it is blunt tool. Foucault famously said he didn't believe in class and that “anything can be deduced from the general phenomenon of the domination of the bourgeois class” (Foucault 1980a, 100). A similar criticism has been made by Moller (2007) with specific regard to HMT. Moller argues that a claim for an objective position on masculinity reduces the complexity of men's lives, and also that HMT's insistence on masculinity as dominant does not allow for a more complex understanding of men's existences. Men are not just beings of power but people with emotions and insecurities. Masculinity is by its very nature complex, notes Moller, and therefore a singular pattern for understanding it will always be inadequate.

Similarly, Moller contends such power is usually equated with domination, but this is also too simplistic. As Brown (1999) has noted, a key way that masculinity is experienced today is through the disavowal of power and privilege. There are also more mundane ways, such as negotiation and consensus building, in which power is now exerted. Perceiving masculinity as part of a pattern does not leave room for men's individual psychological vulnerability, for instance around the body or how they experience nuances of emotion (see Jefferson 2002). Segal (2007), discussed below, argues that the discourse around a crisis in masculinity, regarding the concern that men can't achieve a successful masculinity

in the modern world, is due in part to us framing masculinity in terms of two insecure types of man, the macho man and the weakling, neither of which are useful entities by which understanding of how the modern male exhibits and experiences power can emerge. In more recent years, she argues, powerful men are much more likely to access influence through “mind rather than muscle, manipulation rather than endurance” (Segal 2007, 108), yet this is not how a successful masculinity is presented in our culture.

For Foucault, in order to understand power we must start by trying to understand its “micro mechanisms” (Foucault 1980a, 101), which can lead us to appreciate how more general mechanisms can colonise. It is from these marginal discourses that we can understand the assumptions lying behind larger discourses. If men often do not fit in with HMT theory then the theory needs to be re-understood, rather than re-visualising the individual stories of men who differ. The position of the subject is ambiguous because individuals have personal power but also exist as conduits for wider powers. It is through the examination of people's everyday experiences of power relations however, that we can best understand the relation of the subject to the existing mechanisms of power.

Power is constantly performed as part of a set of multiple relations throughout society and one important aspect of such relations is the concept of resistance. This plays a fundamental part in Foucault's conception of power. People vie for power and this necessarily entails opposition. Groups of people use whatever they have access to (apparatuses) in order to be the one that defines a certain phenomenon. Any mechanism of power is only existent because it is economically and politically useful for some specific reasons at that particular time. As Noble argues: “Identities, concepts, individuals, places, objects, institutions, race and gender, nations, customs or practices, fashions and legal systems are all examples of apparatuses ... that only exist in specific times and places around specific local centres” (Noble 2012). Women have resisted the ideals underlining HMT (or previously, patriarchy) for many decades and there have been significant advances made socially and politically, yet much as women can oppose, they are not able to step outside of an episteme; women are neither bound by structures nor capable of free

will since they are formed in and around discourses, which they exhibit, perpetuate and add to. Therefore, context is key to understanding how individuals experience power; an employee will perform differently in front of an employer in comparison to with her peer group, with whom she might joke about the employer at their expense. Scott (1990) calls for an understanding of hidden transcripts, which he regards as instances of a “critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant” (Scott 1990, xii).

Connell’s and Kimmel’s theories have also historically relied on the idea of a secure male subject, one that is biologically male. Regardless of class, sexuality, able-bodiedness or race, the male sex has been understood as a constant. The theory of hegemonic masculinity was originally devised before the advent of poststructural theories of gender by theorists, such as Butler (1990) and has been successfully challenged by them.

2.4 – Butler’s Theory of Performativity

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (de Beauvoir 1973, 301). De Beauvoir’s classic statement distinguishes between biological sex – the physical reality of a body – and gender – the social acknowledgement of patterns of behaviour associated with men or women. We learn socially prescribed ways to behave in order to fit into a pre-existing gender order, so that we might be recognised. Continuing from de Beauvoir’s position, West and Zimmerman (1987) describe gender as an act; something we do: “a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction” (West & Zimmerman 1987, 125). They argue that whereas a person can exist in opposition to their sex category, gender is defined as conduct that is appropriate for one’s sex category. In this sense, transgender people do not ‘fake’ their newly attributed gender but consciously, as opposed to unconsciously, learn it. This is in contrast to cissexuals who learn their gender roles incrementally from birth and have therefore long since forgotten the origins of their gender education. West and Zimmerman argue that “[g]ender is a powerful ideological device, which produces, reproduces, and legitimates the choices and limits that are predicated on sex category” (West & Zimmermann 1987, 147). Understanding gender as a role, they argue, does not account for the work that is done by people in producing gender in everyday interactions;

interactions result in gender. Our behaviour is not an expression of essential sexual natures rather it is the result of what we would like to convey about sex.

Queer theorist Judith Butler, taking her cue from West and Zimmerman, explores this concept further. She argues that there is no subject outside of the realm of gender performance we are either born into or become. We enter into a gendered system that delineates our future behaviour by arbitrary means that change over time: we are 'hailed' (Austin, 1962) into a recognisable gendered position. She does not use the term 'performance' in the traditional sense, to imply people are actors or subjects who choose to inhabit a particular guise which would imply a subject who precedes this performance; a person who chooses. For Butler, this is a performance that begins at the very beginning of a person's life and is not of their choosing. She refers to this as "performativity", a portmanteau term which acknowledges 'performance' and 'activity' equally. Building upon the work of philosopher of language J.L. Austin (1962), Butler states that to say, "It's a boy!" is to perform an "interpellative performative statement" (Salih 2002, 80). Far from merely describing a natural fact, an action is performed and the baby is designated a role in life. Language actually constitutes identity; it does not just describe it.

In her influential book *Gender Trouble* (1990), and subsequently *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler says a baby is being either "boyed" or "girlled" from birth (Salih 2002, 80) based on the existence of a particular set of genitals; a choice she considers arbitrary in order to exemplify sexual difference since any other part of the body could have been chosen as a focus (for instance earlobes or hands), which would have encouraged a focus on similarity between the sexes. Butler describes a cartoon of a young baby which says, "It's a lesbian!" (2002, 89) to illustrate the imagined horror of society upon hearing somebody say this about a new-born baby girl. It would be seen as determining the child's future in an unacceptable way. In giving this example Butler intends to highlight that this is exactly what happens when one says "It's a girl!" or, "It's a boy!" Not only is heterosexuality assumed to be the sexuality the child would freely choose, so too is gender. We consciously and subconsciously define that child's life according to gender expectations from birth. To

be a girl is to be given secondary opportunities to fulfil ambition, to live a life of threatened or real violence and intimidation, to have certain roles defined for her, such as the default position of motherhood, not to fulfil her own sexuality and to have her confidence tested throughout her life. To be hailed as a boy is to be given primary opportunity to fulfil personal ambitions, to be taught how not to be a victim of violence and to live in a society that does not intimidate boys as much as girls. (It should also be remembered, a boy will also be taught not to experience the full array of possible emotions and to limit what Chodorow refers to as the repression of “relational needs” (Chodorow 1978, 207).)

The role of the body within Butler’s theory is not thought to be an invisible entity, nor one that does not have consequences, as has been argued by Gatens (1996). In fact this is Butler’s very point: we put too much emphasis on the body. One should therefore read poststructuralist theories of gender as a heuristic that enables the imagination to explore all possible gender configurations without boundary, and in this regard, it is an exceptionally useful tool. We should perhaps move towards a position of embodied-ness, in order to accept the on-going relevance of the body (at least in the perceptions of others for the time being at least). This way we can consciously acknowledge its existence, whilst acknowledging its arbitrariness. As Grosz (1994) notes, the body is key to our experience and she argues that we should not be dichotomous about the mind and body, choosing instead an “embodied subjectivity”. (Grosz 1994, 22).

More recently, Connell has also responded to poststructuralist (queer) theory by developing her concept of masculinities to be potentially understood as social practices, described as masculine but performed by women (Connell 2000, 16-17). This is not a minor point. If women can gain power by performing masculinity then this can have a real effect on power relations. It would no longer make sense, for instance, to formulate gendered power in such a top-down formation; a poststructuralist formation is more apt because women become fluid movers. If power were to be removed from its link with the biological it opens up the possibility of greater social mobility for women. Poststructuralism also poses other problems for HMT. In *Undoing Gender* (2004) Butler

notes that 'undecideability' and psychic vulnerability is key to a person's gender performance. Elsewhere she argues (Butler 1995, 171) that men's rejection of homosexuality leads to melancholy in heterosexual men. Thus she prioritises homosexual men's influence, in contrast to Connell's homosexual men as marginally positioned and 'other'. Poststructuralist gender theory, such as that of Butler, has influenced, and undermined, the way we understand masculinity as pertaining specifically to men, to which we now turn.

2.5 – Performativity and Men

In order to be accepted within a particular community of men a man must perform masculinity. Men are not passive in their identity work, yet the parameters of acceptable masculine behaviour are set by the masculine culture in which men exist (Whitehead & Barrett 2001, 20).

At the end of *Gender Trouble*, Butler concludes that the way to realign gender is to play with it as the “free-floating artifice” that it is (Butler 1990, 9). This is where Butler sees inroads to changing gender, by playing with the signifiers in an untraditional way to create new “intelligible” genders (Butler 1990, 23) based on personal choice. According to Butler those new genders will most challenge the boundaries of existing genders; it will be the relatively effeminate man or the relatively butch woman who will challenge society's ideas about what is normal. One good example of this is metrosexuality.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a metrosexual as “a heterosexual urban man who enjoys shopping, fashion, and similar interests traditionally associated with women or homosexual men” (2012). Journalist Mark Simpson first brought the term into the public realm in an article in the *Independent* newspaper in 1994 called “Here Come the Mirror Men” where he highlighted a “new, narcissistic, media-saturated, self-conscious kind of masculinity” (Simpson 2004). Despite Simpson coining the word and the OED denoting the term, there is no consensus on what/who the metrosexual is or why he exists (see Simpson

2002; Gill et al 2005). It has been argued that the ambiguity of the term leads to a destabilising or 'queering' of masculine orthodoxy (Anderson 2009). In one study for instance, Hall and Gough (2011) found that some metrosexuals perceived metrosexuality as a more assured, effective and masculine presentation than traditional masculinity. Although metrosexuals saw their identity as exciting, non-metrosexual responses were mixed with some seeing it as "copycat gay", and merely being the appropriation of feminine pursuits, whereas others saw it as giving in to social pressures to conform.

Metrosexuality is experienced differently in different geographic locations, with a focus on the personal presentation of athletic celebrities in the US and on eroticism in the UK (Wickman 2011). Hall and Gough (2011) argue that in the 1980s men's bodies became more eroticised in adverts, as in the Levi's advert where Nick Kamen was seen semi-naked. That many men want to be sexualised is problematic for HMT because this involves being passive instead of active, to be desired instead of desiring, and to be looked at instead of doing the looking. Most metrosexuals are keen to assert their heterosexuality, to ensure people understand they are not gay. Metrosexuality represents a blurring of traditional masculine and feminine traits, with metrosexual men enjoying an interest in general consumption, clothing, pampering and fitness. These traits are traditionally considered 'female' activities.

Metrosexuality came into existence simultaneously with 'Laddism', a 1990s' reclamation of a historic and simplified masculinity (which in turn was seen as a reaction to the 'New Man' of the 1980s). This co-existence of various interpretations of masculinity is in line with ideas of 'queer' where gender is seen as something fluid and open to interpretation (indeed Laddism was also popular in gay communities (Mowlabocus 2010)). It also fits with inclusive masculinity theory, which argues that there now co-exists a range of types of masculinity. While HMT is a theory which incorporates the existence of many masculinities simultaneously, it is the focus on hierarchy between men and between men and women that has been contested in more recent research, especially through that by Anderson as well as McCormack, who argue that HMT was very good for explaining masculinity in the

1980s and 1990s as a system that was stratified, with “jocks at the top of the hierarchy and nerds at the bottom” (McCormack 2013). Although he acknowledges that some boys are still more popular than others, many are happy with their status and are not trying to copy the hegemonic masculine ideal because popularity per se is now the new gauge by which men are rating themselves, and popularity is a variable which is context dependent. Along with popularity, today’s young men, Anderson argues, also value emotional support and social fluidity (Anderson 2013).

Anderson (2011) outlines what he observes as the development from an orthodox masculinity to a situation where other masculinities can co-exist on equal terms. In his timeline, a key figure in the acceptance of inclusive masculinities was the pro-gay American president Bill Clinton who in 1993 played saxophone on Saturday Night Live. Anderson argues that he performed his masculinity in a way which separated sexuality from gender; he was both straight and soft. What Anderson then sees, from 1993 onwards, is that homophobia starts to become unpopular in sport around 1998. From this time onward, football players were seen to slap each other on the backside as a way of performing their secure heterosexuality, since sport itself was seen to guarantee their heterosexuality. Such men having an excess of what he calls ‘masculine capital’ which renders them beyond suspicion, something Segal (2007) also noted was true of soldiers.

Based on his extensive research, Anderson argues that HMT is no longer accurate, and what currently prevails is an inclusive masculinity based on the idea of including other ‘subordinated’ men in your own group of friends and significant others. He cites David Beckham as a key cultural figure who ten years ago was seen as a rare metrosexual but whose behaviour these days is echoed in that of many boys. Although Anderson is also quick to note that his studies are with largely middle-class young men (Anderson 2011a). He notes that more widely, in regard to attitudes to homophobia, a Gallup poll taken in 2010 found for the first time that boys are less homophobic than girls, who are also becoming less homophobic (Anderson 2011c).

Such a blurring of previously assumed sexual binaries suggests to Anderson the reason for more experimental couplings, such as threesomes, and the juxtapositioning of homosexual porn images with images of heterosexual porn on online porn-hub sites. Heterosexual men are also kissing each other more often. He argues that these behaviours are only permissible because of rapidly decreasing levels of homophobia. Men are also more likely to dance with each other, even in a 'grinding' way, as long as alcohol is there to be used as an excuse (Peterson & Anderson 2012). In "*I kiss them because I love them...*" (2012), a study of 145 heterosexual male students from different British schools, Anderson (et al) found that 89% had kissed another man on the lips, which his interviewees described as nonsexual; 37% reported engaging in sustained kissing with another man, which they also perceived as nonsexual. He concludes that although the men were not erotically attracted to the men they kissed, they did use kissing as a form of establishing intimacy, with the shared meaning of this type of intimacy enforcing group solidarity even when gay men were involved. One man said that much as he kisses men when he's drunk, he has to be extremely drunk in order to build up the courage to approach a woman.

These results are further supported by the research of McCormack and also of Roberts. McCormack & Anderson (2010) studied a group of 16 to 18-year-old boys in a British mixed-sex sixth form and found that they espoused pro-gay attitudes and did not use homophobic language, expanding hetero-masculine boundaries thus allowing the boys to express themselves by physically touching each other and sharing emotional intimacy without being perceived as homosexual. Heterosexuality was still regulated and privileged however, even without homophobia.

In contrast, Kimmel paints a somewhat different picture of current masculinity in young men in America, one ruled by misogyny and homophobia. He suggests that this is evidence of a desperate attempt by men to prove their masculinity in a time of great gender uncertainty, something which results in a stronger than ever need for extreme homosocial behaviour:

In an effort to prove their masculinity, with little guidance and no real understanding of what manhood is, they engage in behaviors and activities that are ill-conceived and irresponsibly carried out. These are the guys who are so desperate to be accepted by their peers that they do all sorts of things they secretly know to be not quite right. They lie about their sexual experiences to seem more manly; they drink more than they know they can handle because they don't want to seem weak or immature; they sheepishly engage in locker-room talk about young women they actually like and respect. These are the guys who want to do well in school but don't want to be seen as geeks; the guys who think they can't be cool and responsible at the same time; the pledges and pledgemasters whose hazing rituals are frequently disgusting, sometimes barbaric, and occasionally lethal. With no adults around running the show, they turn to each other for initiation into manhood. (Kimmel 2008, 19)

Kimmel paints a picture of men who are performing an 'insincere' masculinity in order to gain homosocial respect, one that troubles men yet from which they cannot deliver themselves. Because Kimmel assumes women to lack the power to change men, such men must live a double life of secretly respecting women while publicly shaming them. The desire to be respected homosocially is always experienced as a priority for men. Kimmel believes female students in his study are also tied up in men's performance of misogyny; they too commit acts of hazing (humiliating or dangerous inauguration rituals) in order to sustain a hegemonic masculine hierarchy; they haze other girls in order to humiliate them in front of boys, ordering them to perform mock fellatio or facilitating oral rape. The picture painted here is very dire, with little acknowledgment of the differences between people, both men and women, except that some men may have softer masculine ideals but that they too must submit to an environment of macho posturing. Similarly, Bird's (1996) interviews with men showed that men who distinguished themselves from hegemonic masculine ideals made three things clear: hegemonic masculinity was the form that prevailed in childhood and adolescence; in current situations the expectation of emotional detachment continues; while they defined themselves currently as more heterosocially orientated, they didn't prefer homosocial interaction groups, and they differentiated between both social realms. Bird's interviewees too spoke of a pecking order in which men sexually objectified women in order not to be 'pecked' themselves. Even the men whose sense of masculinity was non-hegemonic existed as part of the sexually objectifying

homosocial group at times, and none of them mentioned verbally rejecting hegemonic meanings in homosocial groups. Rather, they behaved in an emotionally detached, competitive and sexually objectifying way, thus they followed hegemonic norms. Individual departures (or desires to depart) from these norms were suppressed. Bird concludes that non-hegemonic masculinities were failing to influence structural gender arrangements significantly because they are suppressed or relegated to heterosocial settings only.

In contrast, a decade later, Anderson (2008) interviewed 32 members of an American university fraternity and found that, unlike in previous research which showed that male members' attempts to bolster their masculinity by acting in adherence to hegemonic masculine ideals, inclusive masculinity was now institutionalised in the fraternal system. Equality for gay men, women and people from different races was appreciated and it was found that men used emotional intimacy in order to bond. Two of the men interviewed, for instance, were public about wanting to remain a virgin. One was a Christian and the other asexual. These findings do not fit with the idea of fraternity men being a homogenous group expressing hyper-heterosexuality, as in Kimmel's research. The fraternity did retain some aspects of hegemonic masculinity, however, specifically their appreciation of athleticism, 'standing one's ground', and drinking. Overall, the men constructed a form of masculinity, which was based on inclusiveness rather than marginalisation, which in turn became the hegemonic form the fraternity took. As Martino (2009) notes, there is a discrepancy between Anderson's research and that of Kimmel, finding Kimmel's homogeneous interpretation of masculinity somewhat problematic in environments where anti-homophobic discourses are prevalent, for instance in political climates where gay marriage is being legalised in many American states and much of Europe.

In a study of 24 young men who were currently employed in the retail sector, Roberts (2012) found that the working-class men interviewed were able to resist hegemonic ideals and undertook jobs which were traditionally seen as female (defined as such because they involved 'emotional work' and a focus on acceptable self-presentation) suggesting that their performance of masculinity was one that was less concerned about appearing 'soft'.

When asked, the men rated interaction with customers as a highlight of the job. This is a move away from the traditional working-class masculinity which was, Roberts argues, routinely characterised by physical strength or protest masculinity. As part of the study, he also asked the men about their attitudes to housework. Most interviewees expressed egalitarian ideals and that they did undertake housework, although they were more likely to view cooking rather than cleaning as preferable, implying they were still exercising more choice over chores than their female partners. This study extends Anderson's and McCormack's work away from the middle classes to the working class and away from the focus on young men's changed attitudes around homosexuality. Instead, it orientates thinking towards men's changed attitudes around domesticity and effeminophobia.

2.6 – Theories of Masculinity and Female Power

Connell has focussed on the structural power advantages men have over women and although she does not see women as a homogeneous group, believing femininities themselves to be made up of A) compliant, B) emphasised or C) resistant femininities, she has argued that women are positioned solely at the base of a triangle of power. Connell's theory also omits any exploration of women's own hierarchy which places a white heterosexual woman in an advantageous position in comparison to a black lesbian. Although she acknowledges differences between women, she is clear: "there is no femininity that is hegemonic in the sense that the dominant form of masculinity is hegemonic amongst men" (Connell 1987, 183).

Feminism historically has been criticised for its insistence of a homogeneous 'woman' that was in fact white, heterosexual and middle class (Lourde 1984). Similarly Connell has not incorporated the power differences between women and how these affect the structure of hegemonic masculinity. Just as men are formulated in strata which affect the way they interact with each other and with women, so are women. This is an important distinction to make for this study because of how men and women interact and affect each other. Male views of their interactions with women are key to understanding gender relations. Asking a black man to care about sexism more than racism could well incite fears for him of losing

power in relation to the advancement of white women. In this example alone we can see that a model of power which separates men and women rigidly does not adequately represent how power is experienced between the sexes. To this Connell argues that men may not subjectively feel the privilege invested in them by society. This is because men, focusing on their own (subordinated) position in the hierarchy under a dominant hegemonic masculinity - their relative deprivation - are unable to appreciate that women experience even less power: for many men the focus is aspirational – towards the hegemonic ideal – rather than on the active domination of women.

HMT theorists do not dispute that men sometimes feel controlled by women, an admittance which superficially seems to contradict the idea of male power within society. Kimmel turns to a socio-psychological understanding of this phenomenon and argues this comes in part from the male child's relationship with the mother and female primary-school teachers who are in control of his youth. In return he feels the need to dominate women as an adult.

From another perspective, female power is acknowledged within HMT but with reference to women's roles as supporters of men. Men perceive women to have expressive power over them because not only are women more socialised into expressing their own feelings but, argues Kimmel (1989), mirroring Pleck and Sawyer (1974), men rely on women to express their emotions vicariously, especially as many men are unable to feel emotionally alive in relationships with other men. Women also play a key role in validating men's masculinity. Only women can validate men by making them appear successfully masculine, by adopting a submissive role themselves, acting out the relative demarked traditional roles. Women also mediate between different men, providing 'social lubrication' in homosocial conflicts. Kimmel notes that these are powers that women have been handed by men and are often received by women as burdensome. As women are relatively disempowered in relation to men, time with women in which men can express their needs provides a safe haven. This space defined by such roles will be lost if women become more empowered. Finally it is argued that men can feel less stressed in competition with other

men because women exist as a distinct underclass; women represent a 'low' to which men cannot fall (Kimmel 1989, 27).

While arguments as articulated by Kimmel touch on men's insecurities regarding women's social advancement on a macro level, they do not elaborate upon the way men experience female power in the micro setting. Similarly, experience, whether regarding power, sexuality, or any other aspect on an individual level, is divorced from internal, emotional lives of men by theorists and posited instead as manifestations of male power, hegemony, motives, etc. While studies show men and women to experience emotion similarly to each other, it is also shown that men are not encouraged to express emotions. Consequently, and somewhat circuitously, men are shown to experience conflict and strain when trying to live up to prescribed male gender roles which do not allow for verbal expression of emotions (see Robertson 2001 for a summary). In a study which looked at masculinity, shame and fear of emotions in 204 men, Jakupcak et al (2005) found that "men's fear of emotions is highly relevant and perhaps more central to men's expression of anger, hostility and aggression than factors of global masculinity" (Jakupcak et al 2005, 282). Men are also more likely to express emotions if they consider them to be likely to be accepted; they will express anger if they know in advance they can justify it rationally (Seidler 2007). Exactly how men experience women's roles as validators, lubricators, burden carriers or indeed as invalidators, friction makers or burden producers has not been adequately understood because men's own words have not been explored enough. In this study I ask men questions around their perceptions of power in heterosexual relationships in order to address this deficit.

Kimmel agrees that women can be as aggressive as men. Yet he argues that this works to benefit men only. As mentioned previously he argues that girls use aggression solely to impress hegemonic boys in order to win their attention, not acknowledging that women may feel aggression for other reasons unconnected to their being attracted to men. For Kimmel, young women mimic men's aggressive behaviour and do so in ways that fit in with a hegemonic power structure:

Boys do it, of course, to establish and then maintain their place in the male pecking order; the bullying makes sure that those at the top stay there, and it reinforces their belief that they are entitled to be there. But many girls use verbal aggression to impress those boys at the top, believing that their efforts at humiliating other girls, or even revictimizing the boys who have already been targeted, will win them the attention of the top males. Girls' aggression may end up sustaining the hierarchy, which is, itself, an expression of gender inequality. (Kimmel 2008, 81-2)

Kimmel does not interpret such aggressive behaviour as stronger women maintaining their own place in the pecking order, nor as them feeling entitlement over other weaker females. He acknowledges there are weaker females, but not that stronger women might want to keep their own place in the female hierarchy, (something which would be a necessity for the existence of the weaker women). It is difficult to see where women are permitted any real power in such an interpretation as Kimmel's, since expressions of female anger, sexual desire, desire for power, and ambition, are interpreted only in terms of women needing to placate or entice men in hegemonic positions. Potential for such behaviour is not understood as equally available to both sexes in a world where women are actively discouraged to express many 'unfeminine' traits. In other words, his argument rests squarely on uncomplicated gendered subjects, men and women, who coincide with their respective masculine and feminine traits as discussed above.

Kierski (2009) found that men can experience fear of the feminine (FOF) as a "turning down the volume on emotions" (Kierski 2009, 157) which may result in a long-term emotional regulation known as "normative alexithymia: the inability to identify and describe one's feelings in words" (Levant 1998, 35). Men spoke of fears of:

Isolation; fears about a proper/safe place in life and society; health and safety; pain; lack of positive [sustaining] human contact; not being able to look after those who depend on him; losing one's life; incapacitation; lack of meaning; not being good at what one does; letting others down; fears about contact with others and not being in control and going beyond one's limit. (Kierski 2009, 163)

External and internal triggers for FOF include dominant and confident women, intimate situations, situations where expressions of vulnerability are not tolerated and engaging in homophobia. Losing a job and having a low position in a male hierarchy were found to be equally influential. Internal triggers include feeling guarded around emotional situations, the feeling of being dominated, losing control in work or home environments, feeling misunderstood or experiencing feelings of lost identity. When men felt FOF, they responded with aggressive and competitive behaviour. Interestingly, some men reported the need to appear less stereotypically masculine in their jobs because they worked in female-led environments and such men's strategies for hiding the fear were subtler. Yet despite this subtlety and adoption of more seemingly egalitarian approaches Kierski notes Beck's (2005) findings of a trend towards men appearing verbally open without relinquishing their old patterns.

The fact that men were found to respond to fear with aggression and competition, especially to dominant and confident women, is of interest to this study since it suggests that women are affecting men's behaviour eliciting harder masculine types of responses thus rendering the masculine self possibly less autonomous than may have been previously understood. Elsewhere, there has been movement towards the understanding of women's role in men's self-formation in more recent years. In a review of previous studies by Messerschmidt (2012) it was found that a 2005 reformulated version of the HMT showed that out of 540 articles it had been used in 13% of articles studied (n=70) in ways that explore how women contribute to the cultivation of hegemonic masculinities:

...recognising how under certain situations women might be a salient factor in the cultivation of hegemonic masculinities ... The focus can no longer centre exclusively on men and instead must give much closer attention to both the practices of women and the social interplay of femininities and masculinities. (Messerschmidt 2012, 70)

Women's practices in forming masculinities is indeed an under researched area of Gender Studies. We cannot however accurately understand men's gender performances if we do not include attention to their performances that are resultant from women's behaviour,

especially that of how women encourage men to appear in order to appear attractive to them. Talbot and Quayle (2010) interviewed five young South African women about how they perceive men in romantic relationships, family, friendships and work relationships and found that, dependent on the context, the young women wanted different masculine values in men. They argue that women are active in constructing masculinity and its variances and seeming contradictions. They “actively and passively coproduce, normalise, and even fetishized masculinities” (Talbot & Quayle 2010, 256). Context was key to understanding what women wanted: social or work contexts resulted in similar masculine traits being seen as ideal, known as the ‘nice guy’, whereas romantic and family contexts required a second type of masculinity, that of the ‘manly man’. When participants were asked about their ‘ideal man’ they spoke in family and romantic contexts, meaning that they wanted a manly man. They argued that the constructions of masculinities support the women’s own preferred identity narratives in each context. Women want to be in control at work and in romantic contexts they want to be cared for and protected. Men’s roles stem from these initial positions.

In another study, Firminger (2006) studied two issues of five different popular teenage girls’ magazines for their representations of men and male behaviour. Girls were encouraged to rate boys in relation to several different categories and the boys appeared to merge into other consumer goods available in the magazine. In contrast to friends who were understood to be long-standing, boys were seen as disposable, as “shallow, highly sexual, emotionally inexpressive, and insecure, but also as potential boyfriends, providing romance, intimacy and love” (Firminger 2006, 298). As part of the discourse girls’ own ineptitude was a focus, essentially as a source of mirth, which ultimately resulted in more self-surveillance and the placing of men as judges of their behaviour. Yet girls were also seen as responsible for shaping male behaviour and deciding on the route of a relationship too; good men were seen as ‘keepers’. The naturally high sex drive of men was reified and was prominent as a theme across the magazines as well.

Connell acknowledges that men feel change is on the horizon and that they cannot remain in power for long. She argues that developments in state power won by women via legislation and attaining status as public figures are genuine reversals of power (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). Although Connell understands that female compliance is 'bought' by men through masculine 'gifts' (reliable fatherhood, physical safety, financial support, etc.), this does not adequately account for how this interchange is experienced by individual men and women. As Sampath (1997) notes, men are socially valued as "success objects" (Sampath 1997, 51), especially by women, meaning that women play a key part in choosing successful men as partners. Connell notes that men appreciate the oppressiveness of power relations that favour them and are often committed in important ways to women, familiarly and professionally, and that both sexes have always been able to share the human capacity of feelings and caring. But, Moller (2007) argues, HMT is inadequate, or at least silent, regarding how such feelings in men constitute a hegemonic model in which powerful men can also then experience fears and inadequacies regarding other men or women. My empirical research aims to explore some of Moller's insights since I share with him a reluctance to ignore the differences between men and men's subjective experiences of insecurities, in this instance regarding power.

Segal and Hollway have written on men's insecurities around women. Segal notes that in reality men are particularly vulnerable in sexual intercourse:

Most of the men who talk honestly about their heterosexual experiences, admit considerable confusion, often feeling it is the woman who has all the power ... Whatever the meanings attached to 'the act' of sexual intercourse, for many men it confirms the sense of ineptness and failure: the failure to satisfy women ... Unsurprisingly then, for many men it is precisely through sex that they experienced the greatest uncertainties, dependence and deference in relation to women –in stark contrast, quite often, with their experience of authority and independence in the public world. (Segal 2007, 179)

Here Segal complicates the relationship between men's subjective experience of female power and their structural advantage over them. In *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities*,

Changing Men Segal (2007) explores men's insecurities around their gender and looks for greater understanding of how such insecurities may be the cause of much sexist behaviour by men. In a time when women are demanding change and, arguably, masculinity is not popular, or at least not as popular as it once was, she notes both the conflicting messages (from both men and women) men receive about how they should act and their grappling with their self-formation as 'not female', when "masculinity is surrounded by enemies" (Segal 2007, 86). The tasks of denying homosexual and effeminate desires, whilst also keeping up the effort to domineer women are "far from easy tasks to accomplish" (ibid). The result is masculinities are constantly defined in relation to women, leaving men feeling vulnerable, sometimes envious of women, for both their physical and social abilities, and also isolated through fear of intimacy. This is not to say, she is careful to add, that masculinity should overall be understood as "an impoverished character structure" (Connell (no date) cited in Segal: 2007, 242); rather that we should understand masculinity as ambivalently constructed, which results in men having power but subjectively experiencing it not in terms of enjoyment but anxiety, which may be translated into offensive behaviour towards women. Segal asks us to understand both men and women as experiencing a "shared helplessness" (Segal 2007, xxxi) since we are all susceptible to reacting against rejection and loss as emotional beings. Yet for men, such vulnerability must be denied in a masculine culture which sees emotional candidness as a weakness.

She calls for the discourse on a 'masculinity in crisis' to be reframed in terms of human vulnerability. Part of this is due to her understanding of traditional sociological literature as conceptualising power according to a poststructural rather than a top-down model, with the use of force being an exception, because in most cases power relations are "almost always reciprocal involving some degree of autonomy and dependence in each direction" (Segal 2007, 219). Power is complex and cannot be understood solely in terms of gender. For instance, she notes, both men and women now react in ways which might be understood historically as going against their best interests; some women are campaigning against abortion rights and some men campaigning for shared parenting and domestic

responsibilities. This, she argues, is proof of fundamental gender change which has occurred in the past few decades.

How men experience women's power in dating is misrepresented, argues Segal. She cites the work of Hollway (1984) who interviewed both sexes about dating and found women often fail to perceive men's dependence on them and often underestimate their own power and that much feminist analysis of the penis/male power represents power in monolithic terms which render women victims. Instead, Hollway argues that power is more of a complex process of negotiation. She notes some key discourses around heterosexual relationships which delineate how we understand sex. As mentioned in the introduction, the male sexual drive discourse understands that men have a natural sexual drive which makes them want to have sex with lots of women as part of an underlying biological necessity to ensure the conservation of the human species. Although feminism has challenged this idea of a 'natural' sex drive in men, it has replaced the idea with an understanding of women as victims of the male 'power drive' under a patriarchy that is understood as uniform and all powerful. Hollway argues however that male sexuality has multiple meanings which are more to do with individual needs than one shared motivation.

She too sees power as incorporated in all social relations and as a two-way dynamic requiring negotiation and interaction, all framed within a permissive discourse that is fitting of our time (sex as liberalised since the 1960s). Men want and need relationships, yet women do not recognise this due to the sexist discourses that are abundant. Men also resist their own vulnerability by positioning themselves as objects of the have/hold discourse, with women as the subjects. In this scenario, since women need commitment, in engaging with this, men are able to retain a sense of power in feeling that they are generous in allowing room for women's needs within their own lives. The have/hold discourse is based on Christian values (wedding vows) and enables men to project their emotional needs on to women, and to minimise women's sexual needs, thus keeping themselves safe from their own insecurities. Men's fear of being sucked in by women's emotions mirrors the Enlightenment stereotype of rational male versus emotional female. Men and women

are motivated by these two archetypes to misrecognise each other's access to power because the former denies men's vulnerability and the latter denies women's power in sexual relationships, resulting in 'blind spots' for each sex.

These studies which support a theory of inclusive masculinity suggest masculinity is rapidly changing in ways that question the enduring relevance of theories of 'harder' masculinities such as HMT. This remains an area of research which needs more exploration however. In this regard, this current research aims to add to our understanding of heterosexual men's (of some variety of class backgrounds) interactions with dating partners. While some credence is given by older HMT theorists to the idea that women exercise power, we must ask more questions about how men experience women to have power, rather than defining women's power in relation to men's needs or assuming it be used to uphold the masculine hegemony. Further, as much as recent research about men has focused on men's behaviour as the powerful sex, even the focus in studies which generally support theories of inclusive masculinity is upon men's changing attitudes towards other men and masculinity, for instance in terms of their relationship with ideas about homosexuality. Although these studies have noted some changes to young men's attitudes towards women, their findings remain secondary.

Anderson and McCormack's work shows that interpersonal boundaries among men are being redefined in an environment of diminished homophobia. This has ramifications for understanding relations between, and the experiences of, men and women. Much as their findings do not paint a picture of a blissful egalitarian situation, their research outcomes point towards important changes in the way men think about and perform their masculinity, resulting in a diversity of masculinities existing simultaneously. In turn, such a situation gives both men and women more options for defining their gender.

Inclusive masculinities might, it could be argued, result in increased sexism as young men learn that homosociality is a force that can be used to gain power because men's fears of now discarded effeminophobia and homophobia have always been an Achilles heel for

them. Yet Anderson and McCormack argue that inclusive masculinity is genuinely egalitarian in nature and, as Anderson argues, homophobia is key to understanding masculinity and, therefore, when it is not present, men's masculinity must change. Anderson's theory has been criticized, however. Vaccaro (2009) argues that we should not forget to analyse how orthodox or inclusive behaviour oppresses women. Similarly Collinson and Hearn (2001) are concerned that an emphasis upon pluralised masculinities should not lead to the forgetting of women in analysis and politics in favour of a narcissistic preoccupation with men. Yet to thwart the further study of men because it is seen as a 'narcissistic preoccupation' is to deny scholars, policy makers and, ultimately, society valuable information which may well help develop understandings of gender which in turn will inform and challenge some entrenched ways of thinking, and may also give the added bonus of encouraging more male participation in the gender debate. Also, the study of men does not necessarily preclude further study of women.

The current study aims to observe how men understand and experience dating women and to add to this debate around harder and softer masculinities and their variations, as manifested in men today. I will examine how men perceive themselves and the women they date to have power and how these beliefs are borne out by their experiences. Whether or not men have particularly solid or fluid understandings of gender and of power, including how they experience their relationships with other men homosocially, will be explored, especially with reference to a congruence or lack thereof, with their dating experiences. In addition it is hoped that the nagging question of female power, which is relegated or omitted in much gender-studies research – what it is, how it manifests within male experience – can be pushed to the fore and provoke further research.

Having outlined the relevant theories of masculinity we should now focus on how the current dating context has been explored and understood.

3.0 – Theorising Current Dating Context

3.1 – Dating and Individualism

The current dating environment, of which the interviewees in this study are a part, is an economic, political (neo-liberal) philosophical and social reality, which encourages people to understand themselves foremost as individuals with single life trajectories in which a partner is desired to develop and share one's life journey. The interviewees' responses should be understood in the context of a wider set of cultural understandings that see the individual as undergoing a reflexive project of the self (Giddens 1991, 32). To understand how the interviewees perceive dating we must understand how they see themselves as individuals.

To undertake such a project, we must first acknowledge how the self is formed historically by means of power. Power can be traced to the control of technology in order to produce a regulated population according to Cooper (1994), who notes a distinction between power as productive (power creates subjects through technologies) and as relational (power as experienced between people) as in Foucault's formulation of power. In *Discipline and Punish* from 1975, Foucault explores how corporeal punishment was replaced with technologies of discipline aimed at taming the prisoner to become a legal subject. Such technologies include the 'technology of the body', where sanctions and rewards for good behaviour and habits are bestowed, and the 'technology of the self' where a person is encouraged to open up their soul, to consider their psyche as something to be worked upon as part of the aim towards perfection. These technologies were developed, argues Foucault, alongside physical inventions, such as Bentham's panoptic prison design, which allowed unwitnessed surveillance of prisoners by guards, encouraging Bentham's prisoners (and us) to become our own castigators. Through an internalised panoptic authority, we police our own behaviour via relevant discourses, which normalise certain behaviours (heterosexuality, masculinity) against which we know and measure ourselves. For Foucault, power is not an omnipotent causal principle but something that is relational and omnipresent (Gordon 1980, 245). In continuation, Bauman (2001) argues we are more

synoptic than panoptic now, as the methods of control have developed away from coercion towards seduction by the market.

In *Modern Couples*, van Hooff (2013) notes that individualisation, de-traditionalisation and increased self-reflexivity are three related processes that make up the current dating context. In turn, these approaches stress either the potential for democratisation of intimate relationships (individualism), the perceived breakdown of familial relationships (de-traditionalisation), or the continuation of traditional inequalities (such as is her own conclusion). In her study of two generations of heterosexual couples, van Hooff asks which of these three is currently the most accurate in describing how individualism has affected dating relationships.

Van Hooff notes Giddens' (1991; 1992) theory of a wide social shift towards new forms of self-identity which has resulted in 'confluent love' and the 'pure relationship'. The pure relationship exists solely for whatever rewards are possible to gain from a specific pairing, whereas 'confluent love' is focussed on equality of emotional and sexual exchange to be achieved through mutual exposure. In her analysis, the focus is now on being in a special relationship as opposed to giving oneself to a special person, as in the historical romantic ideal. Van Hooff recognises that the ideal environment for such relationships to begin is online dating, where partners make the relationship occur by performing intimacy. Stages of dating that were once taken for granted, marriage, children etc., is now deliberated over at length for their advantages and disadvantages as the pure relationship can be terminated by either party at will if investment is not seen to be yielding rewards. Similarly, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim note that people still want emotional commitment but without obligation (1995, 16 as cited in van Hooff 2013, 38).

A reflexive project of the self (Giddens 1991) understands the subject primarily as an individual, but how to define an individual? Beck's theory of individualisation (which he differentiates from the commonly held idea of individualisation as isolation and

atomisation) involves the individual being freed from old structural constraints, such as race and class, to realise a democratisation of the self:

First, the dis-embedding of industrial-Society ways of life and, second, the re-embedding of new ones, in which the individuals must produce, stage and cobble together their biographies themselves. (Beck 1997, 95)

As the decline of class and status (dis-embedding) occurs, then an individual must become the unit of reproduction of their biography in relation to others (re-embedding). Such biographies are not left up to chance therefore, but are defined by the general conditions of advanced capitalism, after the certainties of industrial society have gone. Such individual choices are shaped by the labour market, educational system and housing situation, etc. with any contradictions understood in terms of personal risks.

Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2001) note the proliferation of the desire in the West to live “a life of one’s own” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2001, 23). In the dating context sexual norms have changed into a new model of the developed relationship: living together. The reason for living together is understood in terms of ‘trying each other out’ in order to find out whether you are suited. This has emerged from an improvement in women's personal and economic fortunes which resulted in a focus for women on personal happiness and compatibility with a partner, as opposed to the desire to be married per se. As women become more financially independent they can conceive of living alone rather than unhappily in a marriage, which was once a financial necessity. The dual scripts of marriage involve expectations of both feelings and equality, which for women may well represent a discrepancy because a lack of equality will affect a woman’s feelings of love. Market economies ignore the needs of family and partnership – which has always been the case – but it has become noticeable now that women refuse to stay in the home, resulting in each couple now having to negotiate their own division of labour, argue Beck and Beck-Gernsheim. The minutiae of life are now a conscious part of our identity, which we must choose in the absence of tradition and rules. An individual is now the legislator and the

judge of their own life and the struggle to be free has now conformed to a general imperative.

Whilst society is split by two contradictory ideas – that of the desire for close interpersonal relationships and for job expectations – the nuclear family can no longer remain as a guideline because of its reliance on the splitting of life into gendered spheres, the personal and the public. Whereas historically the mother and the father did not compete in either sphere, as sex has been separated from marriage and parenthood, and parenthood can be multiplied by divorce, there are now more possibilities for revising decisions around relationships than ever before. We now have the time to ask broader philosophical questions of ourselves such as “Where am I going?” and we now expect more from romantic relationships. We seek person-related stability because other reference points have gone; we pin our hopes on the other person to hold us upright in an ever-changing world, according to Beck & Beck-Gernsheim. Marriage now forms part of our identity as we seek validation of our goals and hope in the other person; love and identity are becoming ever more closely interwoven. The trouble begins when both sexes are positioned between old gender traditions, such as harder masculine ideals, and new possibilities, such as those posed by a more inclusive type of masculinity, result in confusion and friction. Added to this is the fact that the more intense the feelings, the more we can suffer, especially as we place standards of interpersonal behaviour highly. When feelings are supposed to be the basis of a relationship, it is difficult to admit to their fickle nature.

While freedom from ‘traditional’ expectations could be seen as freeing, our compulsion to think through and question our responses and behaviour results, paradoxically, in spontaneity happening more rarely because, in the light of the lack of knowing our roles, we want certainty of happiness. Online dating is one sphere where it can be seen that those who engage in it approach their dating projects as what could be deemed the epitome of organised spontaneity: “The secular religion known as love is suffering the fate of other religions; it is losing its mythology and turning into a rational system” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, 141). Similarly, as Badiou (2009) noted, love itself is being threatened by

safety, with younger people choosing to use dating websites so as to eliminate risk, ironically not unlike the very illiberally viewed arranged marriages which appear so abhorrent to younger generations in the West.

This individualisation process has been criticised by Bauman for its tendency to break down intimate relationships, rather than democratise them. He argues that uncertainty results in dividing individuals, removing any certainty which people can use as a base to build upon. Much as we are all more anxious, we suffer our anxiety singularly. Bauman also notes that class and ethnicity play important factors in a person's ability to profit from a postmodern plurality of offers to freely follow their desires, although Mowlabocus (2010) notes that individualism can offer the marginalised particular freedoms as they may not feel the loss of conventional ideas of community, because they never felt part of them.

Bauman developed the concept of liquid modernity to refer to those who are free to move without notice (useful for work) as being those who are thought of as being in control (Bauman 2000). An identity is something that must be acquired, using persons, resources and appropriations to achieve a target set and relentlessly aimed towards. Identities are flexible and must be changeable at short notice. The individual of today's society is looking for emotional and sexual meaning and fulfilment in an ever-diminishing set of meaningful circumstances, he argues, which masquerade as a vista of endless choice. To the individual, the world is full of possibilities too numerous to try and therefore we are left with the nagging feeling that we are missing out. Any chance that is not seized is missed and this is seen as an unforgivable act. On top of this, as Furedi (2005) argues, personhood has been equated with the state of vulnerability (Furedi 2005, 141) in that we are encouraged to feel vulnerable in a cultural climate where fear is both politicised and normalised, resulting in "the internalisation of the sensibility of self-limitation" (Furedi 2005, 156). We therefore feel distressed because of an endless range of possibilities to which we cannot commit ourselves for fear of vulnerability. The trick is to travel light so as not to impede your movement in a society of consumers involving endless comparison with no central norms.

As mentioned previously, van Hooff undertook an empirical study to test how relevant the sociological theories of Giddens, Beck and Bauman are to couples in 2013. She argues that there is neither a democratisation of possibilities (as per Giddens 1991, 1992, or Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, 2001) nor a breakdown of intimate relationships in response to individualism (as per Bauman 2001); rather what is occurring is a continuation of traditional inequalities. In contrast to Giddens' (1991) argument, that structural inequalities are lessening through reflexive modernisation, van Hooff echoes Lash (1994) in arguing that one's ability for self-reflexivity, and therefore one's ability to grasp opportunity, is still rooted in structural inequality. This results in new gender configuration, which merely differs in terms of inequalities, rather than providing radically different ones. Jamieson (1999) argues that people these days use a lot of "creative energy" to disguise inequalities, rather than undermining them, ways which often involve self-deceiving cover stories about personal preference, for instance for specific chores, etc., rather than such a person admitting that the relationship is less than egalitarian.

Van Hooff's 2013 research found little support for theories of de-traditionalisation such as those of Bauman, as many of the gender inequalities of previous generations were still found in her research. She notes that theorists of this kind often underestimate how people hold traditional gender ideals dear.

In her study, with the exception of one couple, however, all the young women saw themselves as doing more housework than their partners, regardless of the fact that they also worked. In the bedroom, the young female respondents also reported faking desire as part of a responsibility for women to satisfy their partners' sexual urges. The younger generation (aged 20-35) saw commitment as a staged process along which a couple progresses when they feel ready. Men were withholding commitment as a means of maintaining power. The young female interviewees were also nonchalant about the 'drift' from a casual relationship to a committed one, which van Hooff interpreted as progressing along the commitment scale without discussion, rather than as proof of the existence of the pure relationship, which is free from ties and expectations but is thought through

consciously, as per Giddens' theory. She also argues that relationships cannot be 'pure' because of financial necessity such as shared mortgages, meaning that often people remain in relationships for reasons that are not emotionally based.

Many of van Hooff's interviewees saw love as an escape from the pressures of public life. Indeed, as Illouz (1997) argues, in prioritising the importance of social interactions over the material world, love opens up the possibility of an alternative social order, giving the impression of hope via transgression of some social norms. But van Hooff did not find evidence of the gender equality necessary for confluent love since women still did the bulk of the emotional and household work, on top of their employment. There was definitely more reflexivity with younger interviewees than older ones, yet although disclosing intimacy was an ideal, this ideal caused frustration when not met.

Similarly, van Hooff could not support Bauman's pessimistic theory of the breakdown of familial relationships either because the interviewees did not see relationships as products that were ready to consume as Bauman argues. Interviewees still saw relationships as deeply rewarding even though some younger respondents saw their relationships as part of lifestyle choices which enabled a greater level of consumerism among other choices. She concludes that continued heterosexual norms prevail, more so than there being a focus on change, therefore neither the theories of democratisation or family breakdown are fully representative, especially as they are not based on empirical evidence. Changes that have occurred, including dual earner-ship and prolonged cohabitation pre-marriage, have produced changes in relationships, yet:

Discourses of equality provide only a partial picture, as younger couples work to maintain relationships based on traditional notions of gender rather than seeking to challenge them. While heterosexuality continues to be based on the socially constructed differences, rather than the similarities between men and women, discourses of equality have little hope of realisation. (van Hooff 2013, 153)

This focus on, and tension between, both individualism and traditional notions of gender in a time of considerable change between the sexes produces a situation in which there is gender flux and insecurity around acceptable ways of performing gender. McRobbie (2009) has explored this with reference to post-feminism and these ideas have also been noted by writers like Rogers (2005), Benwell (2003) and Jackson, Stevenson and Brooks (2001), in relation to the subject of men's magazines in the 1990's (as discussed in the next chapter).

Individualisation theory has been developed by McRobbie (2009) into a critique on post-feminism using the term 'female individualisation' to describe an individual's plan of a "life of one's own" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2001, 23). She argues that "[y]oung women are now dis-embedded from communities where gender roles were fixed" (McRobbie 2009, 19), the result being women must invent their own structures by means of self-monitoring practices such as making 'life plans'. They must become more reflexive and take responsibility for their choices regarding marriage and working lives, something McRobbie sees as unworkable since society's structures always play a part. She critiques both Beck and Giddens for being inattentive to the:

...regulative dimensions of the popular discourses of personal choice and self-improvement. Choice is surely, within lifestyle culture, a modality of constraint. The individual is compelled to be the kind of subject who can make the right choices. By these means new lines and demarcations are drawn between those subjects who are judged responsive to the regime of personal responsibility, and those who fail miserably. (Ibid)

How individualism has affected men's performance of masculinity has been explored with specific reference to the men's magazines known as the 'lad's mags' of the 1990's (Benwell 2004). Similarly, here it was found that self-irony was utilised to facilitate men to exist within opposing discourses of the Traditional Man/the New Lad and the New Man and men were also shown to exhibit similar traits of self reference as do the women described by both the individualism theorists and McRobbie. It is to these cultural manifestations of the individualised masculine performance that we turn to in this next chapter as we look at the

men's magazine phenomenon, the Pick Up Artists and briefly touch upon the online phenomenon that is the manosphere.

4.0 – Cultural Manifestations of Gender Uncertainty

4.1 – A Masculinity in Crisis?

The emergence of academic study of masculinity can be thought to reflect men's position of uncertainty in the face of social advancements made by women and minorities which necessitate reflection upon a hitherto 'neutral' category, men (for instance, De Beauvoir 1973). The search for meaning of the modern male has become a popular theme; as Clark (2002) argues, masculinity has been seen to become devoid of meaningful social purpose, resulting in domineering and aggressive displays in the search for the definition of masculinity. At such times of social change, or at times of potential war, economic recession, or of increasing crime rates or educational underachievement, the political discourse moves swiftly to one of 'a masculinity in crisis'. As Whitehead and Barrett argue, "crisis tendencies may, for instance, provoke attempts to restore a dominant masculinity" (2001, 45).

This 'crisis' often involves regret at the formation of a softer kind of masculinity that is becoming more popular in recent years. The 'soft man' has been blamed on absent fathers and dominant mothers. Yet, as Simpson (1994) argues, contradictorily, so has been hyper-macho behaviour in men. This reflects the all-encompassing, contradictory and confused logic of the crisis in masculinity. Where there isn't an agreed object such as the 'correct' type of masculinity, there inevitably will be confusion as to the correct path to take in order to 'rectify' men's performances. That men are heterogeneous, and that individual men may also perform masculinity differently in different contexts, only complicates the situation.

Segal (2006) argues that the notion of masculinity in crisis cannot be supported by research however. In the UK this discourse of crisis has been increasingly popular since 2000 when the then Minister for Education, David Blunkett, announced the need for urgent

action when girls outperformed boys in A-level exams for the first time (by 0.6%). She argues that the real crisis is in the differences between different types of men rather than between men and women. Unmarried, unskilled or unemployed men have higher mortality and illness rates than other men, with class, ethnicity and race being more significant than gender in influencing a student's success. She asserts, "Men are at war with themselves and each other over manhood" (Segal 2001, 246). Men who are now marked as white and heterosexual as opposed to neutral are feeling wounded, which is why the crisis discourse exists.

Much as the masculinity in crisis discourse has been ruminated over in both the press and in political spheres, in recent decades men themselves are finding new and practical ways to live and understand their masculinity in a time of considerable uncertainty around gender. Where politics is central to a particular community, such as the online men's communities which debate gender roles, known as the manosphere (see below), or the different men's movements, the crisis of masculinity discourse is paramount. In other more culturally based manifestations of masculine camaraderie, such as men's magazines and the Pick Up Artist communities, the crisis is more often implied or personified as men whom members avoid associating with or becoming (so called, beta men).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Kimmel has argued that one way in which men are responding to the threat of gender flux is by extending their adolescence up to the age of 30, a phenomenon he refers to as Guyland. Key to this manifestation of masculinity is a performance of misogyny and homophobia, most typically personified by the American university Jocks, who form 'Greek' homosocial groups by means of hazing rituals as mentioned previously. These homosocial groups set up rules of engagement in order to identify like-minded individuals and to distance themselves from other types, specifically in this case those men who display softer masculinities (although this has been shown not always to be the case, see Anderson 2008). Such rules and rituals are therefore a means of knowing oneself and of delineating the type of person you are in a world of possibilities too

numerous to fully comprehend. Thus the 'right' type of masculinity can be known and relied upon in an age of individualised uncertainty.

4.2 – Constructed Certitude

In order to understand how men are choosing their masculine performances today, we must return to the theories of individuality and the project of the self. The current context for such men's dating decisions is one where they are encouraged to expand their sense of themselves to take in multiple opportunities brought on by political, economic, cultural as well as technical developments in the last few decades. As the potential for personal growth enlarged so has the potential to make a wrong decision. The self-measuring or seduced subject now exists in a time of uncertainty, of postmodern plurality, in which the 'ultimate self' to which one should aspire is harder to ascertain. Beck (1997) argues that the 19th century, the age of Modernity, could be described as 'the age of Either/Or' (separation, specialisation and clarity), in comparison to the 20th century, which could be understood in terms of 'the age of And' (multiplicity, uncertainty and synthesis). A world made of 'And' is based more on chaos than order and is addicted to growth and limitlessness, which results in anxiety from a lack of boundaries, especially the lack of a secure border between the public and private realms. He refers to the age we live in as 'counter-modernity', the antithesis to modernity: modernity being the age of calculability; counter-modernity being the age of incalculability. Such counter-modernity he labels 'constructed certitude', an age where modernist questions are absorbed, demonised and dismissed.

Constructed certitude transforms doubt into certitude often by means of information supplied by the sciences and a cherry-picking of historic data used in order to close down the need for questioning, meaning that the concept of certainty is used less stringently than in the age of modernity and is 'justified' rather than attained. The priests of modernity are also the agents of counter modernity since their findings are used to support it. Yet the difference between modernity and counter modernity (constructed certainty) is that constructed certainty abolishes and limits the ability to question consciously:

Not some brutal destroyer of questions, but rather the conscious allowing of questioning to disappear in constructed, sometimes even scientifically fortified certitude. (Beck 1997, 64)

Constructed certitude remains open to the politics of construction and the question of who does the constructing. Whereas modernity appealed to rationality and thought, constructed certainty appeals to the emotions of hate, love, fear and instinct, among others. Such certitude sweeps away doubting, questioning or hesitation and replaces these approaches with instinctive security. This leads paradoxically both to compulsions to act and to complacency.

Kimmel's adolescents can be seen in this context to have formed new areas of certitude in which to know themselves; the threat from female emancipation was responded to with an entrenchment of non-egalitarian ideals and a focus on a masculinity freed from the traditional constraints of marriage, mortgage and children of late modernity. These men can therefore hold on to adolescence as an ideal of masculine freedom, the freedom all men have before women 'get their claws in'. This adolescent freedom based on constructed certitude is made tangible through the men's magazines phenomenon of the 1990's, which espouses a type of masculine performance that has been densely explored academically, as shall be discussed below. Understanding how men's magazines offered their readers solace from confusion about their gendered roles back in the 1990's will be an illuminating background to help understand how the men in the current study either still gain some such certainty, especially through the PUA community, or feel they do not have a central masculine script to adhere to, which they either rue or enjoy.

4.3 – Men's Magazines

In the 1990s a cultural fight between the New Man and The Lad was played out in men's magazines. The first New Man's magazine, *Arena*, was launched in 1986 and the first New Lad magazine, *Loaded*, came out 1994. In turn, arguably, the established lads' magazines, which can be dated to the first issue of *Playboy* in 1953, relied on a construct of the

Traditional Man (Edwards 2003). Benwell (2003) notes that the New Man was an avid narcissistic consumer who understood and endorsed feminist principles. The New Lad reacted against the New Man with a response which reasserted hegemonic masculine traits of working-class culture, such as sexism, heterosexuality and homophobia.

New Man article content, such as modern fatherhood, was replaced with articles about drinking, football and partying. The UK's *Loaded* remains the best example of such a magazine. Understanding the focus of the subsequent male-on-male contention between the different types of men's magazines is important. As Benwell argues, New Lad publications were not part of a feminist backlash; their focus was on rejecting the New Man, not the feminist woman. Laddism did not disagree with the discourses of feminism, it just wanted to distance itself from femininity and homosexuality. The editors of *Loaded*, Brown and Southwell, perceived the New Man as repressed, judgemental and inauthentic, whereas the New Lad was seen as relaxed and espousing an honest expression of innate masculinity, which was half animal (Crewe 2003).

Jackson, Stevenson and Brooks (2001) also note the magazines' aim to return to a more 'authentic' masculinity. The New Man was perceived as in danger of slipping up and making a politically incorrect mistake, whereas the New Lad magazines gave their readers permission to do what they want; they supplied support for the man who wants assurance of their identity, to make up the deficit between their ostensive political egalitarian ideals and their politically incorrect desires. Men were able to look at pictures of women without feeling guilt, which was just what men were 'supposed to do'. Ironically, New Lad magazines are conscious of the fact of New Men's magazines being cultural constructs (men formed in the way women want them to be), yet they are not aware of the constructed nature of 'The Lad'.

Rogers (2005) argues that the men's magazines *FHM* and *Loaded* attempt to offer certainty amongst men by creating a shared sense of direction at a time of great gender insecurity. He studied six issues of each magazine and found two main themes. Firstly, the 'Sexual

Mode of Production' stresses management and rationalisation (as well as science), and the 'Relationship Utopia' imagines a fulfilling sex life once intimacy has been accomplished. Rogers focused on how intimacy is made achievable by supposedly teaching the reader skills and attitudes, which support a common understanding of the dilemma of intimacy in the modern world.

The magazines construct both certainty and uncertainty with reference to heterosexual relationships. Sex is represented as unproblematic and satisfying, assuming the reader to be sexually active and the women's pleasure as unproblematic to achieve; uncertainty is represented in ideas about relationships being complicated, in contrast to sex. In addition, while sex is seen as ideally unproblematic, female sexuality is sometimes conceived as dangerous and difficult to decipher too, with women's opinions being potentially damaging to the male ego. Therefore, sex is to be taken seriously and something that must be mastered within three methods of production: management, Fordisation & scientisation of sex (Rogers 2005, 186). The management of work organisations is invoked to illustrate for men some ideas of how to achieve sexual goals, prioritising efficiency. The Fordisation of relationships refers to the imperative for sex to be constantly improving, which involves refining techniques; the compartmentalisation of sex ensures learning is piecemeal and therefore manageable. Finally, science is invoked to provide theories of fool-proof advice, which is imparted as 'objective' knowledge to help men in their subjective sex lives. Biology is prioritised as a means of sounding apolitical and unbiased. The scientific angle also means that men do not need to consult each other directly, an act which might appear weak; science therefore acts as a conduit for men's anxieties.

Using Beck's concept of 'self-limitation', which refers to an individual's tendency to aim towards preventing the worst, as opposed to aiming for the best, (Beck 1992, 49), Benwell (2003) argues that in men's magazines self-limitation is manifest as a reliance on biological essentialist gender ideals. The magazines develop an exaggerated sense of the certainty of gender roles, which can only result in the preservation of male privilege, with women represented only as objects of desire. As Jachimiak noted, men's lifestyle magazines present

“a strangely nostalgic - obsessed future” (Jachimciak 2006, 152). This nostalgia is not unique to the men’s magazines of the 1990s however. If one takes some time to explore the online communities frequented by men in more recent years, such as the Pick up Artist communities, throughout one finds a reminiscence of an idealised traditional masculinity which is divorced from the responsibilities and negative experiences that were most likely to have been experienced alongside the much-lauded freedoms such historic men were supposed to enjoy. Such a historical male is a modern invention, resultant of some of today’s frustrated men’s projections of a preferred masculinity.

A plethora of bloggers and forum users who are referred collectively as the manosphere are also having debates around gender online around three main themes: advancing men's rights in reaction to the perceived erosion of men’s freedoms in recent decades; critiquing the role of feminism in today’s society; and providing men with advice to give them dating advantages over women. Such men, also often referred to as men’s rights activists (MRAs) one such being Warren Farrell who wrote the bestseller on this subject, *‘The Myth of Male Power’* in 1993, moved away from a symmetrical formulation of gender inequality as argued by the men’s liberationists from the early 1970’s (who argued gender was a system that oppressed all (see Messner 1997)), towards a focus almost exclusively on the costs to men themselves of a gender order. Using the language previously reserved for women’s fight for equality, (such men are rare in that they are happy to embrace the role of the victim), MRAs argue that women now have all the power and men are the oppressed sex. They assert the need for a complete about-face in our understanding of gender inequality. By moving the focus from the public world to the inner world of emotion, these men can feel as insecure as women about their relative power to the opposite sex.

The PUAs, manosphere and MRAs all rely heavily upon the idea of an imagined historical masculinity that has been lost; historical references are utilised, especially from ancient history, to argue for a future newly formulated civilisation in which biology is king. This was particularly true in the early 1990s through a focus on spirituality and homosociality in the form of the Mythopoetic movement, spearheaded by Robert Bly’s 1990 book *Iron*

John, (a movement which lasted until the late 1990s (Fox 2004)). The choice of a far-off history as the model for this future world is of interest since such distant cultures precede feminist or industrial influences on gender relations. By choosing a past time as a foundation, the difference between then and now can be romanticised further by such male groups, rendering arguments and desires outside any potential logical rebuttals; they exist in the mists of time. Such a 'vision' enables men to argue for a less egalitarian gender order with essentialised roles for both sexes; it also aims for a modern interpretation of 'the truth' where the postmodern 'both/and' is replaced with modernism's 'either/or' as Beck (1997) understood it. (It also helps to ignore the subject of homosexuality in a nascent and fragile homosocial space, as both Farrell and Bly appear to imagine a similarly mythical time 'before homosexuality'.) Distinct throughout the cultural manifestations of masculine gender debate is a desire to 'clear things up', to delineate, so that anxiety about one's gendered performance can be alleviated and one can get a hold on life by means of constructed certitude, whether that be in the form of a 'rediscovered' pre-historical masculine identity, a newly formed (but assumed to be long-term) homosocial community, or, as will be shown in the chapter called Introducing Pick up Artistry, by means of using cherry-picked scientific facts and neuro-linguistic programming techniques to level the dating field.

4.4 – Conclusion

How women form men's masculinities is an important question to the current study. How much an idealised masculinity is understood by the respondents to be in reaction to the desires of women or other men, is key to forming an understanding how men both understand and then project masculine ideals on to themselves, other men and women. Are we to absorb the theories of Connell or (especially) Kimmel who understand masculinity as almost entirely formed homosocially and in doing so leave little room for any understanding of how the sexes form themselves in opposition to each other? Masculinity is formed not just in opposition to femininity, as in the 'not female' but also in terms of attractiveness to women, as Farrell argues, albeit that he argues this entirely in terms of female power. Likewise, femininity is formed in part through the 'not male' and in terms of

attractiveness to men, especially for heterosexual women. How the interviewees in the current study both position their own masculinity in reference to the women they desire (real or imagined) and how this incorporates a desire for a particular type of femininity is of interest. Further key questions which need answering therefore include: do the men's accounts of their own masculinity sit well with their stated desired femininity in a partner or are there contradictions and tensions between these things? Likewise, are there contradictions and tensions between their performance of masculinity and their dating ideals?

Relationships with postmodern women prevent men from living an imagined ideal life of masculine and emotional autonomy. The response to this is to develop behaviours that stop a man becoming emotionally invested, at all costs. A common response in PUA rhetoric is analysed (discussed below), towards this ambiguity about long-term relationships is to respond by 'keeping fluid and on your toes'. As in Bauman's (2000) *Liquid modernity*, dead ends are avoided and the self must be kept un-invested. Men are encouraged to relearn skills and attitudes in order that they can defend themselves against women's perceived power but also, importantly, be able to guard against change itself since fluid modernity is not received as comfortable nor, as Bauman suggests, as a solid grounding on which to base a long-term relationship.

Whilst objective economic analysis shows structural gender inequality hurts women far more than men, this political fact is not necessarily mirrored by men's psychological reality, as Kimmel argues (2010:125). Yet, if our aim is for genuine gender equality, we should listen to and try to understand how men (of which the manosphere is an extreme vocalisation) perceive power to be played out between genders, psychologically as well as structurally. Because the psychological defines men's behaviour, and is understood as key when men study each other (as shown by its popularity in papers on masculinity delivered at the American Man Studies Association Annual Conference between 1993 and 2011 (Cohen: 2012)). As Jefferson (2002) has argued, we need to develop a more adequate psychosocial view of masculinity which moves beyond single ideas of social construction to

an understanding of men's inner world: the psychic and the social for ever being intertwined.

What is of interest for the current study is how the masculinist groups mentioned in this chapter are positioning themselves as victims and use the language originated in feminist criticisms of male power to argue their case. Their ease of use of this victimhood language is, as will be shown, rare for men: even when they are clearly the victim or at least receiver of women's power over them, men usually respond by highlighting either their strengths or female weaknesses, something that has been found in other research too (Durfee: 2011). Also of interest is how men are responding to gender flux by inventing cultural examples of constructed certitude to alleviate their individual and collective cognitive dissonance. These constructs vie with or relate to men's desire for traditional forms of heteronormativity, such as monogamous marriage, or as the Pick Up artist Community experience it as a focus on multiple sexual partners as a means of performing masculine freedom.

5.0 – Methodology

This study aims to find out how the interviewees feel about dating relationships, women, and themselves, and to understand this in the current dating climate. There was also a particular focus on how men experienced women to have or not to have power in dating relationships. I undertook 30 in-depth interviews of approximately 60 to 90 minutes duration in order to produce a thick description of how my respondents experienced dating. I chose a qualitative-research design because I believed that this would afford me room to probe and elaborate the men's responses at length, giving me valuable insights into how the men thought in an area of Gender Studies which is largely under researched, that of men's perceptions of female dating behaviour.

As mentioned in the introduction, men's perceptions of power relationships in dating situations are a similarly under-researched area of Gender Studies. It is within this context

that I chose to undertake a very particular methodology which was iterative in style. It was a task in itself to design a list of questions which would elicit the most candid and useful data on a subject which, at least at the beginning of the interviewing process, I believed would prove sensitive for potential interviewees (especially at the sourcing stage). The need to elicit candid responses on sensitive subjects (especially for men) informed every stage of the methodological design of the study. I therefore chose to undertake a two-tier design with preliminary semi-structured interviews informing the subsequent 'main' interviews, in order to carefully position the questioning. The respondents were also requested to supply some demographic information in the form of a short emailed questionnaire.

I also attended a weekend Pick Up Artist (PUA) training camp in London and witnessed four new PUAs learning pick-up skills (see the previous chapter). I met three of the PUA interviewees there and most of the PUA trainers I interviewed either came directly from contact made here or from word of mouth via them. I later experienced a female-orientated PUA introduction evening for comparison purposes.

5.1 – Defining Dating

I was not initially aware of the wide variety of uses of the term 'dating' when I designed my research project, although I was aware that too narrow a definition could prove restrictive. Firstly, since research has not been undertaken in this area before, I wanted to take a wide-net approach and explore the differences across a selection of responses from men in order to find any patterns which might prove useful for subsequent research. Secondly, as I faced real difficulties attracting men to be interviewed, I did not want to eliminate volunteers because they had not met a specific set of dating-definition criteria I had already set out. I already had to eliminate some men because they were outside of the age criteria and did not want to waste any more opportunities.

I therefore allowed the interviewee to interpret the word 'dating' as they wished and found that their definitions differed. A couple of the men saw dating as a specifically American

concept – when a young man and women went on a number of nights out, becoming more intimate as they did so. This was something the English respondents said they no longer undertook. Others spoke of their dating lives being previous to their marriages, saying they no longer dated (and therefore they felt the question was not relevant to them). The majority took a wider view, seeing dating as defining anything from a one-night stand to a lifelong marriage. In retrospect, it is difficult to see where it would have been better to narrow the definition since I could not be sure how their definitions would relate to their other answers. When I was asked to elaborate on my interpretation of the word in interviews, I defined dating as anything they thought of it, from short to long-term relationships.

5.2 – Qualitative Research Design

I chose to undertake a qualitative approach, since I felt that for a topic such as this an individualised and flexible design would be most productive. Respondents are more likely to yield sensitive data if they can feel assured that such data is being treated with respect by someone in an interview situation where that person is clearly taking the time and effort to undertake individual interviews, effort which may well be perceived to be missing in a questionnaire survey (for instance, Evans & Mathur 2005). This design was also going to prove useful in terms of the flexibility of such interviews in asking follow-up questions to provide information for possible further research trajectories. A single-interview design was chosen because it represented less of a commitment for the interviewees, and an in-depth semi-structured interview is argued to be “the best type of interview in situations where only a one-off interview is possible” (Bernard 2000, 191). I chose not to utilize a focus group of men because, much as valuable information can be gleaned from watching men interact, I thought it likely that men would not feel able to disclose sensitive information in front of others due to homosocial pressure. As much as such pressure is clearly associated with the performance of masculinity in dating relationships, it was thought best to focus on individual interviews as homosociality is not the main focus of this study.

The preliminary interviews were undertaken with academics who specialise in masculinities; an ex-editor and writer for a number of men's lifestyle magazines; 10 sex workers who potentially had valuable access to men's declarations of dating concerns (in the form of 'pillow talk'); and seven Pick Up Artist trainers (PTs) who specialise in teaching men how to approach women. These initial interviews were undertaken in order to ascertain the most relevant questions to ask future interviewees who would form the basis of the study. While they do not form material used for research here, their responses were invaluable in preparing me for subsequent interviews.

The subsequent 30 interviews used for this research were undertaken with 20 dating men and 10 Pick Up Artists (PUAs) aged between 21 and 40. The reasons why PUAs were chosen were twofold. Firstly, at this stage of initial research and design of the methodology, it appeared that these men represented a particularly nervous group of individuals in relation to dating. This proved to be partially true, although it was found from the PT interviews that in fact many men who attend these classes do so for reasons other than overcoming a disproportionate fear of approaching women, which meant potentially there could be more overlap with the dating men. For instance, some men were already confident but wanted to become even more adept in their dating skills.

The other reason for choosing PUAs as part of the design was that I speculated that men who had recently overcome their fear of women would be more candid and happy to talk about those fears, believing themselves to now be beyond them. Indeed Adler and Adler refer to the "nouveau-statused" as one recognised type of "non-wary participant" (Adler & Adler 2002, 522) in interviews. The PUAs were found to be happy to elaborate on their experiences of disempowerment and it was useful to be able to ask them to refer to their 'pre-PUA selves' when it was felt they were glossing over some remembered (or still-felt) insecurities. This approach also proved useful when talking with the regular dating men too.

5.3 – Using Telephone Interviews

Much as it is generally conceived that face-to-face interviews are always preferable, there are previous studies which compare the results from data achieved from in-person and telephone interviews, in terms of richness. These find that telephone interviewing to be at least as good, if not preferable, to in-person interviews (Shuy 2001; Carr & Worth 2001; Chapple 1999; Holt 2010; Lechuga 2012; Sturges & Hanrahan 2004; Sweet 2002; Tausig & Freeman 1988). It is difficult, however, to find any conclusive evidence in favour of either, especially in relation to this study, because the studies previously undertaken compared formal telephone interviews with formal in-person interviews rather than the semi-structured type chosen for this research. Further, these studies were performed with reference to health or education rather than gender or sociology. Additionally, it has been argued there is a bias against telephone interviewing in favour of in-person interviewing in the research community (Novick: 2008). The advantages of telephone interviewing are usually considered to be lowered costs, ease of comparison within a large-scale survey and access to geographically or socially difficult-to-reach people, such as criminals and gang members, all of which are not relevant here.

It has been shown that men are happier to be interviewed in their own homes (Adler & Adler 2002; Oakley: 2000). I am not sure, however, how much I would have felt secure in such an environment and therefore there may have been issues regarding the quality of the data if I was in any way keen to finish the interview due to feelings of discomfort. It is also likely that the men would have picked up on my tension which arguably would have changed their responses (Brennan 2004). Regardless of my own feelings, it was not a possibility to visit them at home due to ethical requirements laid down by the university about my own safety. The next best available option was to interview the men by telephone or Skype (sound only) while they were in their own homes.

Drawing from my previous experience working as a volunteer listener for the Samaritans, I believed that people are more candid when a pair of eyes is not observing them across the table, so whether or not I should be present in the room when interviewing was also a

consideration. As Hagan states, telephone interviews are useful “because they provide a kind of instant anonymity, are effective for attaining hard-to-locate individuals or when asking highly sensitive questions” (Hagan 2006, 110). Babbie agrees: “Respondents will be more honest in giving socially disapproved answers if they don’t have to look you in the eye” (Babbie 1992, 275). Indeed, some of the preliminary interviews were done in person and I spoke to one PUA trainer initially on the telephone and subsequently in person. At the end of the second interview, I asked him whether he felt there was a difference between speaking in these different contexts and he confirmed that he thought he had been more candid on the telephone. Therefore, not only the list of questions but the method developed ‘organically’.

While it is true that using the telephone involves not being able to witness non-verbal information, body language and appearance which could provide paralinguistic information about the subject’s attitude or response, this should be weighed up against the advantages of the interviewer not being seen herself too. I felt it was, in retrospect, very useful to be able to relax and focus on what the men were saying without worrying about how I appeared to them, for instance, by not giving them any impression of the value of their words by my taking notes at particular times rather than others; by appearing physically shocked by or appearing disapproving of some of the men’s answers; by appearing distracted or pedantic while following my question sheet; or by appearing nervous or tired on an ‘off day’.

5.4 – Women Interviewing Men

Another concern was whether the men would feel inclined to divulge sensitive data to a woman. As part of my initial design planning I acquainted myself with research on the role of gender in interviewing men. Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2002) note that it is important for interviewers to recognise problems that can arise from “men’s efforts to signify, in culturally prescribed ways, a credible masculine self” (Schwalbe & Wolkomir 2002, 203) potentially by means of “emphasizing their heterosexuality, presenting themselves as powerful and busy, and positioning themselves as having expert and superior knowledge”

(Pini 2005, 201). This seemed of particular significance when designing a research project which foregrounded gender. Yet I was aware that men's performance of gender in answering questions would also be very useful for my study as "such displays are not only obstacles to obtaining the data one wants, they may in fact constitute part of the data one needs" (Schwalbe & Wolkomir 2002, 204).

Regardless of gender, it has been found that interviews which intrude into the private sphere of personal experience are more daunting than those that don't. (Adler & Adler 2001). In addition to this, the variable of gender might cause further difficulty. Before I had undertaken extensive reading about masculinity and homosociality, I was concerned my male respondents wouldn't feel comfortable talking to a woman and would prefer a man. My instinct on this was in opposition to what has been termed the "focal gender myth of field research" (Warren 1988, 64), that is, that female interviewers will find it easier to build up a rapport than male interviewers. As this study developed, my concern was proved to be mistaken since the men, with a few exceptions, were talkative about even the most sensitive details. I at one point believed that if I were a male interviewer, I would have had a harder struggle trying to elicit candid responses about insecurities because of the homosocial nature of masculine performance between men. Yet it has been found in one comparative study focussed on female interviewees, the women were less concerned about the gender of the interviewer than was expected. Padfield and Procter (1996) compared requests for male or female interviewers and found that, overwhelmingly, people did not make a preference and were equally likely to agree to a second interview, even when talking about the sensitive subject of abortion. Unfortunately such comparative studies are rare and I have not been able to find one that focuses on male interviewees. In this study, however, most of the men spoke at length about their beliefs and feelings and some thanked me for the opportunity to talk about something that they had either not given much thought to previously or were not generally asked to comment upon.

Having researched the possible problems potentially posed by interviewing men about their feelings, I used some of the methods recommended by other researchers, such as

Schwalbe & Wolkomir (2002). In addition, I also developed my own strategies, based on my past experiences talking to people about their concerns at The Samaritans and more technically when analysing the preliminary interviews. In *Interviewing Men*, Schwalbe & Wolkomir (2002) have written about the various problems a researcher may face when interviewing men, such as reticence to divulge personal information and tendencies for male respondents to instigate power struggles.² Whereas historically men were considered the 'normal' category of human being who did not require special interview techniques, work on hegemonic masculinity theory (Connell, 1987) has shown patterns in behaviour specific to men which, they argue, present possible problems in the interview setting. Men will be likely to apply rationalisation post hoc to answers given, as well as hyper-rationalising experiences, rather than talking about their feelings. Schwalbe and Wolkomir argue that this is done as a means of controlling the interview (Schwalbe & Wolkomir: 2002).³ When men tried to avoid answering questions about emotional states, I responded by requesting that my interviewees talk specifically about their feelings, looping back to what they had previously said, something I had been taught to do as a listening volunteer. Schwalbe and Wolkomir argue that men can be insecure and anxious underneath a guise that appears confident and in control. The interview is a particular opportunity for signifying a strong masculine type whilst simultaneously being a situation that threatens masculinity. They differentiate between the baseline threat of the interview setting – people don't generally feel relaxed being probed for answers – and a surplus threat which

² Only one of the interviewees overtly tried to take control of the interview, and he did so repeatedly by various means: by personalising porn use to me; by stating he has something to say but that he will come back to it later, but never does; by throwing questions back at me and describing them as loaded, or by rejecting some terms and by trying to find out about my personal taste in men. Finally when asked if he had anything else to add at the end of the interview, he replied he has quite a few things, but couldn't think of any right then (and when later probed by e-mail neither then either). Consequently, he tried to make more dates to meet up in order to talk some more, saying he had some things to tell me, I was very suspect about his level of truthfulness in his interview (for instance, he made me guess how many women he had slept with and promptly doubled it exactly) as well as his motivation as not being entirely professional, so did not take up this offer. Some of this behaviour can be understood in terms of PUA community's tendency to 'negging' as explained previously.

³ Yet actually it was found in this study only a handful of men post rationalised their responses, and this was done after the interview had ended. Most noticeably a few who corrected their transcribes did so by either adding footnotes explaining what was meant by a certain utterance, correcting grammar and spoken tics, or by sending further links/information as means of elaboration on a point.

can be caused by the specific questions asked (women's power in dating) and the type of interviewer (a woman). Gender as interview subject matter is noted as an area of particular concern for men because it highlights men's gender performance. As a result men are likely to struggle for 'compensatory control' via testing the researcher's knowledge or authority, inappropriate sexualising, or minimising, which is where interviewees fail to take conversational cues and give inappropriately short answers.

There is an established discussion about female interviewers' vulnerability in interviewing men within the research community (see Lee 1997; Gailey & Prohaska 2011) but less emphasis has been put on women's power in female to male interviews. Exceptions are Schwalbe & Wolkomir (2002) who consider women's potentially powerful position as interviewer:

... as witnesses to men's weaknesses and failures, [who] know just how much of an illusion it is. Women thus often possess a great deal of potentially discrediting information. (Schwalbe & Wolkomir 2002, 205)

And

The threat may be heightened if it seems that the interviewer is interested in gender, broadly construed, because this makes the subject's identity as a man more salient to the interaction. Surplus threat can also arise because of the interviewer's identity. (Schwalbe & Wolkomir 2002, 206)

I was consistently aware that my interview technique needed to minimise such "surplus threat" because of my position being out of line with traditional gender roles and because of the sensitive subject matter. I was also aware that telephone interviewing would not eliminate my identity as a white, middle-class woman. I was conscious of the possibility that talking about dating might be misconstrued as a romantic approach by myself to the interviewee, especially if I contacted them through a dating website. Indeed, after one phone interview I received suggestive texts from one participant. I did not want to play the role of therapist to the men, who may be talking about difficult issues for the first time; it

was imperative that they leave the conversation no worse off than they started it. I was therefore very conscious throughout the interviewing process of treading a fine line between appearing open-minded and non-judgemental and being misconstrued as interested in a sexual or emotional relationship with the interviewee.

5.5 – Sampling: The Respondents

I used a mixed methodology to gather my sample of respondents and it should be noted that this study is not generalisable. For the sex workers, the PUA trainers and the PUAs it was necessary to use a snowballing technique which utilised gatekeepers to access the communities. This is most obvious with the sex workers for whom a word-of-mouth recommendation was vital due to historic misuse of sex workers' data by some less scrupulous researchers. As part of my education around sex work for this study, but also as part of my networking for interviewees, I attended the Sex Worker Open University five-day event held in London in October 2012. One afternoon was dedicated to research around sex work and the pitfalls inherent for the workers. In this study, one sex worker eventually withdrew her consent but the others were largely happy to be interviewed by somebody who had a background of herself working the sex industry.

I advertised on a number of online forums focused on 'male interests' like sport, motorcycling and car ownership and also in *Men's Health* magazine, the UK's second most popular men's magazine (Roger 2012). The car and bike websites were accessed through my husband who is a trusted member on many automotive forums. All other approaches were direct. Other social-network sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, as well as dating websites, like Plenty of Fish and Match.com, were also used, as were advertisements placed in the male toilets at Sussex University. Two men's rights activist (MRA) websites were approached; I aimed to recruit three MRA interviewees in order to understand how such men who focus on power between the sexes feel about dating. In reality, I only managed to get one MRA to accept being interviewed, and even that was very difficult since these communities are notoriously antifeminist. This is therefore why the MRA I interviewed was based in Australia despite the initial aim to have only British men involved in the study; it

was more important to include the voice of an MRA than to retain an exclusively British sample. Although nationality is not a focal point of the study, I thought it useful to enlist respondents from a shared cultural context so as to compare responses, especially since I was utilising a music video popular in the UK as part of my method which may not be as well known in other cultures. The only other non-British subject was Mike who I felt, due to his substantial recent history (over 10 years) of living in the UK, knew enough about British culture to comment.

I focused on men between the ages of 20 and 40, a fact I did not disclose in the advertising, choosing to eliminate those outside of this age range once they had contacted me in order to have more control over the honesty of the men's declarations of their age. This age range was chosen because it was desirable to have a large enough range in order to collect two generations of men's responses but also since I was aged 40 at the time of interviewing (a similar age to many of those interviewed), I felt that my age would not act as a prohibitive factor for the men as I held many shared cultural references with the older men. It was felt that whilst a 20 year old man and a 40 year old man would be unlikely to frequent the same entertainment venues – night clubs for instance – yet they would be able to reflect and position themselves within some shared culture, such as whether they were likely to have watched the Beyonce video *All The Single Ladies* I was to show them. Also, the 20s and 30s represent two decades of usually frequent levels of dating activity, whether it be pre or post-marriage. It was also necessary to include men in their 20s if I was to interview PUAs because this is the age range for which PUA training was most popular. In reality, the age range resultant after all the men had responded and selected was 21 to 40.

5.6 – Sampling Concerns

A key concern I had about interviewing was the ease of finding respondents in a study about men's perceptions in dating relationships, including perceptions and possible concerns about female power. It was necessary therefore to underplay the elements of the study which were focused on male insecurities so as not to deter men or to only attract those who were particularly brave, rendering the study externally invalid. As LeCompte

and Goetz (1982) define it, external validity refers to whether findings may be compared legitimately across groups, in this case other dating men. Although this study does not aim for generalisation, it does aim to represent the findings about men in a way that makes them of interest for further exploration by other researchers, so data needs to be sourced in a way that does not preclude others from mirroring this study, albeit not definitively. Therefore the wording I chose to use for my adverts was 'open' in style. The wording for the university posts and men's website posts went like this:

MEN what do you think about dating WOMEN?

I would like to interview you as part of my PhD research on dating. The interview would take around 60 mins on the telephone/Skype or in person (whichever you prefer) and you would remain completely anonymous.

This would be an opportunity for you to tell your side of the story in a non-judgemental environment, however much dating experience you may or may not have. I am keeping an open mind and am keen to hear whatever it is you have to say about your experiences of dating women.

(Contact details)

When I received a couple of emails from men who were concerned that I was going to use their online dating profile information without their consent, I reworded the email to include:

(for Plenty of Fish website):

I hope you don't mind me contacting you in this way, I appreciate it wasn't the email you were expecting and please be assured if you don't reply I won't contact you again or use any of your information in my study.

(Contact details)

(and not through this site please!) If not, please accept my apologies for taking up your time.

Thanks, Anna

My respondents came from various sources. The PUAs came from either the MPUA Online or the London Seduction Society forums. As most PUAs were members of both sites (they were certainly interacting between them in response to my advert), it is not possible to say with certainty which PUA came through which forum, not least because many of the interviewees could not remember. In retrospect, it would have been a good idea to place adverts on the two forums a week or two apart (removing the initial advert before the second one went up) in order to gauge more accurately where the interviewees came from.

The dating men came from:

University adverts on toilet walls n=1

Match.com n=1

Plenty of Fish n=11

Twitter n=1

Facebook n=0

Men's interest websites n=6

Keeping an unthreatening tone was important at the interviewing stage as well as at the advertising stage. One way this was done was to highlight the value of interviewees' input both in the adverts and at the beginning of the interview so as to instil confidence in the men. The interviews were made up of approximately 30 questions which were ordered in a 'sandwich' style, with the difficult five questions about men's safety coming at about numbers 20 to 25, by which time the men were more relaxed, leaving five questions which were much less sensitive, with the hope that this left the men 'emotionally closed' before the end of the telephone conversation. The questions were asked in the same order for all interviewees, unless the interviewee led the interview strongly in a direction which made an upcoming question relevant and then this was asked out of order. I deliberated extensively about the wording because the questions were key to gaining access to data that was both relevant and candid. I trod a careful line between asking direct questions and making the mistake of asking leading questions. I began by asking general questions about

the respondent's dating history and attitudes but I knew I also had to ask them questions about subjects such as concerns about female power and, for instance, aggression too. I knew that if I only stuck with a general questioning style, it was quite likely that men would 'perform their masculinity' by means of avoiding anything that might show them in a weak or vulnerable light; they were likely just not to 'go there'. I had to ask direct questions, specific in focus, about difficult subjects, in a way that was neither directly leading nor threatening, but which also gave a focus to the question which men either answered or avoided. I could then analyse the answers knowing that the respondent understood what was the focus of the question had been. If I had stuck to generalised questioning,

5.7 – Analysis

I analysed the data in two inductive stages. Firstly I identified broad themes. These were found using the NVivo software. Secondly, the data was analysed in more detail in terms of the discourses employed by the respondents. This process took place throughout my third and fourth year of a full-time PhD. I also noted word frequency in both the dating men and the PUAs' interviews separately, in order to highlight themes as well as to show how and where interviewees laughed to see if laughter coincided with challenging questions. I compiled a mini report on each person, which included their demographic information; their cultural-taste information; their 'laughter report'; my thoughts and feeling as recorded immediately after interview; and a summary of the main points they made in their interviews. I kept these reports to hand whenever I cited from the interviews to enable accurate contextualisation of their words. Summaries of each man's dating history can be found in Appendix 1.

In conducting the study, I found that men's experiences of dating and of female power differed both between men's accounts and within individual accounts, with each man taking up a number of different 'positions' in response to questions about female power. Using Willig's discourse analysis criteria (Willig 2008), I initially found the following positionings: Victim, Moral Agent, Modern Man, Judge and Consumer. Sometimes men's positions were in conflict logically with other answers they had given, sometimes men even

changed position within a single answer, with the Victim positioning being most often utilised alongside other positions. Occasionally they combined various positions simultaneously. These observations were considered useful and I subjected such paradoxical responses to further analysis. At first I also delineated my data into the following subject areas: Beauty, Homosociality, Female Power, Female Hostility, The Dating Process and Male Anxieties. I found however that attempting to distinguish the data into subject areas like these was not useful in identifying underlying themes. I therefore settled on three broader framings: men's thoughts about themselves; about women; and about dating. In this way, I aimed to explore the men's accounts in all of their contradictions and nuances, yet still retain a broad thematic shape to provide useful research outcomes.

5.8 – Ethical Concerns

I was keen to empower the interviewee for ethical reasons but also as a means to encourage confidence, which would lead to better data. Whilst this may seem somewhat contradictory, I believe that people who feel confident are more relaxed about sharing data, meaning a 'win-win' situation is possible. At the beginning of each interview I talked through the steps I would take to ensure the person's anonymity including my changing all names (to one they chose, in order to eliminate the possibility of inadvertently choosing another name relevant to them) and omitting any other identifying information from the report, which was subsequently adhered to. Similarly, all of the men were informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time and that they would receive a printed version of the transcript to approve before the interview was included in the analysis. Importantly, I asked the men to sign the consent form after they had undergone the interview, so they were informed fully as to what they were consenting to. This was inspired by my experience in TV production where it is often the case that one is expected to sign before interview, rendering the TV company in a position of power. I had always done the opposite at work and therefore felt it appropriate to do the same with my research. A handful of men chose to amend their interviews prior to submission (see footnote 9), usually in order to correct their grammar. The interviewees set the time of the

interviews. The place, at the interviewee's home in most cases, was encouraged in order to encourage confidence and candid responses.

My methodology was necessarily formed in response to certain ethical concerns about the sensitive nature of my questions and how they might be experienced by interviewees, and also about my own personal safety. How I would respond to possible misogynist remarks from interviewees was a concern for me because not only might they be upsetting but also I needed to think about how I would place myself in the interview in such an instance; in other words, would I or would I not challenge an interviewee's misogynist statement? Gailey & Prohaska (2011) found that it could be emotionally and intellectually challenging interviewing men about their sexual practices because gender performance is relevant not only for the interviewees but the interviewer as well. Their particular study focussed on the sexual practice of 'hogging', in which men deliberately seek out women they deem to be fat and unattractive in order to sexually interact with them, either consensually or non-consensually, as part of a homosocial exercise. The authors noted that a number of the male subjects tried to take control of the situation by interruption, making inappropriate sexual comments, or going off topic. The interviewer in turn consciously "did subordination" by not acknowledging to the man that his behaviour was inappropriate (in her opinion). When a woman interviews a man who expresses unsavoury opinions about women, they are caught between the desire to express their distaste while maintaining a professional level of disinterestedness; to appear as the ever-objective researcher. My personal position on this issue is that it is unrealistic to assume this is an issue only women face. Men who interview people who hold unsavoury positions also face this dilemma, as do women who interview objectionable people (including women) on subjects other than gender. It is true that women's relative unequal power position renders them in a special ethical position as a researcher. Yet I do not agree with Gailey and Prohaska that this necessarily leads to a female researcher being doubly oppressed, leaving them feeling that "the process of the interview, not just the men, made us feel powerless and vulnerable" (Gailey & Prohaska 2011, 377). This is to ignore the powerful role of the interviewer (for example Campbell et al 2010; Edwards 1990; Soble 1978) and the possibility that the men in question were

reacting to a perceived power which rendered them vulnerable, so responded with a desire to take back control by means of appearing offensive.

It was certainly the case that the initial responses from MRAs on two forums invoked the latter two concerns. The threatening (albeit partially in jest) and offensive language used in response to my request for interviewees by some of the MRAs surprisingly did not faze me because I felt it was so disproportionate a response to my request; it just seemed unreasonable. Within each interview, there was usually a route around my acting with integrity as a researcher but also in terms of my own sensibilities. When somebody said something I considered to be objectionable, I usually responded by probing him as to why he felt that way without registering my disagreement, which led to interviewees expanding further on their beliefs and thus supplying more data for analysis, which often showed their initial response was at least in part misunderstood by me, which may have been an opportunity lost were the context not that of a professional interview situation. I kept a reflexive diary of my thoughts and feelings about the interviews with the dating men which proved valuable and I also noted that my mood (and patience for my husband) temporarily suffered when studying certain parts of the manosphere.

In order to access dating men, I had to utilise a grey area in the terms and conditions cited on online dating sites Match.com and Plenty of Fish (POF.com). I originally approached several websites asking for their specific support to do this research and was declined access. Having surveyed the terms and conditions of the aforementioned websites, I found I was able to work within their definitions. However, Match.com blocked my access after a short time so a lot of my dating men came from the Plenty of Fish website alone. In all my adverts and interactions with respondents, I was overt about the nature of my research, although I was careful about how to frame the information in such a way that was likely to be more accessible to the men; I was clear to avoid using feminist terms or jargon because I was not able to be certain about how they would be received.

Nearly all of the men were felt to be candid, respectful, interested and open to being interviewed. This was a surprise for me as a lot of the methodological research I read before commencing interviewing had led me to expect the men to be reticent and to perform their masculinity in a way which prioritised their power. Some of the men I spoke to were forthcoming with very sensitive information, with one of them disclosing his virginity for the first time to a woman (aged 35) during the interview with me. Another disclosed childhood sexual abuse during the interview. Similarly, the MRA, Eric, lived the life of a virtual recluse and clearly found interacting with women extremely difficult (he was the only interviewee who never laughed during the interview). It was therefore important for me to act in a way that was very sensitive to the men's stories, and to be very careful with how I used their information. Their anonymity was always treated with respect and assured through logical means such as allowing men to choose their own pseudonym to ensure a personally relevant one was not inadvertently used.

5.9 – Study Limitations

The limitations of this study include its non-generalisability due to the size and qualitative nature of the interviews. Also, due to the difficulty of finding men who were happy to disclose their feelings about dating women, it was not possible to design the methodology with any specific racial or class differentiations. Compounding this, five of the men did not return the demographic questionnaires meaning that observations around patterns of class and race were not possible in every case (although I had cultural taste information for all participants since it formed part of the interview). I had originally planned an extensive demographic questionnaire but on reflection chose to simplify it since I felt a lot of the information sought may seem intrusive and wasn't necessary and could have resulted in lowered response rates. I was also not able to control whether the respondents were aware of my professional job as a director of adult films and whether this had any effect on their responses or willingness to be interviewed. I have done extensive interviews in the media, yet I did not want to emphasise my work as it wasn't entirely relevant for the secondary interviews. Five interviewees did not return their consent forms, but as it had been made clear that they were able to withdraw consent at any time and were able to change their

transcripts, and both had chosen not to do this having received their transcripts, this was taken as sufficient evidence of consent. I knew from my extensive business experience that such a precedent exists in that realm too.

One of the dating men, Steve, declared himself “gender queer” by which it emerged, on further probing, he meant he was bisexual. However, since the bulk of his dating history was with women, he was able to reflect upon his experiences in dating relationships with women. As the adverts did not necessitate the men being heterosexual, he was felt to be in keeping with the sample. As a bisexual myself, I am aware of the fluidity of sexual labels and am willing to take the interviewee’s word on face value. He answered an advert about dating women and felt he had something relevant and worthwhile to add.

The iterative style of the list of questions meant that the initial interviewees answered fewer questions than subsequent interviewees. This was undertaken as a ‘best option’ over the alternative of ignoring possibly significant data for the sake of consistency. This research design relies heavily upon the idea that, to my knowledge, there are no existing equivalent studies, therefore I did not have the luxury of triangulating existing work on male impressions of female dating power. The point of this study is to map out a terrain for future researchers to build upon. This meant that I needed to experiment with questions and their interpretations. This necessarily involved adding to the initial set of questions where my initial question drafting seemed inadequate when men brought up hitherto unconsidered areas of interest.

As part of this study I chose to show a Beyoncé video in order to give a concrete example of an instance of female sexualised performance in popular culture and, therefore, in the commercial realm. Two of the men were unable to watch the Beyoncé video in the same way as the other interviewees due to technical problems, including the video playing in slow motion. Whether or not these men could accurately remember seeing the video previously defined whether they answered the Beyoncé section of the interview. The only interviewee who had never watched the video said he would watch it after the interview

and reply by email which he did not in fact do. Therefore he did not answer the Beyoncé section of questions. In all cases of omitted information, I label this clearly at the introduction of the relevant text by saying, “of the [number] of men who answered relevantly on this section...” to indicate a reduced number of men are included in that specific pool.

It should also be noted that as there were no other relevant videos which contained dancers who came from a variety of races that could be used to minimise the role of race in the men’s interpretations of the videos.

5.10 – Conclusion

In this study I interviewed field specialists, sex workers and Pick Up Artist trainers in order to gain some contextual knowledge about how I should approach the second tier of interviewees, PUAs and dating men, on the subject of their perceptions of dating relationships, and in particular female power in dating. I also attended a weekend PUA training course in order to observe four PUA apprentices.

There were many ethical challenges in this study, especially with reference to my own safety; the nature of non disclosure of information, which may be perceived as off-putting by advert respondents; the handling of sensitive data; and the effect of disagreeable opinions on myself as a researcher. There were also a number of methodological challenges such as whether the use of telephone interviewing could be justified; how my gender would influence the answers given (and therefore how to frame them); as well as dealing with reluctant interviewees on sensitive subjects and unpalatable answers.

The result of this method was the successful completion of 49 interviews, which were subsequently contextualised within existing theory and current debates around men’s perceptions of dating and relative gendered power in dating relationships.

6.0 – Introducing Pick Up Artistry

6.1 – The Pick Up Artistry Industry

In the late 1980s, Ross Jeffries started teaching men neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) dating techniques, using his 'Speed Seduction' method as a means for men to feel more confident approaching women. Since then, businesses which teach Pick Up Artistry have spread across the Western world (Strauss 2005, 13) with the aim to educate men to be more confident and skilful in dating women. In the last 25 years, this practice has developed from a heavily NLP-based Jeffries style, which focused on readjusting the balance of power (perceived by Jeffries to be unfairly weighted towards women) to what is now largely referred to as a 'Natural Game', which aims to teach men to have confidence in themselves and their individual skills, basing their approach on their own pre-existing interests and style. Men outside of the community who are perceived to be confident and successful at approaching and attracting women seemingly unconsciously, known as 'Naturals', inspire this approach.

In 2005, journalist Neil Strauss wrote a book on the Pick Up Artist (PUA) community, called *The Game*, which became a bestseller in the UK and US at a time when Pick Up Artistry was at its zenith of its popularity. The book focused on teaching men routines to enable short-term relationships (mostly one night stands) and Strauss ran classes in Los Angeles for men from all around the world. One of the key exponents of this during this period was a trainer who referred to himself as Mystery (a colleague of Strauss) He developed and sold the 'Mystery Method' which involved dressing up and behaving in a 'kooky' manner in order to attract the attention of women. Strauss talks about the Pick Up community having light and dark sides, meaning that some men who are attracted to it have misogynistic motives and while some Pick Up companies see themselves as enabling men to become more confident, others as teaching men to take power back from women.

In this study eight people who taught in the UK and USA Pick Up Artist communities were interviewed in order to provide a contextual understanding of the international PUA

industry. Five of the trainers were male and UK-based with experience only in the UK industry; one was a female PUA trainer who, although based and working mainly from the UK, also had experience working in the US; one trainer was male and had experience in the San Francisco industry only. Finally a 'Supergirl', a woman hired by a group of trainers to act as someone the students can practise their performance on, was also interviewed. Her experience was based in the San Francisco area.

The overall impression from interviewing the trainers is that Ross Jeffries' NLP methods are seen as both out-dated and misogynistic (often referred to as out-dated because they were misogynistic) and heavily reliant on theory as opposed to practice. Jeffries is quoted by PT (PUA trainer) Simon as referring to relationships as 'real-hationships'. Strauss' and Mystery's kooky and 'routine'- based methods are now considered inflexible and also somewhat ethically dubious. However trainers still rely heavily upon certain NLP techniques such as 'negs', short for 'negatives', a technique where a negative comment or backhanded compliment is paid to the woman in order to back foot her and bring her confidence down to a level the PUAs can work on.

The reception of the industry has changed alongside the move away from arguably misogynistic practices towards the more palatable Natural Game. As this has happened, more women have become interested in becoming trainers which has resulted, according to PT Simon, in making the industry more mainstream-media friendly and less stigmatised. He sees the future of the industry as moving from dating practices into teaching a wider range of social skills which, he believes, as a psychotherapist, are becoming more difficult to gain in an increasingly technological age. A couple of the trainers mentioned clients charging the cost of PUA training to their companies because they believe the skills obtained are of use in their work lives.

The PUA boot camp I attended ran from 12 noon to 12 midnight on Saturday, 30th June and again on Sunday, 1st July 2012 in a small subterranean conference room at a large hotel in central London. The weekend event was taught by several PUA trainers, all of whom

appeared to have worked their way up the ranks of the company from trainee to trainer. The class I attended was for four men in their twenties to fifties who were given three hours of basic training followed by an hour and a half of 'day game', which meant going out onto the streets of the Covent Garden pedestrian piazza area of London approaching women on the street. It was a sunny weekend and the piazza was full of tourists. The tutor asked the men right at the beginning of the class if it was ok for me to be there, I was concerned that the men would not want me (a woman/an academic) there but in fact they seemed totally unfazed by my presence. The two days were relaxed in feel, albeit you could sense a feeling of some desperation that had led the men to the course. The men seemed surprisingly open to suggestions as to how they might improve their dating skills, without a hint of competition or aggression. They all took lots of notes throughout the course and listened attentively at all times.

After day game the men returned to the hotel from 4.30PM to 7.30PM when more seminars were given by various trainers specialising in specific areas of Pick-Up techniques, such as how to overcome approach anxiety, how to 'demonstrate higher value', fashion, new technology use, etc. At 7.30PM, the trainees were paired up with a trainer who took them out to bars and nightclubs to practise their skills until midnight.⁴

6.2 – PUA Classes

From interviewing the PUA trainers, there seemed to be some patterns concerning the types of men who attend PUA classes. The age range most cited was 19 to 55 years of age. Reading broadly between different trainers' accounts, there are: a cluster of men aged around 19 to 25 years old, which largely represents a group of men who feel unconfident and lack the skills to interact with women; secondly, between the ages of 27 to 35, men who are witnessing their friends settling down and would like to do the same; then finally there are the divorcees between the ages of 40 to 60 years old who come to classes to re-

⁴ I thought it appropriate that I did not attend this last session as the men needed to focus on practising in front of women who would be wary of my presence.

learn skills and confidence they may well have had at a younger age. PT Paul found that the average age of customers had dropped in recent years, as had the average age of the trainer. He felt that the more recent marketing strategies of the company he worked for were aimed at younger men, which explains this change. Similarly, a reduced price had attracted less wealthy clients in recent years.

The British companies mainly cater for British customers; however, PT Dave, who is US based, often taught men from around the world, including those who had flown from the UK or Australia to California for a course. Racially, the UK saw mostly white men with men of Asian-Indian descent a close second. PT Dominique, who taught in both the UK and the US, felt that in the US the second most common race was Mexican. PT Simon noted that it was only a very small percentage of clientele who were black and none of the other trainers mentioned black people as a common racial group among customers.

The most common occupations for customers, according to the trainers, were IT engineers and those from other technical industries such as bankers, lawyers, business marketers and doctors. PUA classes, it seems, attract customers mainly from the professional industries. This is probably due to both economic reasons and to the technical and logical nature of the training. PT Simon felt that a reasonably high level of intelligence is a common denominator amongst attendees; interestingly, few came from the creative industries.

The aim of many of the men who attend classes today is to find a partner for a long-term relationship rather than to engage in multiple relationships, as was the original goal of PUA and thus what these men are seeking stands in stark contrast to the lifestyle depicted in *The Game*. A number of the trainers, however, felt that younger men were more likely to be looking for one-night stands. PT Dave was the only trainer to quantify how many men wanted to find only casual sex, saying that less than 10% of his clientele aspired to be Pick Up Artists (that is, to engage in one night stands only). Overall, the trainers reported that it was very common to hear somebody say they were looking for 'the one' and yet wanted 'to have some fun along the way', meaning that they wanted to experience some short-term

relationships before committing to a longer relationship. PT Paul saw this as being noncommittal to either type of dating. Supergirl Jane, questioned the use of PUA in forming a long-term relationship. She had reservations about the training's focus on men acquiring skills that would diminish the effect of their lack of physical attractiveness and remained critical about the unrealistic nature of the claims made by PUA trainers. She summed up PUA training thus:

I think it's an interesting answer [about] gender and heterosexual behaviour to current issues around. I don't necessarily think it's the right one though. I think it's a kind of a step in the right direction, get them to talk about their feelings in a group, getting them to better themselves. The guys that are the most successful are the guys that are just trying to better themselves and to become better people and try to be more interesting and listen to people... (Supergirl Jane)

One subject which was mentioned by PUAs and PTs was that men feel they are falling into relationships not of their own volition. The implication was that these men perceived that women were more assertive in their dating lives and that they were therefore being 'chosen' more often by women who they did not perceive as being somebody they would have necessarily chosen themselves. Similarly, men had not 'thought through' their dating habits and aims and this was seen as bad; PT Dave described them as being on autopilot.

A couple of the trainers mentioned teaching a number of good-looking men who historically had much success attracting women whilst at college but who then developed problems approaching women when they entered the workplace. Without the college structure, they felt such men experienced insecurity about how to approach women. According to PT Dave, some married men attended classes with the sole intention of relighting the fire in their existing relationship. Other men attended classes solely to learn social skills to enable them to make friends. PT Dominique mentioned one particular customer who was in receipt of funds from the Welsh Commission to attend her classes in order to learn social skills. PT Marcus mentioned experiencing a number of 'Naturals' who he felt attended out of pure curiosity.

The courses offered by PUA trainers aim solely at giving men the skills necessary to approach women in a variety of different social situations. PT Marcus felt that they taught up to the third date and then after that it was up to the couple to build the relationship. As the leading female PUA, PT Dominique offered detailed advice from a female perspective. She felt that only a woman could explain to men exactly what a man was doing wrong if he appears 'creepy' to women.

The training follows a basic structure. The first stage is to deal with men's 'Approach Anxiety', which is the nervousness they experience when they see a woman they like and feel unable to make the first move. Secondly, skills are based around building conversation with a woman. Finally, 'Sexual Escalation' deals with how a man can take himself from 'The Friend Zone' (reluctantly being 'only' a friend to a woman when a man wants to be romantically involved) into becoming the woman's sexual partner.

Supergirl Jane, felt that men's reliance on logical thinking meant that developing the way they interacted with people in a more lateral manner was something that some men had particular difficulty with. She noted the prevalence of teaching men to 'neg' (to make hard-to-distinguish negative comments to women) in America, unlike in the UK, and felt that this only works on people with low self-esteem. Interestingly she noted this strategy was often used with regard to very good-looking women who have never experienced negative responses from men and therefore were vulnerable to receiving them due to their disbelief. In contrast, she felt, most people would become insulted and less likely to see the man in a favourable light.

PT Peter felt that the skills taught on a PUA course were deliberately exaggerated to encourage men to experience "the full spectrum of behaviours in order to know both how far you can go and how people react to different things." Teaching men to be very assertive on the dating scene would, he felt, eventually result in a formerly 'really nice guy' moving out of 'the friend zone' and into a more confident, if not super-assertive position, which he saw as positive. Overall, PT Peter felt that his experience in the PUA scene has enabled him

to be more honest with people and that people appreciated this. He did however have concerns about the scene; he used the term 'game junkie' to refer to somebody who had let the balance in their dating life slip from unsuccessful to overly competitive. "There's only so much time you should dedicate to this type of thing. If you're putting all your time into it, then your life's going to fall apart and you'll become a game junkie." He felt that some of the skills he had learned whilst teaching and practising PUA could impact negatively on his own enjoyment of the company of others:

Or, for me, in the space of three to six months. So I could – I went from kind of roughly knowing – being able to read people okay to just knowing what people were going to do and say before they knew it, or being able to read them really much too well. And it's almost like (Pause) – it's almost like reading minds. And it can get actually quite uncomfortable. And that's why I wanted to distance myself from it as well. Because you'd be hanging out with someone and you can see from their face that they're disgusted by something you've said but they're not saying it. Or you can see that they're holding themselves back. Or they want to do something but they're not. Or they're afraid or, all sorts of stuff. (PT Peter)

PT Simon and PT Marcus had the most traditional concepts of masculinity of all of the interviewees I spoke to. PT Simon showed (and taught) an interesting need to control all aspects of the date, to the extent where he had a rule which was always adhered to of never kissing a woman until she was inside his house: a house that had previously been prepared to be as inviting towards women as possible. He was also the trainer who made the most comments about the importance of a man focusing on his own shortcomings as a means to gain access to women. There was an interesting interplay between the need to control women's behaviour either through choice of woman or choice of date location and location for sexual intercourse. For instance, PT Simon (as did other PUAs and PTs) showed great willingness to be completely flexible and self-reflexive in order to attract women. He had undergone extensive relearning, including much grooming of himself and his home in order to appeal to women, which may at first appear to be congruent with softer-masculinities theory, yet his ideals were softer in style but harder in form. Ultimately he wanted control but this was in the context of him believing he had already conceded a fair amount of his identity and freedom of choice generally to women and thus the individual woman, he was

dating. This reserved him the right to define how much more a woman was going to be able to ask of him. These men focussed on the rewards of their work (getting the woman) as opposed to the amount of work they had to do to get her, including the extensive changes to themselves they had made, meaning they were able to frame the situation in their favour, seeing themselves as being in complete control. In reality, however, PT Simon particularly had distanced himself completely from everything he had previously chosen as preferable and enjoyable in order to attract women, all the while women's power remaining unacknowledged.

As Pick Up Artist training is based on neuro-linguistic programming first taught by Ross Jeffries in the 1980s, it has a long history of incorporating the findings of some carefully selected pieces of research to support its claims. Peppered throughout the interviews were semi-scientific references and beliefs that posited an understanding of gender relations yet was often essentialist. These 'scientific findings' formed a constructed certitude which aimed to give PUA trainees confidence that they were not alone in their troubles and also that techniques were formed on solid grounding and there was a tried and tested way through the dating wilderness towards happiness.

The most common essentialist argument was that men were 'more visual creatures' than women, who in turn were more socially inclined, as in Hollway's (1984) have/hold discourse (see Introduction above). This is a belief which is extremely useful if you are trying to convince conventionally physically unattractive men that they can get the phone number of any woman they want. The term 'pinging' was used to describe an attraction towards somebody who perhaps may not score highly on a traditional scale of attractiveness and yet was more attractive to you personally than somebody who is more traditionally attractive. The naming of such an attraction as a separate entity shows how strongly the PUA scene is based around the 'objective' scoring of female beauty, with other forms of attraction seen as outside of the norm. Throughout PUA culture there are references to women as marked out of ten for their looks: women were referred to as

'sevens' or 'eights' for instance. This made up part of a culture in which measurement was king, again providing constructed certainty via comparison in an uncertain domain.

There was a disavowal of the female gaze on male beauty, yet such a gaze was either explicitly mentioned or implicitly relied upon in the logic of many of the PUA and Dating Men's accounts. This is in spite of fashion sense being a taught element in PUA training courses. Indeed, on the boot camp when one of the students asked for my opinion on all of the men's clothes in the room (after hearing the trainers' opinions) the subject was changed very abruptly by the nervous tutor, leaving me no time to answer. It was a strange thing to do. Throughout the accounts of the trainers, somehow men were encouraged to take active care of their appearance without admitting the power of the female gaze; ownership and cultivation of good taste was focussed upon rather than admitting that women's physical desire for them was an issue. Again, this angle enables these men to feel powerful since they are feeling they are controlling what the woman's gaze sees. PT Michael explains improved physical appearance as leading to an increase in the man's self-confidence:

The thing with the guys, the hardest bit to get them to realise is that generally, my getting into shape, it's not the same as a woman having a nice body; the attraction switches are not the same. Don't get me wrong, I think women appreciate that. But it's not going to be the only thing that they're going to appreciate about a man. There are going to be other qualities they are looking for. In the initial stages we are talking about now but where a man can decide that he wants to date a woman just on the way she looks because we are very visual and so on. I tend to find that, or at least I tend to find a lot of time the gym stuff and kind of being in shape and being proud, [is] more an internal thing for a guy. It's more to make himself feel good which then helps with attracting a woman. They feel more comfortable in yourself because you think well actually "I'm more comfortable with the way I look now," therefore I am more comfortable approaching people. If you've got that self-hatred [that] starts with the way you look in the mirror and you don't like what you see back, [it is] very difficult for a guy. And they can treat that as, they associate attraction with the way a woman looks. Well, they think it must be associated with how they see me. Some guys that aren't necessarily the gym buff guys still end up with amazing girls. It's not just about that I think. (PT Michael)

Here is an almost gymnastic interplay between the idea that men attract more women when they look good and that women aren't interested in looks. What's situated in his blind spot (the female gaze) is conspicuous by its absence; when the man looks in the mirror it is his eyes and only his eyes that can self-hate and therefore can learn to self-love if he takes control of the way he looks. Similarly, PT Simon felt that essentially "men are attracted to beauty, women are attracted to status and power. It's just biology at work in my opinion. It's natural selection." The difference between what women find attractive and what men find attractive were again understood in terms of visual sexual pleasure for men and emotional or mental stimulation for women, again as in Hollway's (1984) male sexual drive and have/hold discourses. Similarly, that women are mostly interested in the relationship was something that PT Simon felt was based on biology because men could father many children in a day yet women can only conceive children with one man at a time. He described men as 'sex addicts': "If women begin to realise that men are sort of like sex addicts in a way, help them with that, they are much more likely to keep them."

This idea of our biological realities defining our behaviour was a key theme throughout many of the accounts from the trainers (and, as we shall see, also of the PUAs). This was often spliced with benevolently sexist ideas about women being 'worth more', for instance, because they owned a womb, which then placed men as 'disposable'. PT Dave put it this way:

Well I mean in the very classic biological sense like you guys are the keepers of the womb, right, and that thing is valuable. Like if you go throughout all of human history, we have expressions like 'women and children first' simply because if a society loses half of its men that won't affect the next generation in size but it will be the same population because a few dicks can do the job of many. That if the population loses half of its women, there is going to be like a major size decrease in the population of that society next generation. You see where I'm coming from? So there has always been this culture of women are worth more and it's true. (PT Dave)

Here mathematical and scientific explanations are given for men's supposed increased interest in sex in order that men can feel supported in their behaviour; they can also feel

akin to other men, which is comforting in a time of gender uncertainty. PT Dave thought biological differences could also be used to explain the differences in economic status between men and women in current society. While some men achieve greatness through toil, women are scrambling to achieve hypergamy (the act of economically 'marrying up'). He noted Manhattan as a place where this was very visible.

A number of the trainers were nostalgic for a constructed idea of a time before they were born, when gender roles were more traditional and could be relied upon. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim aptly point out, such men only want the clocks to go back for women's freedoms, not men's (1995, 7). As mentioned in the last section, this is not just about the desire to take up a conservative gendered position. It is also about finding certainty in an uncertain time. PT Marcus, who was in his early 20s, felt that men had given up power to women and that both men and women secretly wished for men to:

... reassert the classical male role and kind of, as it were, reverse the gender roles by about 10 years just so, because gender law's so blurred at the minute, and that just creates a lot of confusion, especially for men ... I think men need to push forwards a bit [?] back on equal terms a little bit. That's my perception of women's power in relationships. I think more and more we've seen them take more, more, like, take more and more power but I don't think all of it's necessary. I think really men should step up and make it a bit more equal again. (PT Marcus)

Again women's desire for a more traditional (constructed) masculinity is used as a reason for men wanting to return to it too. How much this is because these men have genuinely experienced women speaking about wanting men to be more orthodox would be interesting to know. As suggested by the aforementioned South African study by Talbot and Quayle (2010), it could be that women desire different masculinities in differing contexts and, as they also noted, women play a role in forming masculinities. However, it could also be concluded that these men are invoking female support in order to justify their own desire for a more conservative masculinity for their own benefit alone. Like the MRAs and the Mythopoetic movement, the PUA industry and online communities often speak of a

rebalancing of the power between genders in terms of giving men more/back power, with this being seen as a means for men to become equal with women 'once again'.

The statement 'Men are from Mars and women are from Venus' as per John Gray's populist dating guide from 1992, was sometimes invoked to preface thoughts about how fortunate it was that men and women are and will always remain enigmatic to each other. The enigma between the sexes was seen as a truth that could be relied upon to keep men and women interested in each other into the future, whatever political or social changes may occur, as though this 'fact' would 'save the day' even in the face of increased feminine political power. A number of the trainers of both sexes mentioned an appreciation for enacting their traditional gender role in the dating scene. Only Supergirl Jane, (who has a history of postgraduate gender education) was dismissive of such essentialist gender beliefs and she felt the PUA community encouraged and reinforced such distinctions.

Online, the PUA culture is fraught with as much male insecurity as male pride. Behind every misogynistic comment is a defensive move against perceived female power. In a popular online list of PUA 'rules' by regular blogger Chateau Heartiste called "The 16 Commandments of Poon" (poon referring to vagina) one can see that male insecurity is inherent throughout. It reads like an adolescent list of desires and fears, as though representing two sides of the same coin, spoken by somebody with little or no dating experience:

1. Never say "I love you" first
2. Make her jealous
3. You shall make your mission, not your woman, your priority
4. Don't play by her rules
5. Adhere to the golden ratio (give your woman 2/3 everything she gives you)
6. Keep her guessing

7. Always keep 2 in the kitty (2 women at the same time)
8. Say you're sorry only when absolutely necessary
9. Connect with her emotions
10. Ignore her beauty
11. Be irrationally self-confident
12. Maximise your strengths, minimise your weaknesses
13. Further on the side of too much boldness, rather than too little
14. Fuck her good
15. Maintain your state control (you are an oak tree that cannot be manipulated)
16. Never be afraid to lose her (Chateau Heartiste: 2008)

Such naiveté within the PUA community is matched only by the desire to attain control of dating by means of knowledge, especially if presented as technical in nature. The drive for power seems to be a drive for security against both women's dating power and the insecurity of gender relations and identities in a post-modern world in which the availability of too many choices invariably leads to a feeling that one has chosen badly.

In the online PUA community, women were often thought to be consciously 'playing' men for their own gain. One example, 'The Shit Test', describes how women deliberately give men a difficult time in order to see if they will react in a dominant way (Thorn 2012) or it is used to ascertain whether the man is keen enough or able to provide financially (Tomassi 2012). The result, Thorn argues, is to put men in a defensive mind-set. PUAs are also taught not to buy women drinks until they are sure that the woman likes them (Thorn 2012), which also implies a defensive response to a perceived abuse of men's gendered position as financial providers.

The emotional insecurities men experience when approaching women are managed by developing technical skills and knowhow to override men's feelings. Throughout all of the

interviews, a major theme of breaking down human interactions into manageable modules was apparent; just as Rogers (2005) found in men's magazines, methods of production, management and Fordisation/scientisation were utilised. This was also true for the one female PT, Dominique, who saw herself as highly logical and "very masculine in that way." A technical focus was also reflected in the types of men who were attracted to the classes. As mentioned earlier, more often than not customers came from IT, technical, financial and legal backgrounds, which are all careers which require extensive logical and problem-solving skills. A number of the trainers relate their enjoyment of, as PT Michael put it, "putting a structure on something which is structure-less ... I think of everything as a process with a start, middle and an end, so I think of, and that's how I try and break down the social interaction." Happiness followed from developing social strategies, according to PT Simon:

So it's about sitting down, working things out, realising what makes you happy. How to go and do that in a very – you know, a very sort of strategic way. And then basically getting on with it. And confidence flows from that. (PT Simon)

Anxiety was something which came from lack of knowledge and could therefore be eliminated completely with the right sort of training. PT Marcus had this to say:

Usually the anxiety comes from not knowing what to do, or not feeling they know what to do, because obviously if you feel like, "Oh, I have to do X, Y and Z," then the anxiety will go down. (PT Marcus)

Enjoyment was gleaned not only from learning new skills but also in mastering an area where these men had previously felt particularly disadvantaged in relation to women in the dating scene. This wasn't necessarily experienced in a misogynistic way, yet mastery of the unknown is a majorly gendered theme and there is something resonant of this in how men's emotional insecurities are overcome by knowledge within the PUA scene.

Key to the PUA scene is a fear of ending up 'trapped' in the wrong relationship and as much as the focus was on women's potential faults, which would determine the quality of the relationship, the driver behind this fear was the unknown of fluid modernity. A major theme running throughout the PUA trainer and PUA interviews was one of learning to dip in and out of dating relationships without becoming emotionally invested, reminiscent of Bauman's (2000) fluidity. This however, sat alongside the desire to find 'the one', was characterised as having some fun along the way towards settling down. Again, it was not clearly articulated as to how these two goals were to coincide, as the mind-set of a free-floating man about town, as was taught in PUA, necessarily meant keeping one's emotional distance and potentially became problematic as PT Peter's concerns about becoming a 'game junkie' attests. This conflict between goals and objectives was also a concern voiced by a couple of the men interviewed at the training camp I attended. In his writing, Strauss battles with this once he is tired of the industry and meets 'someone special'; he responds by giving up the PUA and living within a regular heterosexual monogamous relationship. One wonders how easy it was for him to adjust and whether it was possible to fully commit after such a long and deep submersion into the PUA philosophy. The idea of the pure relationship was strong in the industry, even though monogamy was contested. Even men who saw their identity as that of Pick Up Artist, such as Strauss, maintained a belief in a pure relationship. In fact it could be said that these men were holding out for this (unachievable) goal and in the meantime they were playing the field, which was thought of as a means of netting Ms Right. This is of particular interest because members of the PUA community are critical of some heteronormative traditions, such as marriage and monogamy, and they often invoked the film *The Matrix* (1999) where the characters see through an ostensive reality to a hidden unconventional one behind, as the way forward.⁵

⁵ PUA training is based firmly on a criticism of the heterosexual matrix, especially with regards to issues of monogamy and marriage, which is similar to Butler although the PTs and PUAs I interviewed were not aware of her or her ideas. Some of Butler's philosophy could be said to be ironically similar in some key aspects to the tenets of the PUA industry as some of her core ideas regarding the heterosexual matrix, such as questioning of prescribed yet arbitrary gender roles, are very similar, albeit without her focus on how the 'new traditional masculinity' is formulated and performed.

Women appear in the PUA culture as entirely different to men; almost another species. This was implied even when finding common ground was encouraged within the training. There was interplay between women being seen as intimate yet also distant. PT Paul felt that one of the areas their training school covered was teaching men about women's emotions as a separate entity from what women say, as if men had to learn skills to see what women were saying 'behind' their words. PT Dave felt that while it was too ambitious to try to understand women's emotions, men could internally manage them. The way men learned to frame female emotions gave those men protection against the potentially damaging effects of them. He said: "It's like you are this giant wave and I just need to learn how to ride it." Sometimes the desire to overcome female power and its resulting emotional impact on men's confidence was explicitly mentioned as a reason for taking on PUA training. According to PT Dave, some students associated their own physical attraction to women as a source of disempowerment which they wanted to overcome with technical ability:

A woman has a really powerful effect on a guy, a physical effect like he will feel like the knot in his stomach, that she will feel like a lump in his throat. He will like actually physically be there. It is not a cerebral thing. Guys will say they want to get rid of that, or be like, "I don't want to be like so affected anymore." Because they feel like they associate that being affected with a sense of powerlessness. So they are like, "I don't want to be affected by that anymore." And I'm like, "Bullshit. That is not true. You don't want the like dead and emotionless inside." (PT Dave)

Throughout this quote is the Cartesian dualism of the separated mind and body, with the body understood both as of secondary importance and as a site of distrust. Knowledge was also thought of as something to work for, with putting in the hours and learning the multiple 'approaches' necessarily reaping results. PT Dave spoke of how he had envisaged PUA training to be very difficult and time-consuming, similar to learning karate, which had taken him nine years to master. In reality, he felt it was much easier and a lot more fun than anticipated and it gave him the "same kind of thrill as disassembling a computer." As Supergirl Jane said, there is a simplicity about how social interactions are understood within the PUA scene. This simplicity is carried through to the structural nature of training in classes. Technical skills are emphasised and personal attributes are de-emphasised,

especially those of physical attraction and economic status. A technical framework also gave men something concrete that they could compare and contrast each other's abilities against, thus feeding a competitive drive against other men.

This competitive edge was framed within a homosocial setting where technical knowhow and terminology were key to the formation of the PUA community. The community is based around acquiring technical knowledge, which was then simultaneously used to bind men together through sharing the information but is also used as a reason to compete (as will be explored in the homosociality section below). Supergirl Jane had this to say about how expression of technical knowledge provided emotional support for some men:

You start to find some groups there that [are] so mired in the terminology, I mean those are the ones that really seem like the little-boys' club like 'negging' and 'kino'. You know do a 'conversational drop' and it's about always about being part of this group and being able to use your group speak in the group. I think those are the ones that are going to be the ones who are far more insecure. (Supergirl Jane)

Inherent here is the responsibility to learn life skills that enable one to compete, to be good at one's life project, to make decisions which open up the most opportunities so that an unknown future seems less daunting. Supergirl Jane, went on to say that she felt that women's changing roles in society had necessarily affected how men perceive themselves. Pick Up Artistry was a way to address this concern brought on by increasing gender flux. Trainees were trying to find a new way to be masculine through bonding with other men in a situation supported by the constructed certitude of an 'in club'. The teachings of PUA are clearly of dubious validity as they are a result of cherry-picked snippets of scientific knowledge, yet men's increased confidence, which is resultant from these teachings and through finding themselves supported by being part of such a tightly knit homosocial sphere, is quite real.

PT Simon felt that as women's and men's power positions coalesced, the sexes were as a result learning to rely on each other less. Outsourcing of both practical needs and

emotional needs via technicians, friends, therapists, online communities, etc. was affecting how dating relationships worked. His approach to this was to become more traditional and to insist, for instance, on paying for a meal. He did not consider this to be a projection of his power – neither gendered nor economic – but just as an expression of his desire to take somebody out for a treat.

At the weekend-long boot camp I attended, the focus was on trainees lacking confidence and skills rather than women's or the PUAs' shortcomings. This angle was a very useful way of approaching the issues men had because it externalises their 'faults'. As the following list of 'skills' taught below shows, this was often underlined by the use of acronyms and shortened terms: pre-opening, opening, forcing indicators of interest, transitioning, closing, demonstrate higher value, qualification, the filtration device, escalation, last-minute resistance, isolation, and sexual escalation or proximity alert system. Online PUA sites also use terms like sexual market place (SMP) and sexual market values (SMV), both of which use an economic discourse, and the flag metric, which refers to the number of nationalities of the women men have slept with. Some acronyms become tongue twisters: Strauss refers to 'PaiMai', which means 'pre-approach invitation, male approach invitation' (Strauss 2005, 199).

Some of the language used, like 'last-minute resistance', which refers to how men 'overcome' the final hurdles to getting a woman to sleep with them, has connotations of sexual coercion. The means taught to get over this resistance was through encouraging consensual behaviour from the woman. The reason for such resistance was squarely positioned with the man: he was responsible for not making the woman comfortable enough to sleep with him. This framing encourages men to feel they can do something about this situation, which props up hegemonic masculine ideals of aptitude, yet it also lays the blame for failure with the men, encouraging anxiety. Last-minute resistance to sex was thought to be caused by the woman's concern about being perceived as promiscuous because the man had made her self-conscious by acting too abruptly at a sensitive moment. Again women's consent was used as reason for men to advance in traditionally masculine

ways. Whilst this may be true some of the time, the classes did not approach the reality (either specifically or more widely) of women's lack of consent coming from reasons which were not 'fixable' by the men, and always the focus was on male activity to overcome problems. It is also noticeable that the above list ends at the beginning of sex, as though these (often sexually inexperienced) men did not need to be told what to do when sex commenced (or perhaps the men were too afraid to teach them despite the classes being an ostensibly homosocial and 'open' and frank forum regarding other perceived or felt 'inadequacies'). This is reminiscent of Rogers' (2005) observation about how men's magazines assume sex to be unproblematic and satisfying in contrast to relationships being seen as uncertain and complicated. Supergirl Jane, felt what was clearly lacking in the training was improving men's sexual performance. She noted the difficulty of a roomful of men being taught by other men about sexual skills, especially in such a highly homosocial construct as PUA training, highlighting the precarious nature of PUA homosociality.

6.3 – Conclusion

As part of this study seven PUA trainers and one 'supergirl' were interviewed in order to gain some insight into the history, practicalities and reasoning behind pick up artistry. The industry has developed since its inception in the 1980s from a heavily NLP-based practice to one that focuses more on what has been termed 'natural game', that is the focus has shifted away from a culture of openly didactic skills learning that was steeped in misogyny towards a practice that aims to 'bring out' men's confidence in their own skills and dating style. Its transition from a culture that straightforwardly revered and taught a harder type of masculinity into one that's is relatively more attuned to a softer masculinity that respects women and emotionally supportive homosocial exchange is not in fact as soft as it might first appear. This is because the desire to control women's behaviour, the reliance on an un-problematized, constructed historic male and the framing of all behaviour in terms of manageable modules that prioritise rationality, mean that the PUA culture still owes a lot to hegemonic masculine ideals. The omission of any education on either sexual or emotional aspects of dating showed just quite how unrealistic and probably unhelpful the training might be.

The PUA industry exists in order for men to gain constructed certitude in a time of great uncertainty around gender roles. It provides educational and communal support for 'individualised' men who feel unsure about their dating skills as well as their masculinity, as defined in relation to alpha and beta males. Concepts of a traditional, biological, gendered subject are invoked in order to provide solid sticks in the sand in order to encourage confidence, and a philosophy of light-footedness is engendered to ward off the potential damage caused by emotional investment in a woman. Women remain both an enigma and a threat, yet the focus of all training is on men's ability to 'manage' them as part of a life project and not on how women make them feel. That the PUA industry exists highlights the anxieties and concerns some men have in understanding and attracting women.

We now move on to explore the dating men and PUA's experiences of themselves and other men, as the first of three data chapters. We will then further explore how they see women and finally, their thoughts dating, before concluding.

7.0 – Men's Thoughts About Themselves and Other Men

Gender is performed differently by men and women, yet both men and women's performances are defined by the self and in relation to the opposite sex. Of specific relevance to an exploration of men's attitudes towards dating is how they behave homosocially with other men and whether their behaviours are consistent with their behaviour towards women, or whether there is conflict between the two. Similarly, men's appreciation of their own bodies and attitudes regarding their own attractiveness is relevant to how they approach dating women. In this chapter these areas will be explored separately for the dating men and the Pick Up Artists in order to note any differences between the two, as the PUA community prides itself on providing a homosocial resource that aims to alleviate men's self-criticisms (so called 'limiting beliefs') in order that men succeed in dating and add to a homosocial community of shared advice. How this compares

to the dating men's experiences, which may be more singular and therefore potentially more reliant on women, is of interest.

7.1 – Homosocial Belonging

Q: What is the definition of an Australian poofter [gay man]?

A: A bloke who likes women more than he likes beer.
(Flood 2008, 345)

The above quote comes from the wall of a men's toilet in an Australian café. Flood (2008), who observed it, notes the apparent paradox that a man who is too interested in spending time in romantic relationships with women will have his heterosexuality questioned. This, he argues, is because key to masculinity is the prioritising of male interaction (in this instance, beer being metaphorical for male homosocial spaces).

Such prioritisation is known as 'homosociality', a term coined in 1973 by sociologists Gagnon and Simon to describe "a period in life when valuation of the self is more keyed to those of like gender than it is to those of the opposite gender" (Gagnon & Simon 1973, 49). For Gagnon and Simon, however, this period when "strong dyadic affective relations between boys can occur" (Gagnon & Simon 1973, 52) lasted only until the end of early puberty. Lipman-Blumen (1976) notes that homosociality is first found in early childhood when it is channelled and encouraged by social institutions in which, until recently, men had a complete set of social resources, such as those of the state as well as religious and educational institutions, available to them. Flood (2008) and others (for instance, Connell 1987; Kimmel 2008; Sedgwick 1985), however, have argued that this period of preference for male interaction in men lasts for life. Since men form part of a structural-power gender order, their homosocial relations affect women. Lipman-Blumen (1976) argues that men are more homosocial than women (although this has been questioned elsewhere (Rose 1985)) and therefore homosocial relations help men to remain in powerful positions of society because they control social resources. In turn this forces women to seek resources from men in order to improve their own situations. Therefore it is argued that

understanding and eventual realignment of men's homosocial relations are key to working towards gender equality.

There are two broad themes within homosociality. Firstly, there is the need for brotherhood, which must exist without homosexual closeness. Messner (1992) quotes former professional basketball player Bill Bradley's description of his relationships with his teammates as "warm and real, but never intimate" (Messner 1992, 254). He states that "the hierarchical and rule-bound pattern of athletic careers", especially the "antagonistic co-operation" on the team, dovetails with men's ambivalent needs to develop "closeness without intimacy". Kimmel and Messner (1989) argue that men often speak of friendship not in dyadic terms but in terms of the group relationship, comradeship, in which the individual sense of self is subordinated in preference for a group mentality (Messner 1992, 254). Homosociality also occurs when men use women to make themselves look better in the eyes of other men.

These two broad themes, Flood argues (2008), lead to four ways in which men's social-sexual relations are organised homosocially. That male homosocial friendships take priority over heterosocial relationships (those between men and women) is reinforced by the belief that platonic heterosocial relationships are also dangerously feminising, and that men can't be friends with women without thinking of them sexually. Secondly, men perceive sexual activity with women as improving men's status with other men. Thirdly, actual sex can be the medium through which male bonding happens, as in group sex, and, finally, male sexual storytelling is shaped by homosocial cultures which use such stories as content of men's homosocial interactions. Messner (2001) notes that men will speak to other men about emotional attachments with women privately in dyads, although they know they would be ridiculed if they spoke about them to a group of their male friends. This leads to a form of "sexual schizophrenia", he argues, in which men feel split and can respond by keeping their emotional attachments with women secret from their male peers (Messner 2001, 260). Similarly, Kimmel (2008) notes, many men secretly respect women

but live a double standard because they do not express such when in homosocial surroundings.

Hegemonic masculinity theory (HMT) posits male camaraderie as key to the social organisation of men, often to the detriment of heterosocial relationships. In contrast, inclusive masculinity theory sees homosocial behaviour to be less adversarial for both men and women and generally more supportive in feel, since women are no longer required to support men's masculinity as much, largely due to the diminishing of homophobia. In this current study, it is of interest how far homosocial relations described by the interviewees fit the hegemonic model including whether homosociality is prioritised by them over relations with women

7.2 – Clashes Between Masculinities

According to Anderson and McCormack, men who demonstrate an inclusive type of masculinity are not as likely to value hegemonic values (see Introduction). For a man to reject homosocial norms wholeheartedly, he would have to differentiate himself from other men who may be behaving in ways he finds politically unsupportable, which may well take a lot of courage. As mentioned in the introduction, Bird (1996) concluded that non-hegemonic masculinities were failing to influence structural gender arrangements significantly because they are suppressed or relegated to heterosocial settings only. Kiesling (2005) also discovered that as much as some men resist dominant masculinity discourses, men are, nevertheless, evaluated against such standards by others who themselves take up different positions within such discourses, resulting in positive or negative critiques between members of the homosocial group by means of defused speech and behaviour. In a recent study of stag tours by Thurnell-Read (2012), it was found that in spite of the inclusive ethos of the men studied who did not focus on competition, much of the behaviour objectified women and the performing of boundary work and self-policing behaviours were also noted.

7.3 – Homosociality and Female Power

In *Between Men* (1985) Sedgwick argues that desire between rival heterosexual men results in women being trafficked between men to cement their bonds. Consequently, nonsexual love between men was understood as superior to sexual love between men and women. She notes the work of Rubin (1975), who saw society based on the circulation of women for male gain:

... a distinction between gift and giver. If women are the gifts, then it is men who are the exchange partners. And it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical power of social linkage. The relations of such a system are such that women are in no position to realize the benefits of their own circulation. As long as the relations specify that men exchange women, it is men who are the beneficiaries of the product of such exchanges—social organization. (Rubin (1975) 1997, 37)

Rubin refers to a history of female exchange when women literally handed over their financial resources to their new husband. This is questionable in terms of its relevance in such a form today when women are no longer legally required to do this and when women's relative power position, at least in 'developed' Western societies, has changed significantly since she was writing in 1975. Key to both Sedgwick and Rubin's interpretation of social organisation is this exchange of women who take up the position of the trafficked; women having a potential role as active selectors of suitable male partners is minimised.

This idea of inherent female disempowerment based on sex is key to much theory which focuses on male homosocial behaviour, either explicitly in the way theories position women or implicitly in the way women are omitted.⁶ This is especially true regarding the

⁶ In this study, interviewee Steve recognised that homosexual men had improved women's equality status, and although he showed a rare specialist knowledge of Gender Studies amongst the interviewees. His conclusion was that this change in homosocial relations which had freed women up (as an aside) was not something feminism and women could take the credit for:

argument that men use women in order to impress other men. Kiesling (2005) concludes that while heterosexuality is central to male identity, men's "interactions with women are not evaluated as frequently, or monitored in the same way, as their interactions with men" (Kiesling 2005, 721). The author argues that "in many ways, the men's heterosexuality is performed to help create their homosociality and if this heterosexual desire overrides the homosocial desire ... [i]t can threaten the status of [a man's] homosocial connections. The status of men with respect to other men, then, is central to their identities" (Kiesling 2005, 721).

In other accounts, women's power to undermine men is more central, albeit inferred. As Lederer put it as far back as 1968:

... and yet, so often it is only this cold-nosed, derogatory bitch he is after, because his real interest is not in her, but in beating the competition; he risks the snipping away at his phallus because he not only wants her to love him, but to love him for being bigger and better than the others. (Lederer 1968, 219)

In this analogy the imagined woman is 'entertained' so that the imagined man can appear successful in the eyes of his competitor. Once again, mirroring Connell's work, it is presumed that the woman has the power to 'snip' "away at his phallus", something that is belittled in comparison to the power of a male competitor who could do more harm. In a more recent exploration, Kimmel (2010) understands masculinity itself as a homosocial enactment done in order for "other men to grant us our manhood" (Kimmel 2010, 118), and women are there not for emulating but for possessing (Kimmel 2008, 47).

And I think both – both these kind of things combined – this increased intra-maleness and this increased acceptance of male familiarity with each other, has helped a great deal in mitigating those power games in work, which has in turn helped women. Because a lot of that power game was essentially – it was the (Pause) subjugation of other men. It's the ruling of men by other men. And I think that isn't (Pause) – that isn't nearly as necessary in a world where male relationships are much more emotionally – intra-male relationships are much more emotionally complex, and recognised as such. (Steve)

Here he minimises the role of female influence, whilst prioritising male bonds, even in the feminist political sphere, which typically others in this study were more reticent to comment upon in any detail.

But is understanding men's homosocial behaviour purely in terms of power accurate? Are men always aiming to gain or give structural support with other men? Hammarén and Johansson (2014) differentiate between vertical homosociality, where men reinforce power advantages through collective association (such as those described by Rubin), and horizontal homosociality, which is experienced emotionally and is not focussed on power either with other men or women. They cite the popularity of 'Bromance' films, where stories involving male homosocial bonding which is inclusive and does not increase vertical homosocial gain, as one sign of change (Hammarén & Johansson 2014, 8-9).

The theories so far considered assume men to be in control or even conscious of their homosocial motivations. As Bordo (2000) warns, we can be too quick to judge men's behaviour on face value; what may appear to be social behaviour based upon feelings of entitlement, for instance to female bodies, such a stance can in fact be an example of a man expressing his insecurities through a very narrowly prescribed set of acceptable masculine positions within a culture with strongly defined gender ideals:

I got furious many years ago with the man in my class who wrote in his journal that his (quite slender) girlfriend's "thunder thighs" were revolting to him. How, he asked me, could he get her to go on a diet? My anger was short-circuited, however, when I realized that just beneath the surface of his revulsion was tremendous anxiety. Anxiety that with a less than perfect girl on his arm, he would look like a loser to the other guys. Anxiety that if she got fat, he would stop being turned on by her. (Bordo 2000, 285)

Homosocial behaviour in men is fraught with male insecurities of many kinds. For instance, as Bordo rightly points out, men's interpretation of femininity is deeply entwined with women's, and it could be argued that the obverse is also true. Women's projection of desired masculinity defines men's performances too and homosociality is performed within this context. Women's interpersonal power is experienced by men while they are 'away from the flock' and this informs their future homosocial behaviour. Men perform masculinity in response to women's demands over men on the interpersonal level, especially as partners and mothers. As mentioned in the Introduction, Talbot and Quayle

(2010) argue that women are active in constructing masculinity and its variances and seeming contradictions, similarly Firminger's (2006) study of popular teenage magazines found that girls were also seen as responsible for shaping male behaviour.

This is not to say that only women form men's masculinities. Elsewhere, Elder, Brooks and Morrow's (2011) study of 21 heterosexual men showed how homosociality, fear of homosexuality, and the female gaze work together to police men's sense of gender identity. Whether alone or with other men, the interviewees reported continually observing female beauty and 15 of the 21 men compared their bodies negatively to those of male celebrities and pornographic actors. Although men showed homosocial motivations for approaching beautiful women, they felt that failing to get a woman's sexual attention reduced their sense of masculinity. In this context, what does it mean to say being attractive to women is important to men? We don't know enough about women's role in homosociality to define it as yet. Their interviewees referred to a set of strategies they use to get sexual validation from women. Such strategies entailed concealing emotional vulnerability by appearing emotionally detached in order that women don't lose interest because they perceive the men to be weak.

7.4 – Homosociality in this Study

Although men were asked throughout the interviews for this study about their interpretation of their male friends' tastes and opinions in some instances, homosociality per se was not a primary focus. Instead, it was a theme which emerged from the earlier interviews, hence the lower than average relevant response rate for this section.

Male homosociality, as we have seen, is complex in its origins and manifestations. Although men have historically organised themselves around affording themselves privileged access to assets and areas of influence, it is clear that much male homosocial behaviour is effectively a performance involving many mirrors which often hide insecurities. Since this thesis is concerned with men's perceptions of female power in dating relationships, it is

apposite to ask just how far the men interviewed here experience male homosocial structures as supportive, whether they preferred them to heterosocial interactions, or whether they use women to further improve their status among men.

7.4.1 – Homosocial Support

How are we to understand homosocial support in a time of great change in masculinities, as shown in the work on inclusive masculinities above? Are men thinking of themselves in terms of Kimmel's comradeship built on distanced and competitive vertical homosociality (Kimmel 1989), or as individuals that can engage in closer horizontal homosociality in a time of diminished homophobia, as suggested by the work on inclusive masculinities? In this study, whether or not men felt they received support from their male friends and whether this was important to them, or even desired, varied. On the subject of engaging in intimate conversation between men, of the men who answered relevantly (n = 11) 2 thought men did talk about intimate subjects (which, nevertheless was sometimes uncomfortable for them), n=7 thought they didn't, n=1 felt he had little emotional support from male friends, and n=1 thought he did gain support from his friends.

Of the men who felt that they received emotional support from their male friends, Tim, a 21-year-old bike and car enthusiast, had a friend he spoke to about relationship problems, many of which the friend had experienced similarly. The following was a rare detailed example of candid support between male friends which was openly inclusive:

I've – I've always kind of been quite supportive of him and his current partner. Because since moving to wherever it is now, we've kind of been isolated a bit from where we grew up with everybody who we knew. So we kind of supported each other in that way. But beforehand, we – we'd discuss relationships and we'd discuss how things were going. And if we'd had an argument, then we'd talk to each other about that. And it was nice because it was quite supportive in a sense. And sometimes we were able to sort of sympathise with each other. (Tim)

On the other extreme, of the men who thought that they did not talk to their male friends about emotional issues, Anthony, a 29-year-old, single, white engineer from Northumberland, found talking to women about emotional issues easier:

That's why I need to talk about it. I mean, with a guy, you kind of have an emotional conversation and you punch each other on the arm and have a pint and that's it. It's done with. You know, there's no counselling. I mean, the punch on the arm is quite quick therapy for a bloke. You know. But (Pause) – I certainly find it a lot easier to talk about issues with women. (Pause) I think it's because I get a different perspective from a woman. (Anthony)

Anthony was not the only man to hold ideas around homosociality which were in line with HMT. Tom, a British 21-year-old mechanic, felt the only way he would know that his friends were upset is if they were punching things or appearing very angry and swearing. Eric, a 27-year-old, white MRA activist from Australia who ran a men's rights website – somewhere that could potentially provide an intense space for horizontal homosociality – felt he did not talk about emotions with his male friends, focusing instead on men's rights, sport and feminism.

Elsewhere too there was a distinction made between the different types of subjects men would talk about, with more sensitive topics being less likely to be spoken about with male peers. When asked if they had ever undergone unwanted sexual interactions with women, sometimes without their consent, and whether this was something they would talk about with their friends, the majority of the men said that they did not discuss unwanted sex with their male peers. Interestingly, this was still true of Eric, who despite being a campaigner for men's rights, did not broach the subject of sex with fellow activists, even though other difficult subjects, such as female to male violence, including genital violence, were often spoken about within the men's rights community. There were exceptions to this, however. Tim reported having had conversations about his own sex life and would express concern in conversations with friends about another male friend's antics at swinging clubs.

7.4.2 – Homosociality and PUA

It was striking how, despite the fact that the PUA industry has embraced certain parts of the philosophy aligned with softer masculinities and metrosexuality, such as an acceptance of care of one's physical appearance and an appreciation of a brotherhood based on explicit accounts of insecurities, unreconstructed ideas of gender relations also lay at the heart of the PUA ideology.⁷ The interplay between the homosocial experience of 'being there for your brother' through his insecurities and the need to appear masculine (and as not gay) whilst competing for 'high-value' women, is intriguing. How much of the PUA experience is about genuinely trying to find women and how much is about relearning a homosocial enactment of masculinity in a time of gender flux is difficult to ascertain since dating a woman is so central to male homosociality. PT Dominique felt however that men were more motivated by the community than by finding women. She relayed an experience of a super summit for Pick Up Artist trainers held in Los Angeles:

I was there and I noticed that some of the guys had brought some really good-looking girls from Hollywood to the seminar. But what I noticed is all the girls were on one side, all the guys on the other side. I was like, "Hey guys this is a pick-up convention! What the fuck are you doing?" It was like a seven-year-old's party with all the girls are on one side and the boys will be on the other and one of the girls said, "I was chatted up more this morning in the diner than this," and I said, "Look, you guys, are you closet cases? It's cool but are you just wanting to hang around with other guys?" That's all they do. They look at the girl and say, Okay, I will give you an example." Naturals know what they do differently when they see a good-looking woman come in. The first thing they will say is "Hands-off. I saw her first. She's mine". They are very, very caveman. It does kind of – it gets them in the mood. Whereas a Pick-Up Artist, well, most of them, not on my team, but at least the American ones, "She's not my type. You go first. No, no, no, you go first. She is too tall/she is too short," and really they're trying to say, "I have got such high values she has to be an 11 or a 10." It is bullshit. Bullshit because they are too scared to go up. Still they want to hang around other guys and go through theory, systems, something like that. These are geeks who have moved on

⁷ And it seems some of the tutors' own lives contradict the harder masculine ideals of the PUA community. According to PT Dominique, even the original dating coach, Ross Jeffries, who preaches about dominating women through the dating scene, lives alone with cats.

from Star Wars and they found something else. (Supergirl Jane)

Similarly, she felt that the PUA community was homosocial in nature and gave the example of men's use of facial hair, which she had known to be grown into a monkey shape with the mouth positioned where the anus would be, as something women couldn't do, meaning that the men were taking pleasure in their masculinity together. She also noted the complex nature of male friendships formed around the PUA community. As men are socialised into competing against each other, it is therefore difficult to form a genuine community.

At the boot camp it was noticeable that when being taught in the lecture environment the men rarely shared their own experiences regarding meeting women. The nearest they got to this was to refer to friends who had successes or failures with women. This may not be surprising as none of them had met previously, yet I would imagine a similar situation with a female audience would have been far more self-reflexive and open. As one trainer who used to run a female group noted, introductions could take 3½ hours for seven women, whereas it took about 10 minutes for four men to summarise their dating histories in our group. Therefore, arguably, men may glean less assistance from other men in this environment than seems to happen in online PUA forums where anonymity can be assured and there seems to be much more sharing of sensitive information (in amongst the bragging and, it is suspected, exaggeration).

Whilst Strauss (2005) appreciated the homosocial pride felt in the PUA community, he also noted the transition between a participant starting off worrying about failing in front of women but ending by worrying about failing in front of men, all of whom represented a lower standard of male friend than he had previously fraternised with. He also noted that some men weren't in the community to meet women but to gain power: "I was no longer in the game to meet women; I was in the game to lead men" (Strauss 2005, 234). The drive to gain female attention was also problematic, becoming his "sole reason for leaving the house besides food. In the process of dehumanising the opposite sex, I'd also been dehumanising

myself” (Strauss 2005, 249). Women were also not as reliably respondent as he had hoped; he noted some women’s fickle affections, as well as women’s ultimate role in choosing men, so that a PUA simply worked towards making the opportunity for her to choose him more likely.

Unlike within the MRA and manosphere, the potential for confusion between homosociality and homosexuality was acknowledged to a degree within PUA. The first assignment at the boot camp was about teaching the men how to use touch as a means of forging alliances with a person, known as ‘keno’. Two of the men conveniently forgot to do the exercise when they were not being watched by the trainer, a situation they themselves realised upon his approach and which they laughed off. The subject of homosexuality was danced around and was regularly mentioned humorously although never at length. What was really interesting is that one of the trainers seemed to be enjoying putting the trainees in the position of the woman and then acting out the male seduction role (they did not employ Supergirls); this was not done to embarrass the men, or in any way performed in a vindictive manner, but as a practicality. This trainer commented on receiving a massage that morning from a man who went very near his penis and that this was both equally worrying and pleasurable at the same time. I didn’t notice any overt concern amongst the men about homosexual undertones – they were seemingly laughed off without use of homophobic speech, by highlighting their heterosexuality by acting in an exaggerated camp manner, known as heterosexual recuperation (McCormack: 2011a, 90). It was interesting just how often homosexuality was referenced in a weekend focused on attracting women. Maybe the focus on women enabled the men to relax enough to talk about homosexual concerns, their heterosexuality being assured by their signing up for the course.

Online PUA classes and forums offer the user a homosocial resource to speak to other likeminded men about the trials of dating as well as to speak about issues of self esteem in order to ‘improve’ themselves and their dating success rates as part of a project of the self which focuses on obtaining the perfect woman. It was apparent however, whether with reference to male camaraderie or regarding the role of women in men’s homosocial

behaviour, that the community influenced the PUAs by providing them with gender-performative stereotypes as a touchstone. The PUAs either accepted or negotiated such stereotypes, comparing themselves to them whether in likeness or difference. In contrast, the dating men based their answers more narrowly on their own experiences.

Ostensibly, however, one of the motivations for joining the PUA community is to be able to compare notes about bad experiences in order to learn and to lessen the emotional fallout of rejection by a woman. This was in a context of the perceived normality of male peer groups outside of the community being unsupportive of men's attempts. Homosocial competition was common in the community, however it appeared to be performed away from other PUAs, so as not to damage the community feel. Rather than directly compete with each other to attract a women (and remind PUAs of non-PUA men), for instance, in front of each other, they became competitive whilst on their own, collecting numbers, then relaying them to other PUAs afterwards.

The PUA scene was also largely seen as honest in comparison to the regular dating world, which was either confusing or wrong. Homosociality was 'sold' as an important aspect of the PUA community, providing constructed certainty of group knowledge, or proof of what works in the dating scene. PUA Axl, a 35-year-old, Indian, middle-class private tutor living in London, felt that his (non-PUA) friends could be quite critical about his choice in women because he preferred younger women, aged 18 to 21. Homosociality can manifest in men's policing of partner choices, but usually this is thought of in terms of men being encouraged by peers to align their tastes in women towards the traditional feminine stereotype. Yet here PUA Axl feels himself to be criticised for liking exactly this stereotype. This was especially relevant for him because he came from a traditional Indian background where arranged marriages with Indian women to whom he was not attracted were a norm which he had just managed to reject. In response, he prefers men of the PUA community because he feels that there is more honesty and risk-taking there which leads to closer friendships:

But actually when you hit the field, they can't lie. So you've got to put your

balls on the line. You've got to show that this is how good you are. So actually, ironically, the guys are very honest with about everything. What type of girls they like. How good or bad they are. And, to be honest, I prefer that honesty rather than some of my closest friends. (PUA Axl)

Many of the men interviewed from both groups spoke of various insecurities they had with women, which they felt were compounded by their inability to speak of such issues to male peers or their partners/potential dates. As hegemonic masculine ideals state that a man must not appear vulnerable, many men feared losing face in front of other men, but, importantly, in front of women too for fear of appearing unattractive and contravening women's expected requirements in men. As PUA Axl put it:

No one really wants to discuss the truth, which is men are just as vulnerable or shy as women at times or get depressed. It's difficult to talk about this. Difficult to admit to weaknesses. And how maybe not all guys get laid like with the hottest woman. That's the dream you're sold in the media. And it's bullshit. I'm trying to unplug. (PUA Axl)

Much as both sets of men experienced insecurities around dating women, the PUA community provides a space for men like PUA Axl to speak of them (partially at least: he had not gone public about his virginity at age 35) which is a rare opportunity since men can often feel excluded from homosocial relationships, as well as from a wider culture which defines masculinity in relatively narrow terms. Yet the community also encourages men to think of themselves as projects and individuals who need to work upon themselves. As Wolf (1990) noted with regard to women's magazines, an opportunity for (female) solidarity is wasted in the pursuit of some idealised version of their individual female readers, albeit in bulk. Although the context differs between men and women, due to differing access to power relations the PUA community is focused solely on individual access to women at a time when men badly need to redefine themselves homosocially, as has been shown to happen elsewhere by Anderson and McCormack (see Introduction). Women in this context provide a useful shared focus by which men can align themselves emotionally (Pleck & Sawyer 1974). In the PUA community, however, women are both a focus and an end result, not just a conduit, the community itself being set up by and

intended for men who felt very disempowered in the dating scene in comparison to women.

7.4.3 – Women as Useful

The next aspect of homosocial interaction, as mentioned by Messner (1992), is women's use as tools within male groups used to make men look better in the eyes of other men. One key way of doing this is to date a 'trophy girlfriend', a traditionally beautiful woman, primarily in order to impress other men. In this study, men were asked whether they would date a woman purely to impress their male friends. Of the dating men, n=7 said they did not date women for this reason; n=8 said pride in female beauty was not the primary reason for dating a woman – in these instances homosocial respect was seen as a bonus; n=3 said they had dated women for their looks to gain an increase in homosocial status when younger; n=1 man noted that he did class female beauty as a primary reason for date choice for homosocial reasons; and n=1 interviewee said he thought other men did, but that he did not have relevant experience himself. The men were then asked if they had dated a woman whom their friends had not liked and they largely responded negatively, although those who had had expressed anger at such intrusion by male peers expressing their opinions on the matter.

Of the men who said they did not date women to gain homosocial 'points', George, a 26-year-old, engaged, white business analyst from Birmingham felt that, in general, his friends' opinions of his girlfriends were not important to him but, like a few other men interviewed, he would be interested if his friends had genuine concerns about her personality. The separation of personality from beauty in response to this question was often made. A woman's beauty was often seen as 'off limits' for comment from other men, whereas a woman's personality could be a subject of contention if the male friends had reason enough to express a view.

Tomas, a 29-year-old divorced, white, fund manager from London summed up many men's evaluation of the role peers' opinions played in their dating choices:

I don't think it would guide my decision to have a relationship with someone based on [their opinions] in the first place ... I think if that's with someone who all of my peer group, or a lot of my good friends, thought I was seeing were concerned about, that would give me second thoughts. In terms of looks, I don't think that would guide my initial decision-making. But I think clearly is – it's pleasing when you are going out with someone who other guys find attractive. Or you go to a club and other men are obviously attracted to her or interested in her. (Tomas)

When men had strong attractions to women who did not fit the traditional beauty stereotype, many men were defiant in their choice of partner. 34-year-old Bryan had experienced a situation where his friends had not liked a girlfriend's physical attributes (she was of a larger size) but not a situation where his friends had not liked her personality. It seemed a bone of contention however because when asked if his male friends' opinions were important, he said, "I don't really give a shit ... just because she is – for want of a better word, just because she's fat doesn't (Pause) – it doesn't mean she's not a good person." As will be discussed later, men had varying tastes in female beauty, often seeing themselves as in opposition to the 'regular male taste'. In this instance, homosocial comment on their own tastes was met with this as an intrusion which angered them.

David, a 40 year old divorced, white health service worker from Kingston upon Thames was the only man to say that his friends would negatively evaluate 'showing off' a good-looking woman. He also noted the variety of perceptions of female beauty which his friends have:

David: Never to do it. I've been out with a beautiful women and it impressed my mates. But I've never actually done it because of that. (Pause) Yes, I don't think any of them would particularly be impressed. Because they'd just look at me and go, "Why are you showing this person off?" And my male mates are a strange mixture of folks and I don't think they'd be overly fussed by it. And probably

wouldn't find her particularly beautiful either. Because their visions of beauty are all so different to each other.

AA: Okay. I mean how important are your male peers' opinions of the person that you date to you?

David: Completely and totally irrelevant.

Of the men who did date women to impress male friends, many did so when younger. Anthony was typical in saying that such choices in women soon proved to be unwise and a change in his dating selection motives soon occurred:

Again, in my younger years, certainly. (Pause) Yes. I very quickly knocked that on the head. Because I realised actually, if it's no substance there and no real compensation, then people generally just drive me up the wall. And I can't tolerate it for very long. But certainly when I was younger, there were girls that I chased just because they were good looking. And – and it was kind of – yes. It's nice to be seen with someone good looking on your arm, you know. (Anthony)

Spencer, a 40-year-old, single, white tiler from Surrey, noted that although he did not care about what other people think, he did enjoy the pride of his male friends' appreciations of his ex-girlfriend who was exceptionally attractive. This was tinged with concern that they would approach her: "They're cheating little shits and I reckon most of them would try and chisel her away from me ... there's always a double-edge."

In this instance, male homosocial appreciation was not entirely welcome as it comes in a version that focuses on competition between men more aligned with vertical homosociality, which offers little emotional support for the individual man.

On the subject of whether a man dated a beautiful woman in order to gain prestige from male friends (as the primary reason), there was a clear difference between the dating men and PUAs with the latter more likely to speak in terms of female beauty bolstering their esteem. As part of the PUA community, a rating system of female beauty (from 0 to 10) was regularly referenced. PUA Mufasa, a 25-year-old, South African mental health nurse from

London was clear that female beauty was key to his homosocial status in times past (and not his esteem among female friends):

PUA Mufasa: Oh, yes. Like, I've dated girls that I knew were awful. I've dated girls that no one – like – like I have quite a few female friends. And I like to think they are like my – my – like my jury when it comes to women. Like they are very perceptive. Like they are very perceptive women. Like they're women, so like they know women. And I've dated women that all my female friends just did not like. They were like, "She's awful. Blah, blah, blah." And I – and I knew personally that this – they are not a good person to be dating. But because I – like the ego boost of knowing, "Oh, I'm dating someone that all my guy friends are really attracted to." And I know that if ever I take her out like people will stare and people will look. Will look and be like, "Wow!" You know. So, yes I have dated someone like that.

AA: And did you like those girls? Was it an added thing that your mates liked them? Or was it the main reason you saw her?

PUA Mufasa: It was ego boost definitely.

Like the dating men, he felt that this was something he did less often now however. Similarly, PUA Leon, a 31-year-old, single, white electrician from London, said he would date a woman for a short-term relationship in order to impress his friends and this was something he noted his friends also did "as much as they can get a trophy bird, (Laughter) as often as possible." He did however feel that the main motivation for dating such a woman would be physical attraction towards her but the opinions of his male friends were very valuable too.

PUA Robert, 20-year-old, single, white student from London, had respect for senior members of PUA forums who had "been there and done that and, like, had sex with some impressive-looking girls" and who appeared blasé about their success. He did however feel that sex with a woman who was a '10' would not differ much from sex with a woman who was rated a '7', but that being with a '10' would give an ego boost and also an increased level of respect within the PUA community, possibly resulting in becoming a VIP member of

a forum. His own taste in women therefore sits in contrast to those promoted by the PUA community, yet he still respected such men.

When PUA Robert was asked whether homosocial envy or appreciation of female beauty was the primary reason to date a woman, he felt such a motivation was not so singularly felt. This is something that runs throughout all of the men's responses to questions on homosociality. Both the dating men and the PUAs experienced whether or not homosociality played a part in their choice of women in simultaneously multi-various ways. Although pride amongst men was important, it was not consciously the main reason why men chose women, the woman's attractiveness and personality being also felt to be key more often than not. Even if one assumes these men are embarrassed to admit to homosocial influence as a primary influence (for fear of being seen as compliant), the men still spoke of plenty of other influences on their dating decision making. It is therefore problematic to narrow an analysis of their experience down to primarily fulfilling homosocial aims, as other theorists have done. Family and female friends were also mentioned often as influential with regards men's dating decision-making, as PUA Mufasa describes above. Also, men felt let down by other men, or angry with them, often feeling more affinity with their female partners. PUA James, a 31-year-old single, white, translator from London noted that although men helped each other to pluck up the courage to approach a woman, which was supportive, the very same men could be undermining if rejection was the result, meaning that the PUA homosocial ideal was sometimes problematic. Overall, the men in this study experienced the role other men played in their lives to be varying, dependent on the individual man and context/time of life and homosociality was not experienced as a blanket, vertical support system that bolstered their masculinity.

7.4.4 – Male Friends as Stereotypical

Throughout, the men were asked both about their own and their male friends' responses to many aspects of dating women as well as gender and dating in the media and society. Asking men about their male peer groups' opinions on subjects enables an insight into how

men perceive masculinity to be played out by its nearest exponents, their male friends. Such questioning avoids generalist answers as may be given to more broad questions such as, “How do you perceive men to experience X?” and also allows for a wider response to a question than would often be given by a man’s own subjective account (Frosch 2012).

Interviewees were asked to watch a couple of minutes of Beyoncé’s pop music video for *All the Single Ladies*, which made the Top 10 in the UK in 2008. The video shows singer Beyoncé Knowles and two other black female dancers, wearing armless leotards, high heels, with hyper-glamorous make-up and hairstyles, in a white infinity studio. No other elements are present throughout the duration of the video. Beyoncé wears a metallic piece of jewellery on her ‘wedding’ finger, which bends with the two joints of her digit and therefore resembles armour. The three of them dance in a formation as the lights change in position and intensity around them to draw the viewer’s attention to their physiques. The background is largely unseen. The tonal subtleties of the women’s skin are highlighted by the use of black and white film. One reason why this video was chosen for use in this study was because it focuses so exclusively on female beauty and sexual power.

When asked about how their male peers would experience the Beyoncé video, the response was mixed. Some men felt they could not comment on their friends’ reception of the video but these were the minority. Stuart, a 27-year-old, white, middle class, married medical secretary from London, felt his friends would find the image frustrating because he did and there seemed to be no split between his and what he surmised would be their responses, which was unusual. As many of the men did not appreciate the video or the song, it was interesting that many of them felt that at least some of their male friends would, mainly for the women’s attractiveness. Although some felt their friendship base would be split on the issue, with some holding similar opinions to their own uninterested ones, others perceived their friends to have more ‘stereotypically male’ responses to the women’s performance. A major theme was the anticipation that their male friends would experience the women’s performance in a direct manner, experiencing sexual gratification.

Steve, a 24-year-old, single, white man from London who works in marketing was unique in his reflection on his and his friends' reception of the video in comparison to perceived masculine norms:

My male friends probably wouldn't have much time for it. But (Pause) again, I'm aware, I don't really roll with the typical types of men. And (Pause) that is based on (Pause) anecdotal evidence more so. Like I said, this sort of rather, sort of metric evidence. So like (Pause) all these – all these magazines and stuff. The whole sex-sells business. It would not exist if it didn't work. Of course it wouldn't, I don't think. (Steve)

Here Steve doesn't have confidence in his assumptions without the "metric evidence" needed, seeing his and his friends' responses as merely anecdotal in comparison, resulting in him not achieving certitude, because they are outside of a perceived masculine norm.

Only Eric, the men's rights activist, felt that his friends would look on the dancers in a particularly negative light because they would perceive the video as pushing a female media agenda:

The ones probably would say they were sluts the women on there. To be honest, that's what they would say. They'd say that it's trying to use sex as a means of getting people to buy their music ... Yes, I think that – a lot of the men I talk to, one in particular, one on the forum, he gets upset about things like that. Because he thinks that society is trying to push men out of culture and trying to replace them with women. He just listens to lyrics that have a man singing. And I won't mention his name. We'll keep that anonymous. But he would see that as being part of the feminist belief of a – not so much feminist. But he would see it as trying to feminise society. (Eric)

The friends he refers to are MRAs, so it is not surprising that his/their presumed response is political in nature. It is however interesting that the media, which is most often criticised within feminism for repeating gender stereotypes which hold women back, is here directly understood by Eric's friend as a site of female power.

AA: Okay. And what about men?

Bryan: (Pause) I don't know. I think men are men. (Laughter)

AA: Right. Okay. What do you mean by that?

Bryan: (Pause) I think most of them are just ruled by their dicks, to be honest. Not all of us. But an awful lot of them.

AA: Right. Do you think you are?

Bryan: No.

AA: No. Do you think your male friends are?

Bryan: (Pause) No.

Here Bryan feels that men are stereotypically lustful and yet he himself, and his friends, did not fit this stereotype. This was a typical response from many men. They saw themselves to be less 'stereotypically male' than their male friends or other men generally. This was most clearly illustrated in men's personal tastes in female beauty. The men varied in their preferences for different types of feminine physiques. Yet, with a few exceptions in which the interviewee could actually name the types of feminine physique that their male peers preferred (implying that they had discussed this with them or at least observed a distinct pattern), most men assumed their friends to like slim, usually blonde, traditionally attractive women.

Importantly, these men often positioned themselves as outside of the masculine stereotype; they saw themselves as the exception while the stereotype was the norm. Hegemonic masculine ideals were often invoked as a gauge against which men measured themselves, but the influence of inclusive masculinity was also apparent, and often men felt torn between their own more inclusive ideals and those of a real or perceived hegemonic male majority. Others were more inclusive and less torn.⁸

⁸ One should of course, keep a mind's eye on the interviewees' ability to perform what could be seen as a more palatable type of masculine performance within an interview with a female academic. This was something I was aware of throughout the interview process and felt it necessary to set up the interview in a way that minimized the likelihood of such responses (by highlighting my previous experiences interviewing those in the sex industry; by

PUA Dumervil, a 33-year-old, white, single, assistant facilities manager from Hertfordshire, spoke about the stereotype of men only wanting sex and not relationships as something which lots of men believe. He felt that this was not a true reflection of men's behaviour, which lay somewhere in between this stereotype and the opposing image of the man who only looks for deep emotional love in every instance:

I think – I think that they think they want to shag around. I think deep down, I think a lot of people – I think there's a lot of emotional insecurity around men. (Pause) You know, in modern times in general. And I think a lot of them want relationships. And they might do. And if you look at my previous questions and what I've answered, you know, a lot of the blokes who I know, my peers, they don't shag around. They might see a girl for a little while and then decide, "Oh, no. She's not the one for me." And then might shag another girl and see her for a little while. So do you see what I mean? ... It's almost like it's in between it. It's almost like an in between ... They want one – they think they want one thing but in reality, deep down, they want something else. (PUA Dumervil)

Like many of the men in this study, PUA Dumervil is here positioning himself (and his friends) both in relationship to, and in opposition to the stereotype of the 'old', 'bad', or sexist man. Despite seeing his friends as operating differently to the hegemonic stereotype in their own dating lives, he concluded that his friends might respond in a more 'mainstream' male fashion to Beyoncé's video than he would:

They'd be like, "Fucking hell, yes. I'd bang Beyoncé so hard. And those two girls are fit women." I'm like, "Yeah, alright, mate. Whatever." It's not – I'm not – I'm a bit – I'm not as mainstream as a lot of my friends. I'm a bit of an outsider. I mean, don't get me wrong, I can appreciate – she is a really attractive lady. (PUA Dumervil)

vocalizing that men could be candid and this would add to the value/their input into the research in an area where men are rarely interviewed; etc). Whilst analyzing the men's words I looked for discrepancies and contradictions between paragraphs, which might highlight such performances and indeed some were found. However, there also appeared to be a genuine distancing between the men and hegemonic masculine ideals on many occasions implying that their words were genuinely reflective of their feelings.

Rather than directly criticising their masculinity or their misogyny, with which he clearly disagrees (at least for now), he positions himself as “an outsider”, almost as an excuse for not performing in a ‘mainstream’ manner. He criticises his friends: “I’m like, ‘Yeah, alright, mate. Whatever ...’” but still defines himself in terms of their script, as “an outsider”. In contrast to his friends, when he refers to his appreciation he describes Beyoncé politely as an “attractive lady”. The legacy of HMT is that heterosexuality and gender are so closely linked, meaning it can be difficult for men to reject such a script leading to compromise, negotiation or collusion, as we see in PUA Dumervil’s final comment: “I mean, don’t get me wrong, I can appreciate – she is a really attractive lady.” Here he wants to assert that his heterosexual credentials are intact. As Bird (1996) noted, men who perform non-hegemonic masculinities may find it more difficult to influence homosocial groups, as opposed to heterosocial ones, meaning PUA Dumervil is freer to admit his discomfort to a female interviewer than to his male peers.

The fact that many men in this study position themselves outside of a perceived ‘normal’ male response emerged in a variety of different contexts throughout the interviews: from responses to questions relating to consuming female beauty to responses about experiences of unwanted sexual behaviour instigated by women, some interviewees struggled with how they were ‘meant’ to respond. This is a theme which runs throughout the data and will also be discussed in subsequent chapters.

7.5 – Body Image

Masculinity has been traditionally understood in terms of traits such as physical strength, ambition, emotional inexpressiveness and aggression (David & Brannon 1976). It was the role of women to worry about their appearance and therefore any emphasis on a man’s appearance by men was perceived as feminine and weak. “[O]bjectification of the male body is simultaneously a feminisation of the male body. Historically, such male effeminacy has been a signifier of homosexuality in Western cultures” (Mowlabocus 2010, 97). This has changed in the last few decades however as media representations of men have increasingly focused on male physical appearance. As Stephens and Lorentzen (2007) note,

the critical focus has shifted from an idea of a singular male body towards an understanding of specific male embodiments; visibility and invisibility being key reflections of power. Since men can no longer perceive themselves largely as consumers of physical beauty, but also vehicles of it, they must also sell themselves by it too. As Bordo (2000, 219) notes, men are competing in the workplace with younger men and ambitious women, therefore self-presentation has become more important in a more competitive world.

In a 2002 study, Rohlinger researched advertisements in five men's magazines published between 1987 to 1997 and suggested nine types of depiction of masculinity. From his analysis, it was further found that the erotic male in particular is increasingly becoming the most prevalent depiction of masculinity and that men are being sexualised and objectified to appeal to multiple audiences. Importantly, such men are shown as having undisclosed sexualities, meaning the viewer can project their own desires onto the image. Rohlinger links this to the success of feminism and the gay liberation movement. Women have also been seen to be influential when it comes to men's body self-esteem (Goddard 2000). The female and the gay male gazes have demanded to see men's bodies and men have responded in varying ways, resulting in the male body being increasingly exposed in recent decades (Rohlinger 2002).

Alongside the proliferation of images of idealised male beauty, studies have shown that men are increasingly experiencing body dissatisfaction in similar ways to women, as predicted by Wolf in *The Beauty Myth* (Wolf 1990). Silberstein (1988) found that in a study of 92 men and women, the sexes did not differ in the degree of body dissatisfaction they expressed but did differ in the direction their body dissatisfaction took them in. Whereas women saw self-esteem in terms of sexual attractiveness, weight concern and physical condition and health and well-being, men's body dissatisfaction related to physical attractiveness, upper body strength and physical condition. When men observed images of muscular male physiques in the media and compared themselves to these, if they perceived themselves to be smaller than the media images, they desired 'bulking up' and if they

perceived themselves to be larger, they desired losing weight. Elsewhere, Bordo (2000) discusses the relatively new phenomenon of muscle dysmorphia, in which sufferers never feel that their muscles are big enough. This has been linked to consumption of men's magazines which focus on the male body (Hatoum & Belle 2004) and consuming video games (Bartlett & Harris 2008).

Another study found men to focus on male activity in overcoming perceived physical shortfalls as opposed to women's focus on lack of satisfaction in their bodies (Mullany 2004). This framing of men's insecurities in terms of action is highlighted by Stibbe in looking at *Men's Health* magazine. While focussing on male bodily perfection which may well provoke male insecurity, it was found that magazines focussed on muscle size, alcohol tolerance, sports and violence, not only as men's interests but also in terms of these things having biologically inherent advantages over women (Stibbe 2004).

7.5.1 – The Female Gaze

It is not accidental that such cultural artefacts as *Men's Health*, sexualise women in images and articles that are placed in and amongst features about how to improve the male body. As men become increasingly aware of how they physically appear to women, this has long been understood as a fear of the female gaze, something men are reluctant to submit to. Men are encouraged to be, as Bordo notes, “a moving target” (Bordo 2000, 173) that does not admit to knowledge about how men represent themselves physically to the female sex. A paradox however exists that while not wanting to acknowledge the female gaze as a powerful shaper of male self-image, men have historically been perceived as possibly homosexual if they pay a lot of attention to their appearance. By including female images, it emphasises the reason for ‘looking good’; that heterosexual men are predominantly interested in attracting the opposite sex, so since attractive women are thought to have preferences for good-looking men, it follows that men will be concerned about their physical appearance in ways that are not purely homosocial (the PUA's 1 to 10 rating system) or, homosexual. Also, women are shown as sexualised, therefore as proof that men

aren't the only sex who is keen to appear attractive to their counterpart, therefore men can take comfort in women's relatively higher levels of sexual objectification too.

The role of the mother's gaze has been argued to be key to the son, as Goddard explains in *Looks Maketh the Man: The Female Gaze and the Construction of Masculinity*:

... what son sees his father thinking or feeling about mother is what son wants to have – not least because he is not receiving the same form of attention. It is not entirely, therefore, just a case of son wanting mother – but rather of son wanting what he sees father seeing in mother. To replace the father is to take on the eyes of the father, take the power of the father, but it is also to be a male figure who is formed by what the mother sees in the father. The power of appropriation lies not just with the father, then – but with the mother as well, who, in the son's eyes, gazes at the father in a way the son would like to be gazed at, so, in a good parental relationship, son wants to be like his father because of the way mother has treated father. The Oedipal gaze, then, is almost always 3-dimensional: child observes mother observing father and father observing mother. (Goddard 2000, 27)

Gender identity is a multifaceted formation developed by many aspects of culture and society; women may remind men of their inadequacies in comparison to a hegemonic masculine ideal. Heterosexual men experience and perform their gender in part through heterosexual interactions with women, which, according to Segal (2007), they may find confusing. The act of sexual intercourse, she writes, can confirm “a sense of ineptness and failure: the failure to satisfy women” (Segal 2007, 178). She argues that men experience a far greater level of uncertainty, dependence and deference while dating women in comparison to their public lives.

7.5.2 – Data on Self Body Image

As physical attraction often plays an important part of dating interactions between many men and women, it was interesting to see how the dating men evaluated their own physical attractiveness, how they framed any perceived flaws, and how this related to their experiences in dating women. In the current study, of the dating men, n=10 were happy

with their physical appearance, n=6 described themselves as content and n=4 were unhappy with their physiques. Many men used the word “happy” to describe their attitude to their bodies. Of the PUAs, n=6 said they were happy, n=1 was ambivalent and n=3 were unhappy about their body self image. Overall, in the current study, men had a mixed relationship with their bodies because, regardless of whether they reported being happy, they nearly always reported having both positive and negative aspects of their bodies.

The interviewees responded by managing their expectations and self-images in varying ways, positioning themselves accordingly. Men who considered themselves to be happy with their appearance were also conscious of having ‘faults’, yet such faults ostensibly did not determine their rate of enjoyment in their bodies or dating relationships. Interviewees either framed such faults with reference to other physical assets or they framed them in terms of non-physical assets. For instance, David did not worry about someone not finding him physically attractive: “I prefer to be found interesting than attractive.” PUA Brian, a postgraduate Student currently studying in Finland who was physically large, reported being “very, very happy and confident as well.” He was living in Finland and had recently had a naked sauna with his boss and other men, which he thought was “cool”. He felt that “most people that I hang around with don’t have any issues with their bodies, as far as I know, or they don’t ever talk about it if they have any.” The only man to mention a disability felt it was “a problem for me when I was younger but no longer is,” presumably because he was now married with children and had therefore successfully attracted a partner.

The ‘faults’ noted were: being overweight (especially around the stomach – a “spare tyre” was mentioned in a number of interviews), low muscle definition, slackness of skin, height, hair loss, disability, visible nail infections, eyesight, pale skin tone, hair colouring and texture, as well as the desire to be physically ‘on top form’ for defence reasons. Only one man mentioned his genitals when asked about his body image (the question of penis satisfaction was to come later in the interview) and that was Daryl, a 37-year-old single, white, Lancashire man who worked in advertising who was not happy with his testicles,

worrying that they may be too hairy, which was a direct result of him dating a younger woman whom he perceived would be influenced by watching shaved men in porn films.

Although the men sometimes saw themselves as 'gym users' or 'non-gym users', some had changed their relationship towards physical exercise over time and this had affected how they saw themselves. Four of the men felt they had lost some aspects of their physiques which they had when younger yet, interestingly, this was not always aligned with a loss of body self-esteem as they aged, something which had been found in other studies (Peat et al 2011).

Anthony felt he was at his least confident when he was physically fit:

I used to have a washboard stomach. I was very athletic and I had what I considered a really good body. I've always gone topless. I loved myself a little bit too much actually (Laughter). And interestingly, that was at my least confident. That was when I really just couldn't (Pause) penetrate conversation with women. I couldn't do it. (Anthony)

In this section Anthony criticises his past self as vain whilst simultaneously listing the achievements resulting from his vanity with a certain amount of pride: "a washboard stomach", "a really good body." His understanding of his own fitness is framed by both a discourse on emotional depth – his bodily attractiveness coinciding with his unhappiness – and of an attractiveness marketplace, where beauty is meant to lead to a higher dating success rate, something his older self notes as an incorrect conclusion. It is interesting that he uses a term which is commonly used sexually, that of penetration, to describe his inability to converse with women: "I couldn't do it." There is a sense that his younger self tried to attract women by mastering his body, which was something that was measurable, in contrast to attaining genuine confidence and conversation skills, which are less easy to define.

Although many of the men in this study expressed concerns or appreciations about their bodies, outright vanity (either in the form of praise or criticism) was nearly always

avoided. Although one's tendency towards vanity may well change throughout one's life dependent on age, relative bodily condition and whether or not one is partnered, the interviewees almost entirely avoided expressing themselves about their bodies in such a way. Seeing the body as a project was one of the ways in which men distanced themselves from the image of the vain (and therefore feminised) man. Framing the body in such a way opens up the opportunity to understand it as owned by them and therefore unthreatened by other men's, or women's, gazes. In a study of 140 young British men by Gill et al (2005), men contextualised their bodies within social, cultural and moral parentheses. They used their bodies as ways to form their identities by means of tattooing and muscle building, for instance, and considered their bodies as projects. They framed discussion through a number of discourses: libertarianism, where men argued that anybody had the right to choose, for instance, plastic surgery; rejection of links to vanity; even though they used skincare products extensively, they saw them in terms of instrumentality, sometimes in response to a manual job. Other framings included gym use, which focused on cardiovascular reasons for keeping fit rather than improving appearance (interestingly, the aim of tightening flaccid muscles was not seen in terms of improving appearance) and the well-balanced self. It was important not to take things too seriously or become obsessed with your appearance and there was a moral responsibility to remain healthy. The notion of self-respect was used to negotiate the risky poles of vanity and 'letting oneself go'. Seeing themselves as individuals was key, even though it was clear that normative ideals of male attractiveness were influential.

There were some areas of the interviews for this study in which women were perceived to be blameless for the concerns men had, mainly to do with issues of appearance. Even though a number of the men interviewed thought men generally were as insecure about their bodies as women were, they did not choose to critique women's 'monopoly' of the politics of representation, tending instead to see their own insecurities singularly, and therefore in a non-politicised manner. The respondents were aware of the female gaze however, with many of the men accepting their physical faults up to the point at which

these faults thwarted their chances with women. As Mark, a 31-year-old, married, white mechanic from Berkshire remarked:

Someone with a strongly defined, you know, typically muscly physique that a lot of women find attractive. I think, "Yes. Okay. That wouldn't be the worst way in the world to look." But (Pause) I just – you know, am I going invest time and effort into getting into that shape? Not really. Because ultimately, I've, you know I've still managed to have, you know, very good relationships to date. And as a result of looking how I do. We can't all be – 'perfect' is the wrong word. Because, you know, individual tastes vary so much. Indeed some women I've known absolutely do not like a strongly defined male physique and are much happier with my softer (Laughter), less defined – I'm still skinny but it's just not – you know, not defined (Pause) physique. So a lot of it is just down to personal preference, so I don't worry too much about it. (Mark)

Here Mark, refers to a "typically muscly physique" in minimising terms: "That wouldn't be the worst way in the world to look." He doesn't want to declare himself as desirous of such a handsome body for himself, introducing it via the female gaze as one "that a lot of women find attractive." He refuses to become invested in an attractiveness marketplace, seeing the cost in terms of effort as just too great. He asks himself the question of whether it is worth investment, as though to himself in the mirror, and replies in a jokey tone, "Not really." His framing of his body is in terms of the relationships he has "managed to have ... as a result of looking how I do." In framing it in this way, he appears to minimise the importance of the female gaze: he attracts women, he says, without such effort, just like the PUA aim to become a 'Natural' (although he was not involved in the community). Yet he continues to qualify his physique via the female gaze, because ultimately the female gaze is important to him. Even the men who were critical of their bodies did not directly mention the female gaze as worrying them in so many words, opting to focus on self-criticism and self-improvement instead of acknowledging the power the other sex has over one's self body image. Even though in not going to the gym Mark can frame himself as a more emotionally deep prospect for a woman, women still own the female gaze. Interestingly, he is hesitant in how he describes his physique: "my softer (Laughter), less defined – I'm still skinny but it's just not – you know, not defined (Pause) physique." Although he states that he is not

concerned about his physical appearance and foregrounds personal preference, he appears to feel the need to work towards using the word “physique” incrementally, physique being a word redolent of classic Greek imagery of a honed male.

Of the men (n=10) who answered the question about whether or not they were happy with their body n=3 answered no, n=6 answered yes and n=1 was undecided. Of the men who were not happy with their bodies, PUA James felt that men were as insecure as women in this regard but that this was not as appreciated in society. He had concerns about his weight; historically, he had been 20 or 30 kg heavier. He noted that part of the PUA philosophy was to teach men to improve their physiques and personal appearance to give men “a set of tools so that you can develop a better version for yourself.” PUA Tony, a 35-year-old, British/Nigerian web designer notes that the PUA scene also teaches men that physical looks are far less important for attracting women than an attractive personality, which somewhat contradicts further advice for physical improvement.

PUA Dumervil had recently improved his physique through physical training (recent change through diet/exercise was a common theme with PUAs) yet he describes himself as having body anxiety and being overcritical about some parts of his anatomy, especially his stomach, arms and armpits. His attention to detail, along with his dismissal of his small criticisms, is interesting:

My shoulders and my arms. I’m not so keen about my midriff. I still stand to lose a bit of weight around there. I’ve got some like – like some fat around my armpits and around my arms that I’d like to get rid of. But it’s – you know, it’s kind of – it’s like focusing on very, very small things, compared to the rest of me. It’s like examining yourself under microscope. That sort of thing. (PUA Dumervil)

Here PUA Dumervil also splits his body into sections, which he rates negatively without mentioning any positives. Again, he is reflexive: he knows he is being too self-critical and tries to rationalise this but is unable to reframe his body in a more positive light. He depicts himself as part of an attractiveness market which is economic in nature, and he lists his

assets and liabilities separately, contextualising his liabilities in terms of his assets in order to reassure himself. He judges his own body but tries to keep a rational framing, aware of his lack of perspective: "... it's like focusing on very, very small things, compared to the rest of me. It's like examining yourself under a microscope." He still, however, feels the need to judge himself against 'objective' criteria.

Regarding their physiques, both the PUAs and dating men showed intimate knowledge of their physical faults, which more often they judged without referring to responses from women (supportive or critical). This is in stark contrast to how men referred to their penises (see below). Although they did not mention other men's bodies, they did compare themselves to an ideal. PUA Mufasa said he loved his body but thought he could be a bit bigger:

PUA Mufasa: Yes, I love my body.

AA: Okay. Do you think you're attractive to women, physically?

PUA Mufasa: (Pause) I think I'm – I'm attractive enough. I don't think I'm like, you know, a Greek god, you know, but I'm tall. I work out. And my face is – it's pretty decent. I'm not like – I'm not like a model. But I rate myself as a 7.5, maybe an 8 on a good day ... I think I could be a little bigger. I'm a little slim. I'm like – I work out so I'm not skinny-skinny but I'm not – I could be bigger I suppose.

PUA Mufasa was much more confident with women since undergoing PUA training and spoke of having several girlfriends since he began. He was also more confident about his body than other men and was the only one to use the word "love" with reference to it. It is interesting though that when he is asked whether his body would be attractive to women, he opens up from a one sentence all-encompassing answer – "Yes, I love my body" – into rating his body in sections. His height, his face and his build are all scrutinised and he gives himself an 'objective' rating: "7.5, maybe an 8 on a good day." This is a rating system usually used in the PUA community to refer to women's beauty. He ends the section with self-criticism about his build although throughout he alternates between asserting his worth in an attractiveness market and criticising his faults. It seems he may love his body but he has

insecurities about whether women share this view. Women represent something he is aware that he is not in control of and the process of going to the gym is used to mitigate the effects of a female gaze.

7.5.3 – The Penis

The penis is perceived as unquestionably male and holds a special place of reverence as the phallus in society. When people are shown drawings of a female body with a penis and a body without female attributes, such as breasts and hips, but with a vagina, the former is seen as male by 96%, regardless of the fact that this body had breasts and hips (Kessler & McKenna: 1985). The penis is a special signifier for masculinity and one that is culturally appreciated as synonymous with phallic power. Bordo (2000) notes that male and female American college students chose differing names for penises. The names chosen by men were either heroic/mythical (Genghis Khan, the Lone Ranger), named after tools (garden hose, jack hammer), or after dangerous or innocuous weaponry (torpedo, pistol, squirt gun). In contrast, female students were more likely to use terms such as “throbbing manhood”, which she says involves their yearning for sexual pleasure, something she argues makes men slightly anxious. Bordo argues that the men’s metaphors offer imaginative protection against the reality that the penis is most often soft and vulnerable. They therefore use harder, invincible metaphors homosocially, whilst privately acknowledging the gap between the metaphor and their reality.

The penis is positioned in a contradictory space of both power and anxiety, as at once the physical manifestation of the phallus and the physical manifestation of its lack. In an article exploring the link between body and ego – “the question of what the ego perceives as belonging to the body in which it resides” (Löfgren 1968) and the penis – Löfgren found that men who had their penis removed rarely experienced a feeling of a phantom penis, unlike with other parts of the body. Löfgren concluded that the autonomous motility of the penis, its peculiar sensibility to touch as well as pubertal changes, mean that the penis never becomes securely positioned as part of the body ego, unlike other body parts. This

may be why the men (and women) in Kessler and McKenna's study perceive their penises as separate from them and give them names.

Men's concern about the size of their penis is widely documented. In an intimate study of 52,000 heterosexual men and women it was found that 45% of men desired a larger penis. In comparison, 85% of women did not perceive their partners to be lacking in penile size (Lever et al 2006). Bordo argues that men's concern about penis size is not really about the physiological reality of their penis but about how men are trained to think of themselves as inadequate. Even a penis that is big enough will not be reliable enough. The penis in its unreliably changeable state haunts phallic authority, even for younger men. Men who can maintain an erection also use Viagra as 'insurance', implying an on-going anxiety (Bordo 2000, 42). She argues that the unreliable penis, which often represents a failure to live up to cultural expectations, inducing shame, is ironically a site for a possible deep identification between men and women, because this is exactly how women experience their own bodies in comparison to societal ideals (Bordo 2000, 34-35). She continues, none of the advertising for Viagra mentions an increase in pleasure through sensation, with the exception of overwhelming relief or renewed pride in the 'improved' penis. Pleasure is described as being experienced vicariously through the female orgasm: adverts focus on men's ability to please partners, rather than on men's incapacity. This is possibly a means of deflecting attention away from the initial problem by utilising hegemonic masculine ideals of being a provider (in this case of sexual pleasure). This has also been argued elsewhere to be an example of men using women's pleasure to support their own masculine status (Grace et al 2006).

In this study, when asked if they were happy with their penis size, ejaculation and erections, n=10 of the dating men said they were, n=4 expressed relative contentment and n=6 were not happy with their penises. This is not a dissimilar spread to the answers given for the question regarding general body self-esteem, and similarly nearly all men cited some reservations about their penis, even those who were happy with them overall. The issues relating to penises were – in order of commonality – premature ejaculation, the

inability to ejaculate, erection, size, size when flaccid, inappropriate erections and larger than average testicles. Of the PUAs who answered relevantly (n=7), n=5 men said they were happy with their penis, n=1 man was happier as he had got older, and n=1 man was unhappy with his penis.

The men's initial responses to the question were nearly always short in duration, which was noticeable in comparison to their responses to other topics. Only one man, Daryl, gave an answer that was at all lengthy: six responses to probes in all. Despite their answers being relative shorter to this question the men were surprisingly candid and it was interesting that many of the men who listed considerable problems they had experienced also answered affirmatively about whether they were happy with their penises. Even Victor, a 23-year-old single, white financial worker from London, who experienced retarded ejaculation (the inability to orgasm during sex) and had undergone adult circumcision and was just about to start long-term therapy to help with this issue, answered, "No, it's perfectly fine, short answer is no," when asked about penis problems.

A major theme in this section was that men invoked women's responses to validate their penis self-image. Many of the interviewees said something like "I've never had any complaints," or when specifically asked how they felt about their own penis, they recalled times when women had complimented them on their penis size or appearance – no men mentioned any direct criticism received from women, however. This invoking of the female voice may reflect a comfortable way in which to respond to a question about such a 'male' subject as the penis or these responses may genuinely be grounded in respondents' everyday experiences in heterosexual relationships.

Stuart felt that his current satisfaction with his penis was reliant on him being in a solid long-term relationship and that if this were to end, he may feel more self-conscious about his penis once more. Mike, a 39-year-old, married academic from Finland, was experiencing erectile dysfunction as a side effect of medication he was on. Elsewhere in the interview, he praised the patience of his wife with regard to his illness and subsequent long-term sick

leave. In this section of his interview, he refers both to his wife's response and to men's relationship to their penises. Erectile dysfunction was an issue in his relationship (which they had spoken about together as a couple) and he was aware of both his experience as a changed sexual partner and his having increased reliance on her as something he did not enjoy:

So that's the reason for why this is a heightened problem at this point at time. But when it comes to penis size and ejaculation, I suppose, you know, it could be a bit – every man thinks that their penis is too small. But yes, it could be bigger. But my wife has never complained. Neither has she complained now with having the – with the dysfunction. But we're trying medication to correct the blood pressure effect. (Mike)

Here Mike discusses his penis first in direct terms but chooses to sandwich a generalised idea of men's relationships with their penises between two reflections on his own size, in order to take the focus from him: "... it could be a bit – every man thinks that their penis is too small. But yes, it could be bigger." He does not say his penis is small, just that it could be a little bit bigger and again he invokes his wife's acceptance of his penis as objective proof that he is 'big enough'. He was the only man to refer to his body so directly as part of a relationship, perhaps because he had experienced ill-health ending in erectile dysfunction; he does not say that he is trying medication – rather that "we're" trying medication to overcome his lack of erections.

PUA Dumervil felt justified in feeling happy with his penis size because a woman historically said his penis was "not small". He got his validation from women's responses to his penis rather than from himself or other men, including from women who had not actually seen his penis in actuality. He recalled a time when two female work colleagues had complimented him on his penis size, based on estimations made through his trousers:

And anyway, (Laughter) apparently what they were doing as I walked past, they were looking at my dick. Through my trousers. Apparently, different trousers will have different effects on how big my cock looked ... So apparently, you know, when I'd walk past, they were going, "Oh, he's got a

fairly sizable knob.” And apparently one day the manager was sat down at a table with them. And kind of – you know, I walked round. And she was like, “Oh, my God. It’s fucking huge.” So, you know, it’s a nice little ego boost for you. But I think I’ve got maybe an above average-sized knob. Or maybe flaccid average. Erect kind of bigger than usual but not too enormous. (PUA Dumervil)

Here PUA Dumervil recalls an instance at work in an understated style throughout, distancing himself in several instances as a male observer of a female realm, where women have greater insight into ‘clocking’ penis size through trousers than men do, “apparently”: “Apparently, different trousers will have different effects on how big my cock looked ... So apparently, you know ... And apparently one day ... I think I’ve got maybe...” The only time he uses language in a truncated manner is when the women deliver their response, “Oh, my God. It’s fucking huge”. Again he responds in a deprecating manner, describing it as a “nice little ego boost”. It is interesting that men deny knowledge of other men’s penises while simultaneously considering the size of their own penis in comparison to other men’s abstractly, as in ‘it’s too big’ or ‘it’s too small’. Again, interestingly, he is happy to be above average in size but does not want to be away from the flock: “bigger than usual but not too enormous.” ‘Usual’ is still the touchstone when it comes to penis size, unlike other aspects of body image which could be happily perceived as lying outside the norms of the stereotypical perfect male body.

The recollection that PUA Dumervil gives comes within a discussion of sexual harassment in the workplace. Whereas such stories usually focus on male-on-female abuse, in this instance the women are the aggressors and are arguably expressing behaviour that would be considered both inappropriate and potentially illegal were the genders to be reversed. Due to his own feeling of relative power, he is able to ‘allow’ this situation to occur in order for him to gain what is probably rare flattery of his penis from women who are not girlfriends. He is able to frame this instance as part of a ‘cheeky banter’ discourse, where no harm is done, rather than in ethical or legal terms. In a context in which women have been historically denied expression and exploration of the female gaze, instances of sexual assertiveness by women are framed differently by men and are far more positively

received by them because they have structural power in the workplace. Note that in this anecdote, it was his female manager, “the manager”, who was involved in the banter yet his status was not threatened by her authority whilst drawing attention to his physical attributes. Were the women’s comments to be negative, it would be interesting to see whether he would be vocal in admonishing their behaviour. Being part of an attractiveness rating system is generally more acceptable when one is rated highly. Indeed Daryl, who had issues with both retarded ejaculation and enlarged testes, felt that there was a double standard in society in that it was socially acceptable to make fun of men’s genitals as unattractive, when similar behaviour would not be deemed appropriate from a man to a woman.

Twinned with the tendency to invoke female responses was a distinct lack of comparison with other men. Unlike women, men (in the UK at least) have an arguably unique level of access to other men’s penises in close proximity at urinals and sports changing rooms, yet it is rare that a man will admit to using his peripheral vision to monitor how other men’s penises appear. Whether the men genuinely did not look at other men’s penises and therefore could not comment on their comparative size, or whether admitting to looking could be construed as a homosexual act, thus resulting in silencing their knowledge of other men’s penises, none of the interviewees proffered information about other men’s penises (nor did they directly compare their bodies to other men). Slight exceptions to this were reports by two men who felt that they were content with their penises in comparison to other men who they perceived to be more concerned about penile size, but these other men were cited in the abstract. It was said jokingly by some men that they didn’t have anything to compare themselves to, presumably to justify a lack of ‘objective knowledge’ on the subject. This is particularly odd in the case of the PUAs who take great care to discuss many aspects of themselves and women (some even read *Cosmopolitan* regularly for this very reason) in order to gain certitude. With the exception of a few forum posts, the penis remained largely uncharted territory.

Although men were unaware of other men's sizes this did not stop them using safety in being of an average size as a source of comfort: a man may not be above average (which he may wish to be) but at least he was not below average. While in other aspects of dating, where being an outsider or holding non-stereotypical views was felt to be fine, 'fitting in' was a broad theme when asked about penis size throughout most of the interviews. Many men mentioned either not wanting to be too big or too small and it seems that this was a means for them to frame their average-sized (or perhaps less than average, as they perceived it) penises. By saying they did not want a penis that was 'too big' they set up having a very large penis as a false undesirable that makes them feel happier about their own relative size.⁹ 40 year old, Richard was the only respondent to offer knowledge of his penis size – that of a higher than average nine inches – to which he added, "I don't measure it very often," perhaps to minimise the focus on him knowing his penis size, rather than just experiencing it 'naturally'.

Bordo notes that penile augmentation is often done (to men with average-sized penises) for homosocial display in a non-erect state rather than for use in intercourse in an erect state (Bordo 2000, 73) In the current study however men were concerned about women's responses to their penises, something which was underlined in interviews with sex workers, where men were reported to often apologise for the size of their penis. Women's opinions were not only invoked in support of male confidence about their penises but their opinions were also genuinely a source of concern. Only Alex, a 24-year-old, single, white charity marketing executive from Portsmouth and PUA Spencer mentioned a concern about penis size when not erect or in public male changing rooms. The focus on the importance of flaccid size, which is a homosocially acceptable experience of other men's penises, in some research may underestimate the power felt by men of the female gaze on the penis. Even the two men in this study who mentioned a concern regarding flaccid size, both saw this

⁹ Culturally the larger penis is also met with ambivalence because much as it is a symbol of male potency, just as large breasts on a woman are similarly regarded, the large penis is also viewed with a certain amount of disdain according to Bordo. It implies lack of intelligence and is perceived as "clumsy poundage" (Bordo 2000, 75). The large penis has also been historically conflated with the black penis, which was denigrated (Del Rosso 2011, 707).

aspect as part of a larger appreciation (both negative and positive) of their penises rather than a sole focus.

Among the PUAs, a distinction was made between erectile dysfunction, which can be attributed to excessive alcohol (thus staying within the area of hegemonic masculinity) and small penis size, which does not, because men would talk to their friends about the former only. Although the PUA community prides itself on homosocial support, as mentioned previously, it appears that the penis and sexual performance are still largely off limits as topics of discussion. The only man to respond negatively to the question of whether he was happy with his penis was PUA Robert who had concerns about premature ejaculation. He noted that when men on the PUA forums had spoken about their penis size in one particular forum thread, he was suspicious that none of the men had responded saying that they had a penis that was below average in size, although he did not elaborate on what such an average size was understood to be. PUA James was fairly elusive throughout this whole section on penile problems, often referring to other PUA students' responses rather than answering from a personal perspective.

7.5.4 – Conclusion

Between their desire to embrace more modern inclusive masculine ideals, concerns about the female gaze, along with the pressure to fit in with hegemonic masculine ideals, interviewees experienced multi-faceted and often contradictory relationships with other men as well as with regard to their own bodies. Overall, it was felt that the men shared an overarching concern about how to perform their masculinity at a time when women were gaining more power and yet simultaneously, in a culture that relied heavily upon some very traditional dating ideals. This has resulted in a lot of the interviewees experiencing contradictory beliefs, most highlighted by the fact that many saw themselves as different from other men, as a 'non-mainstream male', or possibly as more or less authentic than they understood their male friends to be. They then positioned themselves as outsiders to a hegemonic masculinity, which sometimes led to a lack of equilibrium, not least because their own instances of alternative experiences seemed anecdotal without metric evidence

of a wider picture of other men's responses, leading to a lack of confidence in their own interpretations. When this happened, they arguably reinforced (and not directly challenge) hegemonic masculine norms. This in part supports what Bird (1996) argued, that non-hegemonic types of masculinity were only partially able to change hegemonic ones because they remained non-confrontational.

Others were more genuinely inclusive and happy to voice their opposition to such hegemonic ideals, however. Indeed, men who were vocal about disliking hegemonic or 'mainstream' masculine tastes and ideals represented a fair proportion of the interviewees and therefore Anderson and McCormack's various findings of increased inclusive masculinity can also be supported, albeit that these particular men were not grouped together and therefore expressed their experience of inclusive masculinity more singularly. Interestingly, this often manifested itself around the subject of female beauty where some men were quite angry at how some friends responded to their tastes in women who were not aligned with traditional beauty standards. Women's beauty was off-limits for criticism, yet women's personality, especially if she was seen as abusive or destructive, was a criticism that was seen as fair. In other words men were happy to listen to their male peers' criticisms if they were based in concern for their mental and emotional welfare, which is more in line with a softer masculinity, than if they were being criticised for not aligning well with hegemonic masculine ideals.

Relationships with other men were often emotionally (horizontally) homosocial, rather than just structurally (vertically) homosocial (Hammarén and Johansson 2014), as is theorised in various works by Connell and Kimmel. The men in the study largely appreciated male emotional support, as has also been shown in studies by Anderson and McCormack on inclusive masculinities. This was particularly evident with the PUA community, which thrives on the idea of being a homosocial resource for men and it was thought it largely provided a rare space for some to discuss dating and body issues, although some subjects could not, it seemed, be broached and whole areas of potential

concern such as sexuality, sexual issues and romantic feelings were not incorporated into the training and were conspicuous by their absence.

In the interviews, it was found that men had various levels of concern about their interactions with other men, however, and, importantly, these concerns resulted in men experiencing a partial homosocial experience in that belonging is never fully achieved and was often laced with anxiety. Some were clearly homosocially insecure. The interviewees reported varying levels of ability to confide in their male friends. Homosocial influence was felt in part by lots of the men, for instance on the subject of dating a beautiful woman in order to bolster one's homosocial standing, some men noted that there was enjoyment to be had in gleaning respect from other men, yet they were clear however, that such enjoyment was secondary to the main reason they dated women, that they liked and were attracted to them. The context was also very important to such decisions, especially as many men felt such homosocial respect was more important when young and more enjoyable when male friends were trustworthy (and would not try to date the woman in question themselves). Although HMT does not require men to like each other, and it also relies on men being separated (in the form of the marginalisation of some men who are necessarily lower status in order to form comparison and hierarchy) it was found in this study at least that many men did not prioritise interactions with men nor hold hegemonic ideals, thus their experiences are more accurately described by Inclusive Masculinity Theory.

Women's beauty was much more often used for homosocial gain in the PUA community; indeed it was central to how these men understood dating success. PUAs were more impressed with a man who was able to date beautiful women and such skills were used to rate the men themselves. This was part of the PUAs' intriguing version of homosociality, which included arm's-length competition such as when PUAs boasted about their skills and achievements attained singularly whilst out in the field, without directly competing with each other with particular women or acknowledging competitive nature of PUA in the

community. This is because such acknowledgements would liken them to men outside of the community with whom PUAs felt less homosocial support.

In other areas there was a clear lack of homosocial influence that has been argued elsewhere. Unlike Bordo's (2000) arguments that men are mainly interested in other men's opinions about their penile size, it was found here that the interviewees did not mention importance of a flaccid size and did show some deep concerns about women's opinions of their penis, something that was corroborated by the sex workers interviewed. Although women were used to mitigate men's knowledge about theirs and other men's penises, which avoids the mention of other men (that may invoke homophobia) it was felt that shame potentially brought on by the effect of the female gaze was the main concern these heterosexual men had even though they rarely articulated this directly. There was safety felt in 'being average' even though the men claimed no knowledge about other men's penises, they did rely upon an idea of an objective average size, which implies some knowledge.

Overall, homosociality was not felt as a blanket or vertical support system that bolsters men's self esteem and standing in society, as has been argued by Rubin (1975) who believed that men largely viewed women as conduits to their own increased power. In this study men's relationships with other men was found to be far more complex and varying than such a theory could describe. Men often valued heterosocial interaction at least as much if not more highly than those with their male peers and showed a lot more respect for women and women's power, in general than such homosocial theories of the likes of Rubin and Kimmel incorporate.

Other aspects of hegemonic masculinity were ever present however, most notably men's focus on their own action and skill rather than on exploring any insecurities around women's power directly. The PUA culture was particularly guilty of this, which is interesting because men join in the community to overcome insecurities with women of which they are very cognisant and yet their feelings were never a focus. The use of

technical language and instruction was central in realigning men's focus away from their insecurities towards a more comforting, homosocially supported structure of instruction that provided certitude. Like the men's magazines that taught a 'sexual mode of production' (Rogers 2005), dating success was cut up into manageable modules that focused on men's skill. That dating is understood in these circles as something that can be successfully mastered, is meant to offer men confidence; men only failed at dating previously because they did not know the requisite knowledge (that they are just about to learn!) In reality, however, such certitude also encouraged anxiety because if all it takes is a certain skill set, then one should be very successful when one has learned it. Also one has to ask when certain subjects are given a wide berth, especially sexual competence, how this reinforces men's insecurities in these areas, whilst being part of an otherwise ostensibly homosocially supportive environment.

Consciousness and reflexivity with regard to emotional and bodily insecurities varied and were confused and constrained by concerns around discussing or comparing their bodies with those of male friends. Men's knowledge about their bodies is mediated by the media (pornography, *Men's Health*, etc.), and women, who are invoked as support or proof of their 'objective' standing, especially with reference to their penises, as just mentioned. Like women, men knew their faults and assets in a attractiveness market, yet the men in this study were more likely to report such 'faults' as not affecting their overall bodily enjoyment – a conclusion which was nonetheless questionable when probes revealed multiple concerns men had. Men framed their bodies and their experiences in ways that generally supported hegemonic masculine ideals even when they were being self-critical or talking about insecurities, because they focused on the active project of either changing or accepting their physicality as part of a broader life project. It was suspected that framing the body as part of a life project was a useful device in order to throw the sent away from any potentially feminising vanity, which was avoided in both of its guises, praise and criticism, for most men. This is in line with hegemonic masculinity theory, as is the omission of mentioning any concerns about the female gaze, which was conspicuous by its absence. Yet as Bordo (2000) noted, men are no longer physically invisible as they compete

with younger men in the workplace and face the reality of women's increased vocalisation of their sexual desires, they can no longer afford to perceive themselves as moving targets. The intricate manner in which men framed their 'objective' attractiveness was telling. The PUAs were taught that women 'don't want looks' and yet were also taught they needed to improve their appearance in order to improve their chances, this logic was justified by encouraging a focus on male activity, again. Women were rarely mentioned in the section of the interviews focused on the male body, the exception being about questions about the penis, as discussed above.

Men's need for women's approval is now understood to be more central to homosociality than previously considered in hegemonic theory, where it was merely peripheral (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). Women are more key to men's performance of masculinity than Kimmel, Lederer or Rubin appreciate because men fear not being strong or attractive enough for women, as well as fearing lack of homosocial respect. They fear losing face in front of both sexes, which is something these theorists all but deny. Elder, Brooks and Morrow's (2011) finding that homosociality, fear of homosexuality and the female gaze work together to police men's sense of gender identity can be supported. All three aspects inform men's masculine performances and therefore any theory of masculinity must incorporate how the female gaze affects men as well as the first two, which have been extensively researched. The interviews in this study show that both what men say and what they omit points towards considerable interest in women's opinions of them. Women are both a focus and an end result in PUA training, not just a conduit, which might be an easy mistake to make if one were to prioritise homosocial over heterosocial relations. How much men are cognizant of female power is one of the subjects we now turn to in the next chapter that focuses on how men perceive women.

8.0 – Men's Thoughts About Women

The aim of this chapter is to move from a discussion of men's understanding of men and their performance of masculinity towards each other to how men perceive women and how

such perceptions affect their masculine performance. While much of the data explores how these men experience women in dating relationships, how they experience women more generally is also touched upon. For instance, how far the interviewees understand women to have power in society is relevant to how they experience women to have power in dating relationships.

The varying ways in which the interviewees experience women will be explored in terms of three themes: in terms of *dating relations*, from their understandings of women's emotions to whether they perceive women to be understanding or supportive of men; in terms of *women's power*, their power in society, their power in the dating context and the importance of their physical attractiveness (and men's experience of the cultural manifestations of this); and finally, regarding men's *concerns about women* abusing their power, including women's control over men's likelihood of parenthood, female-instigated unwanted sexual experiences, and perceptions of female hostility and/or violence. Again, how men position themselves in response to their experiences as part of or outside of available discourses and gender stereotypes, as well as to changing types of masculinity, will be explored.

Sometimes there were marked differences between the dating men and the PUA respondents (usually around the expression of essentialist beliefs held by the PUAs). At other times there was less of a marked distinction. In such latter instances, the two groups of men are discussed together.

8.1 – Dating Relations

8.1.1 – Emotions and the Sexes

When asked if they thought one sex was more emotional than the other, or whether neither was more emotional, out of the men who answered relevantly (n =18), n=6 thought women were more emotional, n=7 thought women were more open about expressing their

emotions (but did not experience more emotion than men) and $n=5$ thought neither sex was more emotional. Nobody thought men were more emotional than women.

Of those who thought that women were more emotional than men, upon further questioning a few were more ambivalent than was first apparent, believing there to be exceptions where men were more emotional than women but that women were, on balance, the more emotional sex. Spencer felt women were definitely more emotional than men even though he saw himself as “a bit of a break from the norm. I’m more of a woman in that respect.” His ex-girlfriend used to joke that he was the woman in the relationship due to his readiness to express his emotions. Here, we can see the entrenched idea of female emotionality being something that Spencer has to place himself as an adjunct to, because the equivalent position for men is not available to him (see Hollway 1984).

When asked if the men agreed with the culturally prevalent idea that women are more emotionally intelligent than men, of the $n=16$ who answered relevantly, $n=8$ thought it was true, $n=7$ said it was not the case and $n=1$ was unsure. Of those who did think women had more emotional intelligence, Cheeko, a 33 year old man from Manchester felt it was definitely true that women had more emotional intelligence, even though he was conscious of spending a lot of his time as an ‘agony aunt’ for other people, again seeing himself in different terms to most men, without however changing his overall belief regarding masculinity and emotions. Eric, the 27-year-old Men’s Rights Activist, Richard and Justin, a 38-year-old, white, single, safety adviser from Lincolnshire, invoked the idea of a female instinct or a sixth sense for understanding people which men did not possess; such essentialised ideas were less prevalent than expected with the dating men, however.

Of the men who did not agree with the idea of higher female emotional intelligence, Stuart felt the idea was ridiculous and that there were enough examples of “women who cope with their emotions in ludicrous ways, the same way that men do” to disprove the idea. Similarly, David felt that women sometimes over-estimated their abilities to interpret people’s emotional states:

And the amount of times I've seen (Pause) women make exactly the same mistakes by completely misreading someone's state of mind and state of emotion, (Pause) and being completely convinced that they're completely right about that. (David)

Mark felt that both sexes feel emotions equally and this was synonymous with having emotional intelligence. He felt that he had more open conversations about his emotions with male friends when there were no women present; this response was unique.

When asked whether they thought women were more emotional than men or vice versa, or neither, $n=5$ of the PUAs felt women were more emotional than men and $n=5$ thought neither sex was intrinsically more emotional than the other. This even split wasn't entirely different from that of the dating men. There was however a far higher use of essentialist imagery and reasoning behind the PUAs' responses to the questions on emotional states of both genders than was evident with the dating men.

Women's emotions were also seen by some of the PUAs to be something to be concerned about because women were seen to have higher emotional intelligence and therefore could 'see through' a fake emotional performance, meaning that women's motivations could not be subject to knowledge, and therefore certainty, although the respondents tried to understand them. For instance, PUA Axl felt that men interpreted women's words literally, rather than paying attention to the emotional content 'behind' a woman's words. The former was something he felt he had learned not to do more recently with the help of the PUA community and had found women easier to understand as a result. There is a strange interplay between women positioned as having an emotional advantage and men needing to regain power here. The idea of reading behind a woman's words enables men to project their own interpretation of women's expressions onto them (for instance, No means Yes) yet, this is done consciously as a means not just of gaining security but of encouraging egalitarian behaviour (making the effort to understand women) and therefore arguably as part of a more inclusive masculine performance in which openness is appreciated.

Of the men who thought women were more emotional, PUA Mufasa thought men were more cerebral (not less emotional) than women. In his response, he annexed men's emotions in terms of frustration or annoyance, so as not to threaten their independence from a man's perceived intellectual capabilities. PUA James had some essentialist ideas about female emotions, which he justified by invoking scientific studies on human orgasms in order to achieve constructed certitude:

PUA James: Well, you know there is a saying about men think logic and women think with emotion. Which is partially supported by scientific data in fact, I'd say. Have you looked at – there's a couple of studies that measured FMRI scanning, functional MRI.

AA: Right.

PUA James: On women and on men during various states of arousal and orgasm and post-orgasm. And it turns out that the more a woman is aroused, the more of her entire cortex. When a woman has an orgasm, the entire cortex is involved in that. Which severely damages the logical capabilities.

AA: Yes, that's during sexual arousal. I mean, how does it compare to the normal everyday life?

PUA James: So –

AA: I don't know – how can anyone make a logical decision when you're in orgasm. (Laughter) Alright. So, yes. It would strike me as men as well as women.

PUA James: Strangely enough, a man could.

AA: Right.

PUA James: I mean, I suppose that nature would teach us to. You're having sex with a woman, do it as quickly as possible because a lion can turn around and eat you if you don't fight it.

The archetypal animal of prey is invoked here at a time of heightened sexual excitement and yet the calming role of cool-headed intellect is also imagined. Here men are perceived as all powerful and therefore able to reap multiple rewards (control, orgasm, respect), all of

which fit neatly into the PUA philosophy which aims to provide constructed certitude to men in the face of 'fickle' female behaviour.

Women were positioned as both emotional (dangerous) and emotionally intelligent (scary); for instance, PUA John, a 34-year-old white, divorced, senior finance systems analyst from London, felt that women had a greater mastery of emotions and this was a source of power for them:

Why oftentimes in a relationship, you'd see a man is completely subjugated because the woman has greater psychological insight. She has greater knowledge. She can, you know, push the buttons in his mind to make him do what she wants really ... It's just the way it is. And I think that being more emotional gives them a much greater understanding of the human psyche ... To get what they need. To control, you know – to control their man. (PUA John)

As with many of the PUA accounts, women are perceived to be something that needs to be brought under control if a man is not to be devoured by them. The double nature of misogyny is clear here: the men's controlling behaviour is defensive at root. In the above two sections, essentialist ideas about gender are, for once, a source of uncertainty and danger. Men may be able to fight lions with their rationality and bodily strength/libido, but women are the queens of the emotional sphere.

8.1.2 – Are Women supportive?

Despite having ambiguous feelings about women's emotions in relation to themselves, men did express appreciation of women's emotional support. When asked if they felt that their partners were supportive, the majority of the men felt that overall the women they had dated had provided a good amount of emotional support to them. Of the dating men, n=12 thought the women they dated were emotionally supportive, n=3 thought some but not all women that they dated were emotionally supportive, n=4 thought the women they dated were not emotionally supportive and n=1 man thought they hadn't been but that was because he did not ask or expect support (even though he was probably the man who

focussed most of his time on giving support to others). It was noticeable, however, that some of the men felt they could not share concerns with their partners but this stance was taken up mainly by men with little dating experience; perhaps such beliefs were part of the reason why such men found dating women to be difficult. For instance Eric felt a lot of men's concerns came from living up to women's ideals of masculinity, especially about not showing weakness.

Eric's concern about ideals of masculinity as an unemotional ideal was shared with PUA Axl, who felt a lot of pressure to conform to hegemonic masculine ideals, for fear of losing the interest of women:

If we say, "Yes. I am emotionally vulnerable," or, "I am – I feel bad," or, "I feel rejected. I feel – I feel low," our fear is that (Pause) they have no one to cling on to. So they will lose respect for us. And that they will – yes, they won't respect us or they won't – they won't – they won't even view men as men.
(PUA Axl)

Here PUA Axl desires a softer masculinity, where men can be candid about their fears, but he still defines men in terms of hegemonic ideals: "they won't even view men as men", meaning that although he focuses on women's desire for hegemonic men, he does not declare his own tendency to see men in a similar way.

8.1.3 – Do Women Understand Men?

When asked if they thought women understood men, n=2 of the dating men said yes, n=6 said no, n=5 felt that both sexes did not understand each other or were non-committal about women understanding men, and n=7 felt understanding relied on the individual, rather than being framed in terms of gender.

As with the emotional support section, women's mistaken assumptions about male emotional security and strength was a common theme. Of the n=7 men who did not think women understood men, Joel, a 27-year-old cohabiting, British white electronic

engineering researcher who at the time of interview lived in the Netherlands, felt men were more sensitive and insecure than women appreciated:

I think a lot of men are very insecure. Deep down. I think most people are insecure, deep down. I don't think that men show that very well ... And I think that's something which perhaps, you know – I've had male friends who have had (Pause) partners who joke at their expense a lot. And you realise that actually it gets them down quite a lot. But the woman just doesn't realise. She doesn't realise that actually that is getting the person down. (Joel)

He also noted that men are polarised in the media into very soft or very insensitive people, which he felt was unhelpful. Mike felt women understood men to a certain extent and yet he had reservations about how men developed emotionally and whether women understood men's development accurately:

(Pause) They – they expect that when boys grow into men and change in ways similar emotionally that – that takes place when girls grow into women. And this is a false assumption. When boys grow, they grow into big boys. They don't change emotionally as much as I think women do. (Mike)

Again, here is support for the benevolently sexist (Glicke & Fiske, 1997), idea that women are superior because of their 'innate' emotional intelligence. The image of the perennial boy, as in Kimmel's *Guyland* (2008) (see Introduction), is useful here to counteract this insecurity: men may not develop as much as women do, but they can be players and therefore unreliable, which is likely to upset women, meaning that, in this way, men can regain some power.

The men who thought the question was too general, or who stated that they thought understanding was relevant only to the individual and not gender, had some interesting thoughts. There was a sense of a script being missing for more inclusive men. When asked about media presentation of men, Alex felt men needed a representation of the less successful man's dating and work dilemmas in order to give men a representation of their own troubles on screen. Another cultural analogy used was Daryl's reference to Sue

Townsend's popular 1980's book about a teenage boy, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 ¾*. Daryl had re-read the book in adult life and felt that it was clear a woman had written it because it omitted the homosocial pressure key to a teenage boy's development. He describes the lead character as "feminine", yet simultaneously understood himself to be outside of the homosocial, hegemonic norm he feels the book omits.

The splitting of the sexes into male sexual drive and the have/hold discourses (Hollway 1984) was evident in much of the PUA men's thoughts on the state of male and female emotions and drives, much more so than was the case in the dating-men's responses. PUA John, felt women often believed men only wanted long-term, emotionally deep relationships, when men were actually merely motivated by sex. PUA Mufasa felt women did not know what men thought and, like PUA James, thought women interpreted male behaviour often in female terms. By this he meant women perceived men to be emotionally deeper than they actually were, when in reality men were only interested in sex and money, and ultimately only interested in money as a means to gain access to sex. This contradicts PUA Mufasa's account elsewhere where he says that he personally finds sex with a "real connection" to be preferable, although he was not looking for marriage or children, things he believed some women were wanting (he got married soon after interview, however). The have/hold discourse identified by Hollway (1984) is clearly of use to him to distance the threat of female connection; emotional involvement is the stuff of women, to be submitted to only when one has sown one's youthful wild oats.

In contrast, PUA Terry, a 23-year-old white, web developer from London also felt women did not know how nervous men could be and how much they often lack confidence with women, which was in opposition to the stereotype of the male sexual drive enabling men to override anxiety. Similarly, PUA Leon thought it was difficult for men to communicate with women because women could often assume that men had bad intentions, which was then something a man often had to disprove before he could be trusted.

8.2 – Female Power

8.2.1 – Women’s Success

To ascertain how the interviewees perceived women’s power in dating, I felt it was useful to ask them if they felt women were powerful in society at large. If men had a sensitivity to how they personally experienced women’s power in dating and they did not recognise women’s macro political and societal position of being disempowered in comparison to men, it could be argued that such men had an unrealistic perception of women’s real power status on both counts. When asked if they felt that women were successful in public life, out of the dating men, n=9 said women were successful, n=10 said women had partial success and 1 said women were not successful.

It can be said that of the men who thought women were successful, most noted considerable exceptions where women had not reached equality, especially along career lines. The areas in which they thought women excelled were sport, journalism, politics, the law, medicine, clothing, retail, sales and the media. Careers where women were less successful (stemming from men’s own experience in the workplace) were electrical engineering and the motor trade. A focus on female beauty and the commercial promotion of female domesticity in the media were also seen as problem areas for women. Many men mentioned pregnancy and motherhood as things which held women back from achieving equality. Their responses to this were though split between empathy and direct blaming of women for taking time out of their career whilst expecting equal pay. What was of interest, however, is that none of the men, empathetic or not, mentioned men’s responsibility in taking time out of their own careers to raise children.

Of the men who thought women had attained a degree of success in public life but as yet did not enjoy parity, some were nevertheless critical of women. George noted that women had some success, especially in politics, TV presenting and journalism, where he criticised some women for “only writing articles for women” and not for a ‘neutral’ audience. The one man who thought women were not successful, Daryl, thought they were often used as

tokens, especially in the media, which was still fixated on beauty to a large degree. He noted that although his workplace was largely female, the bosses were all men and while he said he related better to women, at the same time, in this study, he was one of their greatest critics. As mentioned previously, Kierski (2009) notes that men who work in female environments often develop more subtle means of performing their masculinity/power. In this case, Daryl was supportive of equality while remaining critical of individual women's performances. He felt women were sometimes naïve in that they believe female competitors at work to be more honourable to their own sex than they really are. It was interesting that some of the men who were most critical of women were the same group who spoke of egalitarian ideals. Knowledge about gender inequality did not necessarily lead to a genuine restructuring of the understanding of their own privilege.

Other men were more understanding of women's position however, asking for a restructuring of how we perceive success between genders. Victor noted the disparity in pay, and other societal structural impediments, which keep women on an unequal footing. He also mentioned men's social privilege, which no other men in this research did. Tim noted that success was often defined in traditionally male terms and this was something which needed to change if gender parity was to be achieved, since he saw female family members as successful at building a family and gaining an education, rather than in career terms.

The n=9 PUAs who answered the question about whether they felt that women were successful in public life these days responded with more accounts of women's public success than the dating men. PUA Terry felt women were more equal and confident these days and that some women were bringing their male sons up to exhibit a softer type of masculinity. He had experienced problems personally in this regard, yet he did not criticise his mother for his issues with masculinity but focused instead on his father's culpability. Similarly, he had no issues with taking orders from his female boss. There was therefore a disjuncture between his political beliefs and his dismay at his inclusive upbringing.

PUA Dumervil felt women had historically been seen in a negative light and cited lads' magazines as an example of where women were put on a pedestal, but felt that this was changing. He felt, mirroring the PUA philosophy that men are able, through adopting PUA techniques, to 'regain' some power which had been lost by rating women so highly. Throughout the PUA interviews, physical attributes such as female beauty, male testosterone and childbirth were used as reasons as to why power between the genders differed, and often as explanations of why this was seen to be fair, with female beauty being an exception.

Although some PUAs did understand the gender-inequality debate, women's ease in entering nightclubs was sometimes given as a concrete example of positive discrimination and, as always with the logic of PUA, it was considered singularly, rather than as part of a larger gender order which largely positively discriminated in favour of men. PUA Tony was the only one to cite a positive effect of female emancipation experienced by men: that of shared economic responsibility in the household. PUA Robert described women as cultural consumers and as trendsetters men followed, so women were perceived to have power by many of the PUAs.

8.3 – Men's Responses to Female Physical Attractiveness

The questions in this section centred on men's reactions to experiencing attractive women in three ways: men's tastes in potential partners in comparison to their male peers'; men's reactions to female beauty in the media; and whether or not men perceive women to gain power through being attractive. I was interested to see how men positioned themselves within the discourses on feminine physical attractiveness, and on the relationship between their own personalised aesthetic tastes and the standardised type of beauty praised in the media.

8.3.1 – Personal Tastes

When asked if they had an ideal woman or when asked to describe as nearly as possible what attributes they look for in a potential mate, all the dating men and n=5 out of n=10 PUAs responded initially with descriptions of personality traits they found desirable. In many instances the men only responded with physical descriptions of potential partners when prompted. Similarly, when discussing beautiful women in the media, only one from either group of interviewees directly criticised the looks of the women in a video they were shown. The men contrasted their own taste to those of their male peers' ideal women, who invariably were described physically. This may be a result of the interviewees seeing (or presenting) themselves as less of a 'regular guy' than their friends (as mentioned in the homosociality section previously), something also present in discussions around typical male media use. One exception was PUA John, who felt his peers had distorted ideas about female sexuality based on too few interactions with women and too much masturbation to images of and their own fantasies about unobtainable models. He was unsure whether their bravado was covering up for their insecurities.

Although the men claimed not to be primarily interested in physical attributes when choosing an ideal woman, there was a tendency to view beautiful women as more formidable than plain women, regardless of the respondents' own personal tastes, and there was considerable reticence expressed about the idea of approaching an attractive woman in both sets of interviewees. When asked if they would approach an extremely attractive woman who was sitting in their local social venue alone, of the dating men who answered relevantly (n = 13), n=4 said they would approach, n=4 said they might approach and n=5 said they would not approach. Of the n=9 PUAs who answered relevantly, n=4 said that they would approach the woman, n=4 said they wouldn't and n=1 said he might approach a very attractive woman. Indeed some PUAs deliberately choose 'less attractive' women at the beginning of their training to 'practise' on. Very attractive women were also seen as unapproachable because the men had concerns about how often the women were approached; they did not want to appear either as a pest or as a 'loser' in comparison to other men who had more to offer.

When analysing the language used, it emerged that the respondents reacted to feminine beauty by utilising traditionally respected positions of authority, which were aligned with hegemonic masculinity, with the exception of a few who expressed direct insecurity about female beauty. It transpired throughout, however, that many of the men had deep and widespread insecurities around their experiences of female beauty, especially around their own relative state of attractiveness to women. There therefore appeared to be a disconnect between feelings of insecurity and how they adopted various authoritarian guises.

8.3.2 – The Power of Female Physical Attractiveness

The issue of female attractiveness and its relationship to gendered power has been the subject of much academic discussion, and for feminists is a relationship which should be framed as part of a wider discourse on women's lack of power relative to men (Mulvey 1975; Nochlin 1971; Betterton 1996; Wolf 1990). This is in contrast to how beauty has been perceived by some masculinist writers who perceive female attractiveness as a genuine source of power which moves men. In his book *The Myth of Male Power*, Warren Farrell refers to men's "addiction to female sexual beauty" (Farrell 1994, 311) as being something men need to wean themselves from. The aim of this question was to ascertain how the interviewees themselves described their positioning: as straightforward consumer of female beauty; as 'addicted' victim; or in any other position.

Some PUAs did speak of enjoying female beauty as part of a discourse of addiction, or of being out of control, such as when PUA Axl describes seeing a beautiful woman in a video as:

... a huge dose of artificial sugar to the man's sexual brain. We crave it and when it's given to us in its more artificial, refined form, we are hooked. We then expect girls to be sexy all the time, the great dress and high heels. (PUA Axl)

PUA Axl sees female attractiveness as "artificial sugar", which feeds a biologically determined male "sexual brain", in a "refined form", all in line with the PUA philosophy of

gender essentialism. Female beauty is seen as unnatural in relation to male authenticity. His use of both the medical and male sexual drive discourses (Hollway 1984) reinforces the idea of men's lack of choice in responding to beauty, and lack of responsibility too. Yet PUA Axl continues to critique men's sexist response towards women. For him, men are 'naturally' attracted to such sugar, and therefore are without blame, yet they respond to the sugary stimuli in socially unacceptable ways, which is blameworthy: "We then expect girls to be sexy all the time, the great dress and high heels." This positioning ultimately allows him to feel less guilt since he chastises himself before others have a chance.

PUA Tony says that approaching a '10' (as per the PUA 1-10 rating of female beauty) post PUA training would involve some hesitation on his part. He describes a conscious decision to delay the approach in order to overcome his initial emotional reaction to the sight of the woman:

I just wouldn't approach it at this stage now just straight away. I'd still need to just recruit myself. Whilst before, [pre PUA training] I probably never would have. No matter how much I drank. Now I don't need to drink. I just need to just gather my thoughts and then approach. (PUA Tony)

He describes 'recruiting' himself as consciously taking time out to allow his excitement to fade:

... you have like such a high and such an adrenalin rush and you first got to like calm all your like adrenalin so that you can think properly... to settle so you are back human, for want of a better word. Then when you do go, you can finally pay attention to her. (PUA Tony)

There is a sense of an out-of-body experience in his account, again using imagery of drug use ("such a high") and also of being an animal: "to settle so you are back human, for want of a better word." All of these terms are part of the male sexual drive discourse, which sees men's attraction to women as uncontrollable. Rationality is an aim but not one desired in order to control the woman, but to respect her, as part of a more modern inclusive style of gender relations ("Then when you do go, you can finally pay attention to her"), and to

distance himself from other sexist men, as well as feel his mind is controlling his own body: 'to recruit himself'.

When asked whether the women in the video gained power, lost power, or neither, by accentuating their attractiveness, of the n=16 who answered relevantly, n=11 said they gained power, n=2 said they neither gained nor lost power and n=3 gave partial answers. None said the women lost power. N=4 of the dating men felt women used power gained by their attractiveness not on men but to compete with other women in order to position themselves in a female hierarchy. PUA John felt that critiques of the use of female beauty in the media "view it through the lens of male power" – interestingly, a lens he seemingly does not share himself.

Female beauty could also be experienced as seriously troublesome. Mike felt discomfort in meeting attractive women because he had experienced a negative situation where a student at the university he was teaching at had used her beauty in an attempt to gain a favourable mark:

Well, you know, being a lecturer at a university, there are young – young beautiful women, you know, taking my courses. And I – I'm always (Pause) – I like to think of myself as professional. No matter who you are, no matter if you're female or how you look or how much you weigh or whatever, everyone gets my attention. But there have – there has been – I mean, there's been a few occasions where very attractive students have clearly tried to use their (Pause) beauty and charm to get things from me. To get (Pause) a better grade, or to get more time to, you know, submit an assignment or whatever. And these situations have made me feel very uncomfortable ... And (Pause) I've (Pause) – especially one – one – especially one occasion, I – I – I was shaken by it because it was so – it was so explicit that she like – like, you know, come to me in a way that clearly sent a message. And I didn't – I – I really didn't want to – I wanted her to – to (Pause) – I referred her to a different teacher. To someone else. I didn't want to be involved in anything where someone would get – where I would give even an inch of something to someone because they are attractive and they sent you a signal. (Mike)

Mike relays his political beliefs in a clear and concise manner – “No matter who you are ... everyone gets my attention” – right up until the point where he mentions the incident with the specific student, upon which his speech is fractured by hesitation. He is clearly torn between a carnal urge and a desire to remain professional: “And I didn’t – I – I really didn’t want to – I wanted her to – to (Pause) ...” His response is to remove himself from the temptation: “I referred her to a different teacher. To someone else.” This is far from the traditional teacher/student dyad where the teacher is the authority. It is also far from the ‘older male/younger female’ pairing script where the man can rely upon his economic and societal advantage. Mike feels vulnerable in this situation; he is aware that the student has the power to damage his professional reputation as well as his successful marriage, whether he takes her up on her offer or not, hence his distancing himself entirely from her; he neither trusts her nor himself. He is vulnerable both to her as a potential complainant and to her as a potential seductress.

8.3.3 – The Commercial Use of Female Physical Attractiveness

In response to watching the Beyoncé video, only n=6 of the n=19 dating men mentioned the beauty of the women being the main attraction of it, although all the men had something to say about the role of female beauty in their experience of the video. There was a lot more distress expressed with regard to the perceived economic exploitation of men’s desire for beautiful women in the media than in the men’s own dating lives (by women manipulating them). Importantly, few of the men saw themselves as straightforward happy consumers of female beauty. Even the men who saw themselves primarily as consumers were sceptical about the level of power they possessed as those at whom the product was aimed. Eric, like others, was critical of the video and the manipulation of himself as intended audience participant who was willing to pay for such a product:

Eric: But I do think they were – I do think that the dancing was more or less
– I saw it as a marketing ploy.

AA: Okay.

Eric: So in that regard, it was aimed at men. It was aimed at men that way. But I don't think they were trying to pleasure me or anything like that. I just think they were trying to get me to pay attention to their song so that if I'd watched – so that I'd watch it again and again and then hopefully (Pause) develop a liking for it and then I'd go and buy it.

When questioned about whether they felt themselves to be the intended audience of the Beyoncé video, many felt that women were the intended recipients. Of the $n=18$ dating men who answered the question, one thought the women were performing for them and the other $n=17$ thought they were performing for various others, such as younger people (especially younger women), other men or a more general audience. Four of the men thought the women were performing for themselves. Of the $n=7$ PUAs who answered this question relevantly, $n=3$ felt Beyoncé was performing primarily for men. Of the rest, $n=2$ felt she was performing for women and the final $n=2$ felt she was performing for either a crowd or the music industry. That many of the men perceived women to be the intended audience of the video was possibly caused in part by the call to women at the beginning of the song, “all the single ladies”, which is repeated seven times at the outset. However, this was rarely mentioned by any of the men as the reason why they felt they were not the intended audience. The men's responses were varied but the lyrical content regarding the desire for Beyoncé to get married and the sexualised performance signalled it to be a female-orientated song for many. There emerged a distinct theme of male exclusion from the perceived intended viewer, as has been found elsewhere (Stuart & Donaghue 2012).

Tim felt the main intended audience was female yet, due to the sexual nature of the video, men were indirectly affected. He expressed feelings of being both included and simultaneously excluded:

I found it very hard not to watch, and not to listen. But I certainly didn't think that she was talking directly to me, although I am quite aware of the fact that it's probably indirectly aimed at men. I guess that can't – I don't know, well it can be avoided. But I think for a lot of that kind of music video, that's why – why they're maybe – that sort of sex sells kind of thing. I feel that that kind of video is made to get as much attention to it as possible and after my experience of not being able to take my eyes away from it for the first

viewing, then I think that kind of [?] that I think (Laughter) – I don't personally think it was written for me. (Tim)

He refers to sex in economic terms, as selling to an 'indirect' audience, which does not include him yet to which he vicariously belongs because he did find it alluring nonetheless. The perceived audience is generic and un-gendered "as much attention to it as possible ...". He sees such media as powerful, almost worrying – "I don't know, well it can be avoided" – as though he is conscious of companies who try to manipulate his sexual desires. The result is confusion in his position: "But I certainly didn't think that she was talking directly to me, although I am quite aware of the fact that it's probably indirectly aimed at men."

PUA John felt that the video was an expression of women's desire to possess a man: I think (Pause) – I think the intended audience are women. I think that was aimed at women to feel empowered about their sexuality and about their inherent need to possess a man. You know? I think it's by women, for women. Yes. But, as a man, yes, I fully appreciate the sexuality on display. (PUA John)

He is able to access Beyoncé's sexuality 'vicariously' through what he sees as the female gaze, both for pleasure but also as a means to define his masculine identity: "Yes. But, as a man, yes, I fully appreciate the sexuality on display." This is, he feels, a world of women "by women, for women". They are seen as threats in their need to possess a man: women, it seems, are both needy and troublingly powerful.

Some men were critical of their position with reference to women's beauty when it formed part of a commercial/media product. It was interesting however that the men responded in different ways, from nonchalance or minimising of female beauty; criticism of apparent female power, to outright anger.

Sometimes when an interviewee claimed that the video left no real impression, the women's beauty was contextualised in a similar manner, as though the women's effort to entertain the viewer through sexual display was intentionally unacknowledged. Similarly, women's time-consuming beauty-regime efforts were also disavowed. Their beauty was

understated by placing it at the end or among a list of other attributes. Of the video, Bryan felt: “It doesn’t really do that much for me to be honest. (Pause) Three pairs of nice legs. Lyrics did absolutely sod all for me to be honest.”

Daryl equated the dancers’ attractiveness with whether he felt their performance was aimed at him. Because he said that he did not find them attractive, he did not feel it was aimed at him, as though their aim had failed, rendering the women’s technique more apparent. This is reminiscent of a study conducted by Vaes et al (2011) where responses from 85 participants aged 18 to 31 showed that men only sexually objectified the images of women they were shown when they were attracted to them, regardless of whether or not the images were framed as objectified (sexual) or personalised (non-sexualised) images. Attraction, the researchers suggested, triggers objectifying perceptions in men (but not in women), probably relative to men’s increased power position. In this study, Joel felt more strongly that the use of sex to sell videos was “lazy” and this highlighted his dislike for the music. He did not find Beyoncé personally attractive and it would be interesting to see whether his perception of this laziness would change if he did.

When PUA James was asked about female beauty in relation to the video, he replied: “they’re not looking bad. It does not faze me one way or the other”, thus minimising the effect on him of the women’s looks in the video. He then tells of the situation where he sees himself as helping women over their obsession with their own beauty by not admitting its power:

When I think that a girl is playing up her beauty too much, I say. You know what? I’m helping her. Under all that beauty there’s a far more interesting person hiding underneath. (PUA James)

PUA James here uses the concept of women’s emancipation for his own gain: the denial of a woman’s beauty is presented not in terms of his interest and power but of his egalitarian efforts. Elsewhere, mirroring the PUA philosophy, he admits that being rejected by beautiful women is more difficult because there is more at stake, despite the fact that,

logically, it should be the reverse: if one can't attract an average-looking woman that could arguably reflect on one's own attractiveness more damningly than not achieving interaction with a much more sought-after woman. This possibly reflects his projection of a self-image that should be able to attract the best looking women and, when one can't, rejections are a damning reminder that such a perception is fantastical.

As mentioned, for the men interviewed, the position of being a consumer of female attractiveness/sexuality was far from an unproblematic one. They saw either the women in the videos or the businesses behind them as in control of them. The same was true of other businesses which sell female attractiveness. Of the men who answered questions on lap dancing ($n = 16$), $n=7$ had been to a lap-dancing club at least once and $n=9$ had never been to one. When the dating men were asked how they perceived power relations in lap-dancing clubs between the owner, dancer and customer, and whether the relationship was hierarchical or reciprocal, $n=14$ of the men answered in the formations below. All but two saw the power relationship to be largely hierarchical. No one thought the male customer to be the most powerful party:

- Four thought the owner had most power, in second place came the dancer, then the customer
- Three thought the owner had most power, then came the dancer and customer in joint second place
- One thought the owner or dancer had most power, leaving the customer last
- Two thought all three shared power equally
- One thought the owner had most power, then the interviewee was unsure of whether the dancer or customer was the second most powerful

- One thought either the owner had the most power with the customer second and the dancer last, or the dancer had the most power with the owner in second place and the customer last, depending on whether it was a club that empowered the dancers
- One wasn't sure of power relations
- Six left the question unanswered

Daryl relayed how he felt while receiving a lap dance and how differently he felt once it had ended:

There was a girl in there that was absolutely my type. And everyone else was kind of off. So I thought, "Right. I'm going to do it. I'm going to have a dance." And (Pause) it was – it was very odd. It was really odd. Because there's (Pause) – I mean, it is – this is a really attractive woman with an amazing body getting everything out and I am very visually stimulated. And rubbing herself against me. Probably in a way that was against the (Laughter) rules of the club. And probably the rules of the local council. And so I was immensely turned on. And I had – you know, I was massively hard. And at the same time, there's part of my brain going, "This is an artifice. This isn't real. This is – this is an illusion." And of course, as soon as the music stops and she's like, "Right," and turns round and goes off and you think, "What was that? What have I actually put myself through there?" And that kind of – it was – it was kind of – yes, so it was a bit of a weird thing. And I thought, "Do you know, I don't think I can come in a lap-dancing bar again." I don't think that would be – I don't think I would feel right doing it. You know, there's – I think there's a very – I've had a friend who has done lap dancing and she was very much sold on the empowerment myth. That, you know, she was in control and it was all about her. Whereas at the same time, I was thinking, "No. It's someone giving you £20 to show them your fanny. (Daryl)"

Here a novice to the lap-dancing environment is grappling with learning the behavioural boundaries of the lap-dance experience. He relives the moment, changing to the present tense as he describes the dance in some detail – "I am very visually stimulated" – and he is clearly affected by what he sees as a rejection of himself by the dancer as she moves on after the dance: "What was that? What have I actually put myself through there?" He then

becomes aware of himself as part of an economic exchange in which fairly intense intimacy is sold in small doses: "This is an artifice. This isn't real. This is – this is an illusion." In response to her 'rejection', which results in him feeling "weird", his interest turns to the moral: "Do you know, I don't think I can come in a lap dancing bar again. I don't think that would be – I don't think I would feel right doing it." And finally he adopts the position of 'judge', not only of the dancer herself but of a female friend too: "I've had a friend who has done lap dancing and she was very much sold on the empowerment myth. That, you know, she was in control and it was all about her. Whereas at the same time, I was thinking, 'No. It's someone giving you £20 to show them your fanny.'"

Daryl deals with his perceived lack of power in comparison to the dancer by reverting to the hegemonic male scripts available to him; he can judge her and question the morality of the event, yet clearly he positions himself as a victim in this particular situation in all but words. Such a confession would result in loss of face. He is more concerned with the woman's power than the power that the club represents since he positions all his responses around her and her representative, the female friend. The "weird" clash of intimacy/consumerism is noted at the point of the woman's cessation of the intimate act, which then leads to his linking it back to an economic framing, not vice versa. He responds by appearing to want to do his bit to 'save' women from such clubs by vowing not to attend them in the future, a response which sits neatly within an ambivalent sexist framework (Glicke & Fiske 1997), in which he, as a consumer and then as a moral commentator, is also implicated.

Some men commented on the perceived incongruity between Beyoncé asking for commitment while simultaneously appearing sexualised, and felt clear about their judgement on the subject in comparison to Beyoncé's seeming confusion. For Steve all sexual images were ultimately for the male gaze and the only room left for women to stake a claim on their representation was to refuse to be sexualised. He cited singer Janelle Monae as an example of a woman who dressed modestly and therefore he felt it followed that she was more in control of her artistic expression than other female artists who wore

provocative clothing, even those considerably more commercially successful such as Beyoncé. For him, sexual imagery of women, although thought of as understandably something women would want to bring under their own control and interpretation by Steve, is a “risk” that sexualised women take in a business that is moving fast and therefore hard to grip. For him, a female desire to behave sexually and to be respected simultaneously was an aim that was unrealistic and he believed the “central tenet that interpretation is male, therefore what you do as a female can only go so far. Even if it is helping to – to – to shatter some boundaries. The other problem is, it just – it rings hollow. It rings hollow.” A woman’s claim to emancipation cannot be defined in new ways that challenge ambivalent sexism in a world long defined by men, lest it rings hollow.

PUA Axl showed a certain amount of frustration with the omnipresence of images of beautiful women used in marketing: “It’s like a putting steak on my table that you can’t have.” A number of men expressed feeling disempowered towards women in relation to their own looks. Daryl said that seeing a beautiful woman made him feel angry because it reminded him of his relative position in the dating scene: “She was so beautiful that it actually made me slightly angry.” PUA Axl comments upon the PUA community’s 1 to 10 system for scaling female beauty and agreed this was often used as a means of justifying not approaching a woman by claiming she is not good enough. Rating women, however, also caused anxiety in relation to a man’s rating of himself:

At the moment I’m trying to get rid of this stupid scale between 0 and 10 or whatever it is. It’s sort of shooting yourself in the foot. As soon as you say, “That girl is a 10,” then that means internally you have put her at such a high value that you are playing sort of a losing mating game – she’s looking down on you. So, yes. Realistically, at the moment, yes. I would find a 10 much more harder to approach than an 8. But I’m trying to – yes. This PUA stuff is not like the normal world. The PUA thing totally breaks what you’ve been told by society so you don’t even know what the model is anymore because you are breaking it all the time. You are breaking yourself. You’re doing stuff that you’ve never done. And then maybe you sort of find something yourself. I’m trying to break that 10-scale at the moment. Yes. (PUA Axl)

The 10-scale is part of himself: "You are breaking yourself." He sees himself in terms of something which needs to be broken and rebuilt in order to be capable of approaching and successfully dating a woman he finds attractive as part of a life project. PUA Axl is trying to make himself a '10', something he already finds out of reach: "I would find a 10 much more harder to approach than an 8. But I'm trying to."

8.3.4 – Women as Intimidating

When asked whether the dating men found women, men, or neither sex more intimidating, n=12 thought women were, n=1 didn't and n=7 thought neither sex was more intimidating than the other.

Of the men who thought women were more intimidating, 'approach anxiety' was often mentioned. Anthony noted that making first contact was an uncomfortable experience as he felt he could not read the woman's mind or body language and he feared experiencing a fiery response from a woman:

If you kind of get met with this cold front, that can be absolutely daunting. Because, you know, you spend the whole time – you're thinking, "Well, she's thinking she's just better than me? Is she looking at me and thinking, "What the hell?" You know, "What's going on in her mind?" Because you don't know, and you can't read the facial expressions. You can't pick up on the body language about what they're thinking and what they're doing. And that can be – that really can be intimidating. It's like trying to scale a mountain sometimes. (Anthony)

Tim noted that men reacted to feelings of intimidation in relation to women by changing their own masculine performance:

... when I've felt intimidated by women, for whatever reason, be it a teacher who is telling me off when I was younger. Or (Pause) being scared of a break up or something like that. I've sort of been able to come to terms with the fact that in the back of my mind, somewhere in there, I'm absolutely terrified by women. And I don't seek to control them to (Pause) sort of (Pause) get over

that. But more now, especially, sort of try and understand and sort of (Pause) not – not dominate really. I think a lot of men compensate for this not being able to understand women. Like women are from Venus and men are from Mars kind of thing. This huge difference, these cultural differences that have been hammered into us over the time. (Tim)

Similarly, Tomas felt that some of his male friends felt threatened by women who were powerful and this made him question their self-confidence:

I think some guys find powerful women hard to deal with strong [?] And I always find it very strange to see these guys go out with women who are clearly you know, intellectually not their equals. Who are not very interesting. Not necessarily very assertive. I can only assume that's because they find assertive, interesting women less attractive or less appealing. (Tomas)

Of the men who thought both women and men could be equally intimidating, Victor felt that same-sex groups were intimidating to the opposite sex. Bryan felt that it was a person's size and not their gender that rendered them intimidating and so he saw intimidation as gender neutral (even though men are more often larger).

Interestingly, one interviewee thought that a man's class played an important part in whether or not he found women intimidating. Spencer, who reported usually being confident with women, notes that this confidence wasn't something he always had; it had increased when he perceived his living situation to change from one of middle to working class:

Spencer: I mean, I'm from a – I'm from a – well, quite well-off as a child. You know, I had private school and that. And then now I live on a council estate. And I'd say it's different. The wealthier you are, the more intimidated you are by women. Whereas the less well-off you are, the more cocky and arrogant you can be. And the more confidence you have. So I – you know, less [?], the less intimidated. So for the latter half of my growing up, teenage years, you know, it was all council estate. And all my mates now, they would all go up to a girl and chat her up without even batting an eyelid.

- AA: That's interesting. Why do you think that is?
- Spencer: I think it's all about you get taught about respect and privacy and whatnot. And you know, politeness. And it's all drilled into you when you are in private education. And I think when you are at state school, it's fucking fight for yourself. You know. It's one rule for us. Another rule for them. We'll do what we want. It's – there's just a totally different ball game.
- AA: What sort of things were you taught about women when you were at your private school?
- Spencer: (Pause) I suppose to respect them all and be nice and kind and (Pause) loving and that sort of genre. But as I've grown up, I realise that's mainly a load of bollocks. (Laughter)
- AA: Right.
- Spencer: Because you do that and, you know, a woman would generally think you're a bit of a wet blanket.
- AA: Right.
- Spencer: You know, you'll get walked over. (Pause) I've learned that...
- AA: ... Because normally, people would say that, you know, the one with the more money, the one with more opportunity in life, would be more confident. So you're actually saying the opposite. That's quite interesting.
- Spencer: Yes. When it comes to women. Yes. I would say. You know, the well-off person, they'll have more confidence in other aspects of their life. You know, they could deal with talking to the bank, getting a house, this, that and the other. And, you know, running a company and whatnot. Whereas someone down on the council estate would find stuff like that more intimidating, definitely. Yes, so there's other areas of confidence that, you know, being well off will benefit you in.

Here working-class masculinity is seen as a bonus, but whether this is because women prefer 'rough diamonds' or whether he feels he just has more confidence because of an upbringing that involved having to "fight for yourself", is open to question. Is it female appreciation or a lack of male sensitivity that is the advantage here? "The wealthier you

are, the more intimidated you are by women ... a woman would generally think you're a bit of a wet blanket."

A popular theme with the PUAs was that women per se weren't so intimidating, but powerful or beautiful ones were, perhaps invoking the homosocial rating of women in the PUA community. When asked whether he ever found women intimidating, PUA James, as with other sensitive questions, did not answer from a personal perspective but on behalf of other men. He felt that a lot of men he had spoken to could find women's body language in front of their friends extremely intimidating because they found it difficult to interpret and therefore did not know how to deal with it. PUA Mufasa felt that strong women who were extremely attractive would have intimidated his pre-PUA self, although he never felt physical intimidation from women. He still felt intimidated when he saw a beautiful or rich woman but now framed his approach in terms of overcoming his insecurities as a form of a challenge that motivates him: "If I do see an intimidating woman, I feel the need to approach her." PUA Robert also found young women who "grew up in council estates (Laughter) and have a lot of attitude," to be intimidating. Similarly, PUA John was aware of being intimidated by hen parties, so groups of women were noted as sometimes intimidating.

8.4 – Concerns about Women

8.4.1 – Women's Fertility Power

Within feminist discourse, the subject of contraception is often discussed in terms of the unfairness of it often being a woman's responsibility or in terms of the difficulty getting men to wear condoms (Gavey 2005; Gavey, McPhillips & Doherty 2001; Schick, Zucker, Bay-Cheng 2008). While these concerns are important, what is omitted is men's common reality that a woman can hold the power to make a man a father, regardless of his wishes (and to terminate a pregnancy too). The opposite side to the 'responsibility coin' is therefore women's power, or freedom, to choose their parental future.

The most common pattern for contraception use among the men interviewed was for both condom and pill use; this was true for 13 of the men. This usually manifested itself as men choosing to use a condom for short-term relationships and for there to be a transition to pill use with long-term girlfriends. After such a transition, men are vulnerable to the possibility of a woman ceasing to take the pill without informing them.

Most men in this study were concerned on some level that women might lie about contraceptive use. N=10 men expressed such a fear, n=7 said they did not fear such unwanted pregnancies, and n=2 gave ambivalent answers, n=1 did not answer. The 2 ambivalent men were interesting. Victor said he did not fear it because he always protected himself by using a condom and Spencer said he tried not to think about such a concern because he found it too scary; both responses imply fear. On the whole, STIs were cited as a reason for wearing condoms but pregnancy prevention was still prominent in the men's thinking. The questions around pregnancy were one area that was researched later in the interview cycle, which happened after the PUA interviews were completed, meaning the PUA men were not asked them.

The men's concerns varied in intensity. Some were concerned about pregnancies in extra-marital affairs: Tim "used to be completely paranoid" about unwanted pregnancy when younger since his friends had experienced pregnancy scares and his parents were particularly conservative about sex. Bryan's concern was linked to a male friend's experience of a partner not taking the pill in order to become pregnant. Tom used condoms even if a girlfriend was on the pill for protection against pregnancy, Eric's fear was linked to his anti-abortion beliefs.

Justin deliberately chose women as partners who could not have children or who had completed their families and therefore would not be a risk:

AA: Is there any reason for that? You just happen to like older women?
Or is that one for the reasons why you like older women?

Justin: No. That's one of the reasons I like older women because I personally do not want any children of my own.

Tomas was the only man to mention the possibility of having unknown numbers of children and this was something he felt sad about. He had also feared that his ex-wife was planning to get pregnant to keep him from leaving the relationship. Daryl said he had experienced a similar situation and took precautions:

(Pause) I haven't – I think we both knew it was coming to an end. And I think she was looking for excuses to stay in my life. (Pause) Perhaps I was being paranoid. But I (Pause) – I then made up excuses about why I should have to wear condoms. I said that I was sore and X, Y and Z. And, yes, I'm not proud of myself for that particularly actually. (Pause) But I did think at that point, "Yes, she might." (Tomas)

Others were far more accepting. Stuart felt that trusting women came easily for him. Richard felt that if a long-term partner got pregnant, it would be just "one of those things" and he would be able to adjust to the fact of becoming a father. Joel and Steve both said that they had always experienced trusting relationships in which they did not feel the need to question the women's integrity.

8.4.2 – Unwanted Sex

I was interested in this study in whether and how often the interviewees reported experiencing unwanted sex – consensual or non-consensual – and if such experiences changed their future behaviour towards women. If the men experienced unwanted sex and did not take precautions to prevent similar events in the future, this could be resultant from men's self-confidence in their relatively larger physiques and/or gendered selves. Alternatively, they may be overly concerned about how resisting unwanted sex affected their self-beliefs and the beliefs of others regarding their masculinity; such concerns could have an inhibiting effect on men's likelihood to take precautions were they to be prioritised.

Gavey states in *Just Sex?: The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape* that “just like ballroom dancing, natural sex is initiated and controlled by men” (Gavey 2005, 212). This representation of men as fully autonomous sexual agents who control all sexual activity is not reflected in the findings of studies about female-perpetrated sexual abuse of both men and boys (for instance, Dube et al 2005; NISVS Summary Report 2010:19 & 24; Fiebert & Tucci 1998), nor was this found to be the case in this study, which presents examples of men’s ambivalence, reluctance and occasional resistance to sexual advances by women.

Between a coveted hegemonic masculine ideal a man is striving for and a possible reluctant ‘inner’ reality, there is room for much dissonance. A man may feel distanced from his genuine desires; he may feel anger at his socialisation; he may lose respect for the female object of desire because that desire is not genuine; he may focus on a fear of being perceived as weak, by both men and women. Of the men who said they had not experienced unwanted sexual demands by women PUA Mufasa responded negatively and added “like, genuine, do any men say ‘yes’ to this? It’s no, no. (Laughter).”

Our attitudes to men’s sexual consent are emblematic of myths around the male sexual drive and constitute what are known as ‘male rape myths.’ In *Myths about Male Rape: A Literature Review*, Turchik and Edwards (2012) list the popular myths: that men can’t be raped; that men can defend themselves successfully against rape; that only gay men are victims or perpetrators of rape; men are not as emotionally affected by rape as women; women cannot perpetrate against men; men only get raped in prisons; if a man is raped by another man, he becomes homosexual; that homosexual or bisexual people deserve to be sexually assaulted; if a man gets an erection during an assault, he must have consented.

The last myth is particularly prevalent. It is commonly thought that a man must be sexually aroused in order for him to achieve an erection. Sarrel and Masters, (1982) note “men can experience sexual arousal due to touch stimulation or strong emotional reactions, such as fear, even when they do not have any psychological desire for a female initiator” (Sarrel & Masters 1982, cited in Anderson & Struckman-Johnson 1998, 11). They found women using

“manual stimulation and a knife pressed against his scrotum to force the man to have erections ... And acts of manual and oral stimulation of the penis.” (Ibid) All of which resulted in men’s penises becoming erect.

Of the dating men interviewed for this study, n=4 had experienced non-consensual sexual acts with women (two as children), n=12 had not experienced non-consensual sex with a woman, however a further n=7 had experienced unwanted but consensual sex.

At what could be described as the softer end of the consent spectrum, examples of unwanted but consensual sex included having sex through boredom, which was later regretted; having ‘addictive’ sex with women who they perceived as ‘emotionally damaging’; having sex with ‘unattractive’ women; having pragmatic sex with a woman with whom the man knew he was just about to end the relationship; having sex with a stranger which was later regretted; having sex when tired or drunk; or engaging in sex acts that the man did not enjoy. All of these were reported to be manageable experiences and some of the men did talk to their friends about them. Many women will recognise themselves in many of the above situations too.

In general, the dating men’s recollections remained un-politicised as, for instance, there wasn’t a call for them to be part of a larger discourse around sexual assault that compares men and women’s experiences. Two of the men mentioned experiencing minor sexual interference from women, which took the form of bottom pinching, genital groping and stolen kisses, when they were younger. David and George referred to such instances as part of a culture of cheekiness or silliness. Whereas a woman approaching a man to perform a minor sexual assault may not be envisaged as a physical assault, it could, however, add to a sense of unfairness or to society having a double standard in this regard, especially for men who would consider themselves as sexually unthreatening. One exception was Alex who felt that men stealing kisses would be automatically misinterpreted as being done for sexist or malicious reasons, rather than for the same reasons women might do such an act: “If one of us did it to them, it would be a serious issue because we’re men. And we’re – again, we’re

automatically seen as threatening.” He feels women have the freedom to appear unthreatening, which was a double standard: “they can do it and not be intimidating.”

Most men interviewed who had experienced unwanted or coerced sex did not frame their experiences within a discourse of victimhood. For instance, Justin recalled his childhood when a much older girl stole a kiss; he uses the term “forced” to describe her actions but did not consider it sexual abuse. A few men in this study had experienced serious non-consensual sex with women and these men were far more likely to speak in terms of victimhood. Their accounts showed conflict with the male sexual drive discourse (Hollway 1984) which dictates they should have wanted to have the sex. Anthony recounted an instance when he was coerced by a woman into sex to which he eventually acceded, noting his gender as the reason:

She came on to me in a very, very big way. And – I ended up knocking her back. But it was actually – it was – it wasn’t very nice. Because she was really kind of – you know, she kept kissing me on the couch. And I was kind of going, “Well, look, just slow down. I really don’t want to do this.” And she wanted – she wanted to sleep with me. I said, “No.” And she really did pile the pressure on ... (Anthony)

In this account Anthony describes an upsetting experience, clearly a case of coerced sex, which might be labelled rape were the genders reversed. He recalls the whole story in terms of her activity and his responses; she is the instigator, the active one. At several points, he vocalises his wish for her to stop, “I ended up knocking her back ... ‘Well, look, just slow down. I really don’t want to do this’ ... I said, ‘No.’” He felt pressured into having sex with her and did not have the language from a script on male-rape victimhood to draw from in order to stop her. As part of the male sexual drive (Hollway 1984) discourse he is supposed to enjoy a woman ‘taking the lead’ (occasionally) yet he experiences two difficult conflicts: firstly, he is not experiencing the pleasure he is ‘meant’ to feel and, secondly, he cannot successfully remove himself from the situation without admitting he actually doesn’t want sex at all costs, which is a key element of this discourse.

Halfway through his account, he is saved from this dilemma; he is given a route out of victimhood. The woman performs oral sex on him and suddenly he is transposed into a discourse born out of the lads'-mags culture of the 1990s. 'Blow jobs' existed in this culture as a way for men to experience power, the power of the woman supposedly submitting to the male penis, yet simultaneously, power that was justifiable as mere 'cheekiness' because men were also expected to perform oral sex on women too, meaning it was fair play. In these magazines the casualisation and mastery of sexual relationships were equally encouraged (Rogers 2005).

At this point of the interview, Anthony changes his tone to one reminiscent of a typical article that could appear in a lads' mag, from either a journalist or a reader writing in (the existence of such content in these magazines provides the verity and certitude of the experience from varying perspectives). In this part of an interview he almost adopts the 'New Lad' persona:

And eventually, she ended up giving me a blow job on the sofa in the end. (Laughter) which – I was kind of like, “Well I don’t really want to but actually that does feel quite nice what you’re doing. Well, alright. Just carry on doing that. But I don’t want anything else.” And – you know, so – I think for a bloke, certainly from my own point of view, you get this – you have a point where you kind – you don’t really want to but then suddenly something else clicks in and you think, “Well, that does feel nice I suppose. So, alright.” (Anthony)

He is safely back in congruence with the male sexual drive discourse and therefore in line with hegemonic masculine ideals too. The fact that he could not extract himself from the situation before the blowjob is forgotten; it is enough that she performed her gender (at least, from his perspective) thus allowing him to regain face. The ability to reframe coerced sex as consensual can be read as either a privilege he has as a man or as a deflection from a painful reality. He ends the section explaining the male position per se to the interviewer; he is now secure enough to relay the findings of this experience: “I think for a bloke, certainly from my own point of view, you get this – you have a point where you kind – you don’t really want to but then suddenly something else clicks.”

Interviewees who experienced unwanted sex – consensual or non-consensual – usually did not change their future behaviour towards women. The majority of the interviewees utilised positionings which reduced the conflict they felt when in contact, or potentially in contact, with female sexual assault. By focussing on other aspects of the experience (e.g. management, morality or generosity), the men were able to retain a sense of a hegemonic masculine identity while at the same time criticising women's behaviour. Without closer inspection, men's behaviour may appear to be confident and unaffected by female actions, yet the extent of the effect, it can be argued, will not be understood until discourses around male victimhood are developed which are nuanced and representative of men's genuine realities.

Of the men who had not experienced coerced sex, their consent rested (just as when asked about false rape accusations) on their ability to manage their safety. Tim felt the fact that he had not "pushed for anything other than what I would say, I would label it 'normal intercourse'" was relevant to his not experiencing coerced sex in return. Similarly, Tom felt he was open-minded and would "try anything once".

Of the $n=8$ PUAs who answered relevantly, $n=4$ had experienced unwanted sexual behaviour, including $n=2$ cases of non-consensual sex, and $n=4$ had not.

PUA James had had the most serious of the unwanted sexual experiences and I felt that he waited to talk about it until after the sound recording equipment was turned off. He reported that a woman whom he didn't know very well had told him by text that she was going to come to his house the next day to take control of a sexual encounter with him. He did not want this but yet he let her in when she arrived and she proceeded to tie him up and force herself upon him. His consent seems to have been partial in that he said that eventually he gave in and started enjoying the experience. It was as though he didn't know why he let her into the house, as though on auto-pilot; he was genuinely scared at the beginning and his consent seems to be couched in the reality that he couldn't realistically

retrieve himself from the situation once he was physically constrained. He appeared to be affected by the experience upon interview.

Fiebert and Tucci (1998) interviewed n=182 college men at California State University about sexual coercion. 70% of the men (n=127) had experienced some form of sexual coercion in the last 5 years. In another study Struckman-Johnson (1988) found that use of physical force was reported by 55% of women and 10% men, in comparison to psychological pressure, which was experienced by 52% of men and only 16% of women. They note that the most common reason for men to engage in unwanted sex was pressure to adhere to male stereotypes (Zilbergeld 1978, cited in Anderson & Struckman-Johnson 1998, 173). They note that few men use the term 'rape' in the descriptions of events, although their experiences would fit the legal definition of rape and attempted rape in 20% and 9% of cases respectively.

In the current study, only PUA James used the word rape (or coercion) and none of the rest thought of their experiences of female sexual aggression as particularly negative, again even though some of the acts experienced were serious. Elsewhere, Weiss (2010) found that men were more than three times more likely to reveal that they were either taking drugs or drinking prior to the incident, suggesting that alcohol gave an excuse to victims of assault for not being successful in combating their assailant, especially if that person were smaller in size.

Anderson & Struckman-Johnson developed the Sexual Opportunity Model to explain men's range of reactions to female coercion (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson 1996, cited in Anderson and Struckman-Johnson 1998, p. 138). They argue that because men enjoy and value sex, they are predisposed to experience female aggressive advances as positive (Smith et al 1988, cited in Anderson & Struckman-Johnson 1998, 138). Because such men are freed from the usual responsibility for initiating sex and risking rejection, they are more likely to focus on the positive aspects of the woman's advance and "Men tend to respond positively to a forceful sexual advance from a very attractive woman"

(Anderson & Struckman-Johnson 1998, 139-140). When asked whether his friends had ever experienced unwanted sexual attention, PUA Leon noted that he had heard them talking about interactions with girls who were drunk that were either consensual or not consensual depending on whether the men found them attractive:

AA: How do your mates react to that? What do they do?

PUA Leon: It depends if they like the girl or not. If they like the girl, then they're happy about it. And if not –

AA: But yes, but really don't want it.

PUA Leon: Most of the time, I think – I think they'd probably just go through the motions anyway regardless if they liked her or not.

AA: Do you think they'd regret it afterwards?

PUA Leon: No. Not really.

8.4.3 – Female Violence

David and Brannon (1976) describe the final standard of traditional masculinity as “give ‘em hell”; that is, men are encouraged to act aggressively and to dominate as a means of expressing their masculinity. Such instances of male aggression, especially against women, have been well documented (with around 1.2 million women suffering domestic abuse in 2012 in the UK alone (May 2013). Increasingly, however, such masculine performance has come under criticism from women and has been felt to be a “relentless pressure on men” (Kimmel 2014). While masculinity is diversifying into simultaneous variations along a harder and softer continuum, femininity too is changing and one of the changes in femininity is a perceived increase in female aggression. Female domestic violence against men has been found to be on the increase¹⁰ and at a time when women are subject to a

¹⁰ Since sociologist Suzanne Steinmetz (1978) coined the phrase ‘The Battered Husband Syndrome’, the idea of gender symmetry in domestic violence has been explored and disputed. The research into female-perpetrated violence is significant, however. Straus (2009) notes that more than 200 studies have found that men and women commit partner violence at roughly equal rates and that mutually perpetrated violence is the most prevalent type of domestic violence (Archer 2002; Fiebert 2004; cited in Straus 2009, 246). Among young couples, women are

lessening of strict gender policing of their aggressive (masculine) behaviour, men must readjust their understandings of it too. Female violence can be perceived by men to be perplexing and troubling in the current context of gender uncertainty, when violence is still thought of largely as a masculine norm. Men face not only the direct physical threat violent women present but also the threat to their own and others' understanding of their masculinity.

In this study, some interviewees spoke of experiencing female hostility in the form of domestic violence or sexual assault. The majority of the $n=19$ dating men answered relevantly and while $n=11$ had not experienced any (non-sexual) aggression from women, a sizeable minority of $n=8$ had. When asked if their male friends had experienced women being physically aggressive, $n=5$ said they had and 3 that they had not; the others did not answer. The level of aggression varied in intensity and frequency. All of the men who said a woman had attacked them only mentioned the attack after being asked the specific question about female hostility. When the PUA men were asked if they had experienced physical aggression from women, $n=4$ said they had, one answered neutrally and $n=5$ said they had not.

Research into the manosphere shows that men's fear of being labelled aggressive is also one of the reasons why they are concerned about being on the receiving end of female aggression. In such situations, any physical endowment of strength, which many men may

more likely than men to be the violent partner (Straus & Ramirez 2007; Whitaker, Haileyesus et al 2007; cited in Straus 2009, 246). When only one partner attacks, both genders do so in equal amounts among married couples (Anderson 2002; Capaldi & Owen 2001; Gelles & Straus 1988; Kessler et al 2001 etc.; cited in Straus 2009, 246). Straus states that gender symmetry is true for severe intimate-violence prevalence although the consequences are more serious if the perpetrator is a man (Gelles and Straus, 1988; cited in Straus 2009, 246). Motivations are similar for each gender; violence is used as a means of expressing anger, punishing a partner's behaviour, and trying to coerce a partner (Cascardi & Vivian 1995; Follingstad et al 1991; Kernsmith 2005; Stets & Hammons 2002; cited in Straus 2009, 247). Self-defence is rarely the reason for violence for either sex (Carrado et al 1996; Felson & Messner 1998; Pearson 1997; Sarantakos 1998; Sommer 1996, cited in Straus 2009, 247). There has been a substantial decline in public approval for acts such as a man slapping his wife yet this has not been mirrored with a reduction in approval rates for wives slapping husbands (Straus 1995; Straus et al 1997; cited in Straus 2009, 249). Fiebert and Gonzales (1997) found that 29% of female college students have assaulted a male partner. Half of these women said they had no fear of retaliation because the physical strength differential meant that men were more than capable of defending themselves.

have in comparison to women, is rendered surplus. Men are also concerned about the legal and social ramifications of defending themselves. For instance, PUA John reported having experienced physical provocation from his ex-wife on several occasions, which he felt was motivated by her desire to gain from their divorce settlement.

Tim relayed a story of a girl bullying a boy at school in which he felt he could not defend himself because he would be seen as the guilty party; there had been a school assembly to discuss the case at the time. Eric felt that if a man were to defend himself against a woman, other men would attack him since people's default position was to believe the woman to be innocent. Mark specifically mentioned this as one of the reasons why he feared groups of women attacking him when out in public, saying he would not intervene if one woman was hitting another but remain in the background to call an ambulance if it became necessary. Chaudhuri (2012) invokes Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity as being a possible reason why some men don't respond with violence when they are attacked, because such behaviour can be seen as the rational and calculating type of hegemonic masculinity, therefore their masculinity is supported. Yet some of the men in this study were angry that their gendered position meant they were unable to defend themselves or they argued for alternative social arrangements where men and women were more equally positioned, as with concepts of inclusive masculinity. Daryl, for example, felt that the message should be redefined from teaching men that they shouldn't hit a woman to one where the responsibility not to hit another person, except in defence, was imposed on everyone.

In an example of interviewees' reluctance to defend themselves, both for fear of being labelled the guilty party and also for fear of the actual physical attack, Anthony reported having experienced aggression from a female student at a bar who did not agree with people in the forces being present in Afghanistan. Rarely among the interviewees, Anthony admitted to being intimidated, actually using the word "intimidating", albeit swiftly and then partially retracted: "Not because I was worried that she was going to hurt me or anything like that." A few men spoke of feeling disempowered because they could not defend themselves, yet, almost without exception, they also reported not being physically

scared. Anthony was clear: “The biggest thing I found intimidating is the fact that I could absolutely – it’s socially absolutely unacceptable for me to retaliate.” In nearly every instance in this study, such men focus on their self-control, their active positioning rather than focusing on the ultimate reality of them being hit, sometimes to the point of concussion.

Perhaps Anthony’s candidness is due either to his secure physicality, his training in the forces (which presumably involves facing anxieties before overcoming them), or because he is used to working alongside physically strong women. Certainly, he was more comfortable than most of the men in admitting such concerns. It is interesting though that immediately after he admits “... I actually don’t think men can always win against them. I think there are women out there that are pretty handy and know what they’re doing”, he recalls times when smaller men had physically approached him, highlighting his relative physical advantage at several points: “Big guy, big arms. He looks quite – you know, he’s quite handy ... they’re much bigger than you”. In doing so perhaps he returns himself to safer ground.

The dating men reported various examples of women’s aggression, including having been hit by a bottle over the head, drinks thrown in the face in nightclubs, bottles being thrown, and witnessing violent women whilst working in pubs and clubs. Many men had not experienced aggression from women, however, and could not recall friends telling them of such experiences, yet there seemed to be an appreciation of the possible threat on some level in some responses. Steve was not concerned about a woman being aggressive, for instance, because “I could run faster than them.”

Eric remembered experiencing aggression from girls at school, which he felt had definitely impacted on his confidence to go out in public. He had the most pronounced fear of women of all the interviewees, was clearly unconfident about his safety with them, and was happy to describe himself in terms of his victimhood, as is often the case for MRAs, perhaps so that he can feel supported by forum members at least. The concerns expressed by him and

by other men who had little experience of women tended to be more abstract and often exaggerated in nature. When referring to a girl at school pushing him down the stairs, for instance, his concern was that she could have killed him.

Similarly, PUA Axl feared that approaching a woman could possibly be interpreted as an aggressive act by her, which in turn could induce an aggressive response. He was another interviewee who had not experienced a relationship with a woman. When such men spoke of fears of approaching women in public they sometimes mentioned concerns about women enlisting help from other men to act aggressively against them too. Again men with the least experience had the greatest fears.

It was significant, however, that several of the men who had experienced violence or aggression from women expressed a nonchalant response to women's ability to cause them to have concern for their safety. A number of men were happy to describe a woman as aggressive and criticise her, yet with very few exceptions did not show concern about those women attacking them again or extrapolate this experience into a fear of other women being aggressive, even when the attack had been serious. Unlike other areas of this research, when men spoke of female hostility the most popular positioning they used was that of the victim, with this positioning usually invoked singularly rather than as part of a composite of positionings, meaning that there was a focus on victimhood for these men. The Victim positioning was inhabited in differing ways and although some men embraced the concept, others only utilised it when they were questioned further. Importantly, men described their victimhood but rarely labelled themselves as victims, even though they described being subject to a significant number of violent instances between them.

8.4.4 – Masculine 'Coolness'

In *"I'm not a Victim, She's an Abuser: Masculinity, Victimisation and Protection Orders"*, Durfee (2011) examined how men negotiate the competing discourses of victimisation, hegemonic masculinity and domestic violence stereotypes when they file for a domestic-

violence protection order against a female partner. She refers to this as a “gendered paradox” (Durfee 2011, 328). In analysing 2,163 protection orders filed in the US in the year 2000, she found the men's narratives contained three themes: the men's descriptions focused on their power and control over their partner; their active resistance (but they were careful to note that their actions were not abusive); and most men did not express fear of the partner. Men are less likely to claim to be a victim even though they are content to describe their experience as violent (Owen 1995, cited in Durfee 2011, 319), and when they do refer to themselves as a victim, they describe their ordeal in ways that maintain ideals of hegemonic masculinity, for instance by referring to their behaviour as “tactical”, or they choose to belittle their attackers, or display a “masculine coolness” (Burcar & Akerstrom 2009, cited in Durfee 2011). Durfee describes this process:

When crafting the narrative, he has the option to focus exclusively on his partner's actions, omitting his responses to her violence. Instead, he chooses to include his responses to her actions, which emphasise his power over his partner and reflect elements of hegemonic masculinity. (Durfee 2011, 325)

In her study, in 38 out of the 48 petitions analysed, the men did not express any fear of the female aggressor, even though they were filing for court intervention as a result of her violent behaviour. This is in comparison to almost half of the women doing so who were filing for orders (which is interestingly, also a high percentage) (Durfee 2010, cited in Durfee 2011, 327). Durfee noted that some of the men remained stoic in the face of physical and emotional pain, even when the attack was severe.

In the present study Justin reported having experienced a relationship where his girlfriend became violent on several occasions and once had knocked him unconscious:

Justin: Yes. She'd – she – (Laughter) [inaudible]. But when I walked into the kitchen you had to go through a door and in the kitchen I used to keep my motorbike helmet on top of the fridge freezer. And as I came to the door, she was stood inside the fridge freezer and swung and flattened me with my own bike helmet.

AA: And it knocked you out?

Justin: Yes. She knocked me out.

Here Justin begins to tell the story in terms of his girlfriend's activity but changes his mind – "Yes. She'd – she – (Laughter)" – and the rest is told from his own active perspective, with his own bike helmet knocking him out. In choosing to tell the story from his perspective, he can imbue it with a sense of his activity at the same time as declaring his unfair victimhood, all without foregoing a harder masculine ideal too much. When asked in a 'neutral' style about his bike helmet knocking him out (mirroring his previous language usage) – "And it knocked you out?" – he is clear to summarise the story in terms of her guilt: "Yes. She knocked me out."

Tomas's ex-wife had, he reported, been aggressive too, attacking him in his sleep, something he relayed in only a few sentences with no focus on his emotions. The most serious amount of aggression experienced by an interviewee was that reported by David, who also expressed the clearest example of masculine coolness in describing the events. On two separate occasions, female strangers had glassed and stabbed him. When asked, he still did not report feeling concerned about future instances from aggressive women because he looked at it in terms of probability and felt that he was much more likely to be attacked by a man:

That was on two different nights in the same place. And punched by one in the – but that wasn't sort of a – that was in a political discussion. (Laughter) So, yes, I have been. The knife wasn't particularly nice. The glass missed my face and hit my chest and I've still got the scar. And the punch was relatively irrelevant. So, worried about it? No. I'm much more worried about being hit by men. (David)

Here David recalls the two occasions on which he was attacked in short punchy, disjointed sentences and three times he minimises what happened: "but that wasn't sort of a – that was in a political discussion. (Laughter) ... the punch was relatively irrelevant ... The knife wasn't particularly nice." He is keen to set up the subsequent conversation in terms of his

nonchalant response to serious violence, thus projecting an image of himself which is in line with hegemonic masculine ideals, strong even in the face of adversity: "So, worried about it? No. I'm much more worried about being hit by men." Admitting to being worried about men was clearly preferable in this instance. He elaborates on both events:

The first one. And I was just literally drinking in this bar. I went outside and this (Pause) couple of women decided – I was walking over on the way home. These two women started screaming at me and then started insulting me. So I just told them to go away and grow up. They were probably about 20 – 19, 20. Something like that. Next thing I knew, I'd been hit on the back of the head. Someone had stabbed me in the side. And I was sort of like – and then they ran off. And I really wasn't expecting that. You know, I was expecting it was two women being loud. Not – you know, if it had been two men by me, I'd have been [inaudible]. (Pause) But that – and that was just literally wandering back home (Pause) in a suburb of London at 11.30 at night. (David)

In this section, he is keen to position himself as an innocent bystander who is unreasonably approached: "I was just literally drinking in this bar" and "that was just literally wandering back home". He alternates between telling the story in terms of the women's actions and telling it from the perspective of his own active participation: "I went outside and this (Pause) couple of women decided – I was walking over on the way home. These two women started screaming at me". Then suddenly he relates the story in terms of blindness: "Next thing I knew, I'd been hit on the back of the head. Someone had stabbed me in the side. And I was sort of like – and then they ran off. And I really wasn't expecting ...". If the women suddenly and unexpectedly attacked from behind, he cannot be blamed for not defending himself successfully. Here, shocked by such behaviour from women, he begins to say that if they were men, it would be different: "You know, I was expecting it was two women being loud. Not – you know, if it had been two men by me, I'd have been ...". The women are unpredictable not only in their violent behaviour but also in behaving out of character for their gender. In the final sentence, he couches his experience in terms of the arbitrariness of his bad luck and places it geographically in a common environment and time when nightlife is busy. This could have happened to anyone and, by implication, he was therefore not to blame, nor was he a 'typical' victim who might attract such abuse: "...

and that was just literally wandering back home (Pause) in a suburb of London at 11.30 at night.” David spends much of his recollection of the events of abuse couching them in nonchalance (masculine coolness) and the everyday.

He then relays a second instance of abuse:

That was just weird. I don't know what happened there. Because that was sitting at a bar again. But I wasn't – I'd literally just got there. (Pause) And I think – my assumption – I can't quite remember it because I was absolutely totally shocked after it happened. But I think it was a man – I think I made the cardinal mistake of getting involved in a domestic. Because there were two people kicking off by the bar and being quite rude to each other. And that was it. And there were some kids in the pub and stuff like that. It was in the afternoon. So I asked them to kind of be quiet. And the next thing I know there was this woman had a glass full of wine and kind of arced it down on me. Showering me with the wine and then kind of keeping the glass going. So I stood back and it missed my face and landed on my chest, snapping off with – leaving the tulip sort of still embedded into my [?]. (David)

This last section starts from a blind perspective and establishes his lack of guilt: “I'd literally just got there.” Again, as with other interviewees, when male aggression is referred to it is done so in a minimising way, using antiquated language, “... the cardinal mistake of getting involved in a domestic. Because there were two people kicking off ...” The fact that David bravely tries to intervene is interestingly not what he chooses to focus upon when retelling the story. He could have framed the incident in terms of a brave but ultimately failed attempt at thwarting the abuse, saving not only the weaker partner but also the children who were witnessing the event. Instead he chooses to frame the incidents in terms of the woman's culpability and unpredictability. This, it could be argued, is because he does not come out on top and he is not keen to position himself as a victim in the usual sense, so he emphasises his shock and unawareness (blindness) of the events, again relieving him of the obligation to successfully resist the abuse. He focuses on his response, but importantly not his emotional response and always framed in terms of astonishment. It is an unfortunate side effect of the orthodox masculine ideal that a man should feel responsible for being attacked with a weapon, because he does not have space to claim victimhood.

When he speaks of the movement of the wine glass, he describes his response in a minimal and almost a nonchalant way “So I stood back...” A small move from him results in him saving his face, literally; the rest does not matter. Throughout David’s interview, he is rather laid-back and sometimes answers with regard to men and women in general (rather than answering about his direct experience). He often minimises the effects events have on his emotions, and contextualises his lack of concern at ‘castration’ in terms of worse alternatives such as death.

8.5 – Conclusion

In this chapter, men’s reactions and opinions about the women they date have been explored and their feelings about women in the media and society more generally were touched upon, with reference to dating relations, women’s power and concerns about women.

With regard to dating relations, the majority of men understood women not to be more emotional than men and acknowledged the gendered way in which people’s emotional responses are framed; this was equally true for both types of men. This did not stop some of the interviewees relying upon the have/hold and the male sexual drive discourses (Hollway 1984) as a means to understand dating relations between themselves and various partners, however. This manifested itself in two ways: firstly some men considered themselves or were considered by female partners to be the more ‘emotional’ of the dyad, and the men understood this as them inhabiting female terrain; they saw themselves as ‘more feminine’. Just like when men saw themselves as different from other men in homosocial settings as discussed above (as ‘non mainstream men’), there was a feeling of being outside of the traditional male position. Secondly, some of the men appeared to rely upon women to express emotions in lieu of their own emotional feelings or expression. Men focussed on ‘helping’ women with their emotions, which could cause some surprise when an end of a relationship resulted in their own increased emotional insecurity. Others spoke a lot about subjects that aligned themselves with the male sexual drive, yet they appeared to have more appreciation of beliefs aligned with the have/hold discourse.

Overall, there were plenty of instances where men did not have essentialist ideas (based around both sexes proclivity to experiencing emotions), however. Men also saw similarities between the sexes with reference to whether or not they understand the opposite sex, seeing this as representative of the individual, not the whole sex.

That many of the PUAs saw dating in terms of Hollway's (1984) male sexual drive and have/hold discourses was not of use to them. Delineating the sexes along these discourses encourages a perception that men and women are far more different, essentially, than they actually are. This it was thought, resulted in men being overly concerned about female emotions, especially their perceived emotional intelligence, whilst simultaneously not gaining comfort from the male sexual drive, to which they felt they did not match up to. In a sense some men appeared between both discourses, a very disorientating place when gender essentialism and science are invoked to supposedly provide support but ultimately fail to do so.

These two discourses lay behind the PUA's fear of female emotional intelligence too. Such a fear was much more common with the PUAs than the regular dating men and this is probably due to the community's higher reliance on essentialist gender ideology, which traditionally sees women as emotional caretakers. As said, both types of men understood both sexes to experience the same amount of emotion as reported when asked directly, those from the pick up artist community went on to elaborate upon several instances of concerns about women's greater emotional intelligence, as they perceived it. There was a strange interplay between an aspirational softer masculinity based on confluent love (Giddens 1991; 1992), in which men and women were both freed from gendered constraints placed on them by society, and where there appeared to be a desire for similarity between the sexes, felt alongside an entrenched idea that men and women were necessarily very different and that women's difference needed managing, something more akin to a traditional harder masculine performance. Women's supposedly greater emotional insight was something that necessarily meant men had to undergo some self reflexive work, because a woman would be able to sniff a 'non-natural' performance a mile

off. Here we see these men's masculine performance as being tied up with responses to female behaviour, rather than with directing female behaviour as might be implied in the PUA philosophy. There was a feeling with the PUAs especially that men felt 'at sea' with women and didn't know how to respond to them, resulting in a fertile ground in which the PUA phenomenon can exist in order to provide constructed certitude (Beck 1997) as a means for men to 'take back' power from women, in order to make things 'more equal again'. Throughout, the PUA community were thought to spend an awful lot of time changing themselves in order to appear more attractive to women, whilst simultaneously rarely acknowledging that this means women are defining them.

Women were largely seen as supportive of men, yet there was a call by a number of the interviewees for a more inclusive situation where men could express their emotions and insecurities more openly without censure. Sometimes, however, these men simultaneously used harder masculine ideals against which to rate themselves and other men, meaning they never really rid themselves of the traditional harder masculine ideal (to which they do not genuinely aspire) but, possibly in the absence of a script for softer masculinities, they revert to as the default position. Some men were also critical of women's desire for men to exhibit a harder masculine performance. And a few of them felt that they would choose to be more aligned with inclusive masculine traits were it not for the fact that they felt that women would not be attracted to them. Again here we can clearly see the influence women have on how men choose to perform their masculinity. And one must revisit Kimmel's theory of Guyland and ask not so much are the women are performing a more masculine performance in order to appear preferable to head boys, as he argued, but how much were those boys performing for the women, (including the denigrating of other men) in order to appear like an attractive alpha type to the female students? Also, how much is men's promiscuity and performance of 'playing the field' done in order to upset women by maximising their side of the bargain, the male sexual drive, possibly because they wish to counteract the power women have in fully knowing and expressing their emotions as per the have/hold discourse? Again, Elder, Brooks and Morrow's (2011) finding that

homosociality, fear of homosexuality and the female gaze work together to police men's sense of gender identity can be supported.

With reference to women's power, their societal and political success was seen largely as partial by both groups of men, their ideas about which areas women were disempowered in often reflected their own career paths. Some were critical of women's lack of success including men who were ostensibly egalitarian, maybe this is because they have learned to experience their power in more subtle ways, due to the fact they were well versed in female environs (the workplace), such as Kierski (2009) noted. Twelve of the twenty dating men felt that women were the more intimidating sex, whereas the PUAs were more likely to feel that women weren't intimidating unless they were rich, powerful or particularly beautiful. Yet approach anxiety was something that all of the PUAs had experience in, indeed it is central to the PUA philosophy and many of the men spoke of anxiety with varying types of women, so there is a contradiction here.

Women's beauty was seen as powerful, rendering the more beautiful women more difficult to approach. This was the case regardless the fact that all of the dating men and half of the PUAs listed nonphysical attributes as the most important when looking for a partner. Likewise, often men did not share the same standardised beauty ideals that they imagined their male friends to hold, yet these were ideals were not challenged meaning again Bird's (1996) insight that non-hegemonic men were not challenging the status quo is supported. There was a sense of their 'non-mainstream' tastes in women putting them in a minority, outside of a more stereotypical response, even though a great number of them had such tastes.

Female beauty is central to the PUA community and men not only focus on it but they know themselves through it. It was thought that the 0-10 rating gauge used to classify women also had other uses, not least that men were simultaneously rating themselves, (albeit unconsciously for some), alongside rating women. How choosy are they? Do they hold out for the very best? Do they achieve access to the very best? As PT Dominique aptly puts it, an

insistence on holding out for highly rated women was often used as an excuse not to approach any women at all, after all few women are nines or tens. It is also possible that a focus on highly prized women who are difficult to attain may obscure the fallout felt when men don't achieve intimacy with women further down the scale. Women's beauty therefore becomes part of a life project (Giddens 1991) in which men need to change themselves in order to achieve dates with more beautiful women.

Although women's physical beauty was highly prized in the PUA community, it was not entirely respected, certainly not as much as other 'innate' traits such as testosterone, men's physical strength and women's ability to give birth, all of which were seen as fair reasons for gender inequality, whereas female beauty was often seen as unfair to the extent that it was sometimes seen as unnatural. It is not a coincidence that upholding essentialist ideas about the former physical traits help men more than women and the latter vice versa (for beautiful women at least). Amongst both types of men there was also some anger and dismay at the commercial use of female attractiveness and men often didn't see themselves as powerful consumers, this was in contrast to many of the dating men's personal experiences with beautiful women who did not incite such anger. These men felt included and simultaneously excluded from the intended audience of 'men', they assumed they must be part of it, yet did not feel an active state of belonging. They spoke of being manipulated and responded with nonchalance, moral criticism, judgement of women and anger in order to minimise the effect of women's beauty as portrayed in the media. They took up the positions of judge and moral agent most often on the subject of beauty, therefore staying safely within the confines of hegemonic masculine ideals.

While concerns about women abusing their power were expressed by many of the men (the majority of men had experienced some sort of unwanted sex with women and many had witnessed or experienced violence too), they rarely acted upon these in ways that further secured their safety, whether in terms of fears of pregnancy, sexual assault or violence. To such fears, men usually responded by keeping them out of mind, or by rationalising the situation in ways that resulted in a sense of security that wasn't

necessarily based in fact. Again, men communicated in terms, which highlighted their active positioning rather than describing situations of being respondents to women's power. Men very rarely used the term victim or any such synonyms to describe themselves, preferring instead to focus on women's culpability as Durfee (2011) has previously shown. Women's physical power was usually minimised or obfuscated. One recurrent theme was dismay or anger at men's inability to defend themselves physically against attack by a woman, for fear of being seen as the guilty party. This was often as near as many of the men would get to openly admitting concern about a woman's physical attack but again it was done in terms that aligned the speaker to hegemonic masculine ideals. It should be noted however that the men acknowledging a fear of being wrongly accused, is in itself somewhat more of an inclusive masculine act in comparison perhaps to a more traditional stoic response; it at least admits vulnerability.

When a man experienced physical attack from a woman that was severe some spoke in terms of blindness or shock, these states being understandable under the circumstances (a swift onslaught). This was akin to the use of alcohol or drugs being used as excuses for not being successful in combating their female assailant/s as Weiss (2010) found when men were attacked by women or homosexual men. After all, even alpha man can't see out the back of their head or, they in particular, cannot be blamed for drinking a lot of alcohol. There was often a lack of homosocial support with regards to any physical attack from a woman and few of these men admitted to talking to their friends about any such abuse, and yet these men appeared to appreciate the opportunity to speak about their ordeal in interview, albeit in ways that did not leave them entirely vulnerable to criticism of their masculinity.

Having now looked at how men view themselves and other men, and women, we now turn in the final data chapter to how they experience their dating lives and reflect upon how to compare such experiences to their beliefs around dating.

9.0 – Men’s Thoughts on Dating

This chapter is concerned with men’s thoughts and behaviour regarding their dating relationships. Discussed below are the men’s anxieties around dating women, such as whether the men suffered from ‘approach anxiety’; how men perceived power relations between men and women who date; how they felt dating was represented in the media; monogamy; and more generally, how men conceptualised gender roles in dating. Throughout, I shall be analysing these responses in terms of changing masculinities, the project of the self and the specific discourses around dating and sex, noting how men position themselves.

9.1 – Making the First Move

‘Making the first move’ is a concept which has historically been understood to be performed by the male partner but is a norm that is regularly questioned on male-focussed websites such as AskMen.com and GoodMenProject.com; when women are otherwise making strides in many areas of life, why are men still expected to approach women? Whether or not these men still made the first move and how they felt about it, was of interest. When asked who made the initial contact between a dating man and a potential girlfriend n=7 said they did, n=9 said the woman did and n=3 said it varied. Of the men who said they made the first move, Victor noted that a ‘first move’ was not easy to define because the woman could organise a friendly meeting, which changed into a date, and that signal giving was key: “It would depend on whether you consider it’s a case of me reading a signal and acting on it, or them – them giving a signal, which I perceive and act on.” This blurred status between a first instance of communication and a conscious understanding of being on ‘a date’ was something a number of men mentioned as a grey area in which who made the move was not understood in terms of either’s conscious intentions.

One key theme in these responses was men reporting insecurities and often embarrassment about attempts to approach women, especially when they had been teenagers. Men often reported that they were more relaxed now than they had been when

younger and in the case of PUAs, since they had received training. Whereas they once relied on bravado, they said, they now had more genuine confidence. Location, time of day and alcohol were still elements which were key to men's confidence, however, because men found it easier to approach a woman while drunk in a dating-friendly location such as a bar or pub at night time.¹¹

Of the men who waited for a woman to approach them, the reasons varied from being very shy, fearing an approach from an aggressive boyfriend, to a general appreciation of women's romantic advances. Mark described himself as passive and "basically, I just leave the door open as it were. If they want to walk through it, then fine." He tended not to meet women in bars but as friends of friends, which was a common theme with the dating men. Daryl felt he had trouble reading signals from women and often only retrospectively realised that a woman was interested in him. He said he felt annoyed when he missed opportunities to date women but noted that sometimes the "fear of it is, is you know, quite severe." Four of the dating men mentioned the desire not to be seen as invading women's space or to appear intimidating to women and these concerns made them more reticent about approaching, which could result in frustration. Alex was aware that he could be perceived as a threat to the woman and was concerned about that, yet found this hard to reconcile with the idea that many women also expected men to make the initial approach. Justin had issues with asking women questions about themselves because he felt that he would be prying. If there was one pattern amongst the varying responses it was one of men finding approaching women nerve wracking and their finding a way to deal with meeting women that suited their level of confidence.

Of the PUAs, only n=3 out of the n=10 answered the question on this topic (this question wasn't cemented as part of the structured interview at this point). However, overcoming 'approach anxiety' is key to PUA training and almost all of the men spoke of concern and reluctance about approaching women previous to their training, and some still experienced

¹¹ For this reason, PUA training includes what is known as 'day game', when men approach women in the street in the daytime whilst sober.

it after much training. Nearly all of the men were open about how daunting they found approaching attractive women and their anxiety varied from slight to extreme. It was rare to find a man who was completely confident about it and even those that were confident could recall times when they were younger when they lacked confidence. As PUA Robert put it, “I was probably just so desperate that I was pretty overjoyed with anything that was coming my way. So that was probably (Laughter) more significant than actually liking a girl or what anyone thought.” Sometimes there was a sense of the men not being able to explore, or almost not even being aware of their own tastes in women, they just felt like they received attention from whatever women they could and their focus was on maximising their ‘luck’. Throughout the PUA and PUA-trainer interviews, a strong theme of women choosing men was evident. Some men just waited for women to approach them, or made a habit of dating women who were friends of their friends whom they had met as part of a group; it was felt in these situations that the risk of rejection or failure was low. As we can see in this response from PUA John, invariably the economic discourse of exchange was invoked:

The majority of men are just taking what they can get. Do you know what I mean? They just see like a girl. She’s attracted to them. And it’s like, “Wow! Hooray! This is my chance.” Which is less than ideal. I’ve been in that place before. And it’s a question of the value of you are offering relative to the rest of the market. I mean, not a lot of guys, PUAs, will admit this, but many of them are sleeping with basically anyone who will lift it for them. (PUA John)

Despite the fact that the PUA community talk of the fear of approaching women and speak either directly or indirectly about a desire to share this burden under a fairer dating arena (confluent love) in which women could approach men, however, there was still a focus on male activity. Men needed to overcome their fear in order to work towards a fantasy future where women were drawn to the men; if they didn’t, such female advances could become emasculating.¹² PUA Terry felt that he did most of the approaching and would appreciate a woman approaching him. He did not, however, want a woman to be “dominant and kind of

¹² Indeed, at a PUA taster evening aimed at women called ‘Get The Guy’, the focus was solely on making men approach women too.

leading” but he was happy for her to make the first approach. PUA Axl spoke of his friends being “passive” in that their girlfriends had chosen them. He had undertaken thousands of approaches towards women since learning PUA skills, yet still he felt dating to be very difficult:

Yes. Honestly, it's a miracle I'm still doing it. Because it has destroyed me emotionally. Just broke me to pieces. I'd come back home and I'd be just, fucking, like the end of the world for me. So it just reinforced my unworthiness. All the years of my life until that point. It would be like confirming the fact that I don't believe I'm worthy of these girls now. Just, yes – it's not for you. You don't deserve it. I would then go into depression. (PUA Axl)

PUA Axl was not alone in focussing on the technical side of training as a means of overcoming anxiety. He had undergone far more training and attempts than was average in the community and yet he had only managed to increase his confidence incrementally. There was a sense with PUA that even if men became effective at approaching women, the underlying fear of women's responses remained for many of them.

9.2 – Difficulties in the Dating Scene

Of the dating men who were asked whether they had found the dating scene to be difficult, n=11 answered yes, n=6 answered no, and n=3 answered neutrally. The men were then asked to provide a specific example of a time when they found dating difficult and to describe how they felt at that time.

Of the men who answered yes, Victor found that being single was something he eventually got fixated upon and this had caused him to lose perspective, which resulted in an increased lack of confidence. He was regularly nervous when younger but this changed when he joined the bondage, discipline, sadomasochism (BDSM) sexual community. Spencer felt that the dating scene was filled with liars and cheats, especially in the case of online dating. Richard remembered not being part of the in-crowd as a teenager, which resulted in him and similar male friends taking themselves off to the pool hall, which he

appreciated was an act of giving up trying to talk to women. Daryl finds the rules of dating confusing, for instance whether a man should pay when on a date or not, and this was something he was unsure about, which had an effect on his confidence.

Of the men who said that they did not find the dating scene difficult, there were reservations nonetheless. As mentioned previously, Tom did not lack confidence as long as he did not feel he was 'punching above his weight'. Cheeko did not feel nervous of women but could feel intimidated if they were 'full on'. Of the men who felt it was neither difficult or easy, Joel again acknowledged lack of confidence when young but managed his confidence levels by not actively looking for women and he tended to "let it happen" to him, which was, he said, a method that worked well.

When asked whether they found the dating scene to be difficult, it was not surprising that, given the self-selected nature of attending a dating skills improvement course, the vast majority of the pickup artists answered in the affirmative. The two groups therefore cannot be compared directly in terms of their willingness to declare insecurity because the PUA community encourage such declarations which is rare elsewhere. There was a variance in levels of difficulty faced by individual men, however, since some of the men had attended the course in order to add to their existing skills as opposed to attending in order to gain the confidence to begin approaching women.

PUA Leon, who was, he said, not particularly unconfident with women before his PUA training, said he would have taken rejections personally and would have been embarrassed about them the next day when he reflected on what had happened the night before. He was, he said, frustrated that women thought it was easy for men to approach them:

They think it should all just be done and you know that's it. But they don't realise that the man is thinking this or feeling anxious or (Pause) especially when there's like girls being rude to them or telling them to go away. (Laughter) or just being awkward. (PUA Leon)

Uniquely, he also felt that prettier women were easier to approach because he would feel driven by a strong attraction to do so. PUA John, felt that before meeting his wife, his insecurities were caused by a lack of understanding of both women and social dynamics, as well as believing he offered a weak “value proposition” due to his lack of money. This is a term used in the PUA community to describe the list of a man’s attributes which would be attractive to women. Robert described his love life as difficult and somewhat uneventful. He mentioned feeling confused about his perceived role: “Didn’t really know what to do. Didn’t know like the criteria that girls find attractive so couldn’t – just didn’t know how I needed to be perceived in order to be fancied I suppose.” Throughout these interviews there was a feeling that the men were confused as to what women wanted in men, they had to second guess and to learn behaviours to make themselves more attractive.

PUA Mufasa, who had grown up in an African all-boys boarding school (but who had been living in the UK for 9 years at the time of interview), relayed a detailed story about a pivotal experience with an attractive woman. Here we have a step-by-step internal account of a young man’s struggle with approach anxiety:

I was coming from the airport. I was coming from home. I had airport bags. I had all these bags on me. And all these brand new clothes I just bought. I felt great, you know. And I got on the Underground to go home ... and this beautiful girl walks in and she looks me square in the eye. Like we had that – like that – that – that moment. You know, that love-at-first-sight moment ... and she could have sat literally anywhere in this carriage. Literally anywhere. But she chose to sit right next to me. Right next to me. In an empty carriage. And I knew that nobody does this normally. It’s obviously – obviously it’s like she wants me to talk to her. But I sit there and the train starts moving. And I sit there. And I want to say something ... and I just couldn’t. And she started doing all this – like she changes her body language. She shifts her entire body language to face me in a way that’s like she crosses her legs ... Like every, every, every sign a woman can give you in the book apart from saying, “Hey! Talk to me.” ... And I just couldn’t. I just couldn’t ... so it was like 20 stops. 20 stops and I suppose went 30 – 20 or 30 minutes ... You know what happens is eventually she gets up. She gets to the stop and she gets up and she’s leaving. And like suddenly in my head I thought, “Mufasa, do something!” It’s like, “She’s leaving!” you know. So I had all these bags. All these 100 bags and, “I’ll screw it and just try and do it.” And like she’s – she’s out of the Tube. Like she’s going to – like on the station. So I grab my bags and I started running – I

ran out of the train ... So I tapped her on the shoulder and she looks at me and she just turns her back and just keeps walking ... And the train like leaves. So I'm left standing there on the Underground with these giant bags. I've been running after a girl. Tired. The train is gone. I just stand there and wait for the next one ... And I just feel like shit. I just felt like shit, I just felt like shit, I was like, "Fuck man. This can't happen again. I can't let a woman just walk away from me and, you know, feel like shit at the end of the day because I didn't know how to talk to her." Yes, that was definitely – that's a pivotal moment for me. (PUA Mufasa)

After his dating training, PUA Mufasa had become far more confident although he was aware that some women still had the ability to knock his confidence, especially if they were beautiful or very wealthy. Interestingly, he seems now to be managing his anxiety, rather than to have eliminated it. He now responds with what may be perceived as a calculated response framed as a sport, focussing on his action:

It's become a motivator for me to approach her now. Like if I see someone that I find intimidating, I've got to go and talk to her. You know? Because it's become like a sport almost. Like a sport ... if I do see an intimidating woman, I feel the need to approach her. (PUA Mufasa)

Such women, then, are integral to PUA Mufasa's ability to redeem his confidence, it being precarious and in need of reinforcement at every interaction. He needs to get to talk to her before the anxiety builds up, to get in first.

In contrast, PUA Terry, who also lacked confidence with women, could not recall any traumatic experiences; however he noted that he was currently attempting to date a woman at work but could not encourage her to see him as a prospect, only as a friend.

PUA Brian, speaking on the subject of sexual stereotypes in the Beyoncé video, was critical of the Sexualised Woman and of its corollary, the male sexual predator. His focus in the following is on the sexualised woman yet as he describes the situation, he is implicated too:

PUA Brian: I don't really like it. And it's kind of for me reinforcing gender stereotypes that men should do one thing, women should do another. But women should be some – I don't know, like some sexy thing that's dancing and (Pause) I don't know. It's up to the men to (Pause) capture them. That's what it's – what it's saying to me. (Pause) And I'm not a big fan of that kind of thing.

AA: Okay. When you say, "The men need to capture," the women, what-can you elaborate on that a bit please?

PUA Brian: Well, not capture. It's like the whole lyric is like, "Well, if you didn't marry the woman or whatever, then it's your fault." Like that's what I think the lyrics are saying. Something like that.

In this exchange, PUA Brian positions women as prey – "it's up the men to (pause) capture them" – yet it is not until the end of the subsequent statement that he hints at what is really troubling him, that such supposedly disempowered 'prey' has the power to demand certain behavioural norms from him. He must capture a woman if he wishes to remain without criticism himself (criticism that is less likely to come from men than women?): "Well, if you didn't marry the woman or whatever, then it's your fault." For PUA Brian, the sexualised figure of Beyoncé represents a gendered system which traps both sexes into prescribed dating behaviour. However his focus is on her culpability alone – "I'm not a big fan" – while at the same time he wants to distance himself from the image of 'the Bad Man': "Well, not capture."

9.3 – Portrayals of Dating in the Media

Of the n=18 men who answered the question on how accurate media portrayals of dating were, n=14 felt their dating experiences were not represented accurately, n=2 felt their experiences were represented well, and a further n=2 were neutral on the subject.

Of the men who did not feel that their dating experiences were accurately represented, Tim felt that the number of cheating partners was over represented on television, and Stuart felt that men were shown to be "lads in the pub all going, 'Wha hay!'" which was unrepresentative. He also felt that the active nature of many male characters was

unrealistic and in reality women made much more dating decisions. Tom felt that the British comedy show *The Inbetweeners* was a rare accurate representation of men like him because it focussed on men's awkwardness. Eric felt that shy men were automatically shown to be "losers" who lived in their mothers' basements and that this image had ramifications for shy men like him in real life. Bryan felt that the majority of dating stories showed young men who are only interested in sex, which was unlike his situation. Similarly, Joel felt that the media exaggerated men's focus on female beauty when choosing a partner and this was not the experience he had with his male peer group. Justin felt that the scripting of the dating process was far too formulated, that the dating experience was 'pigeonholed' into easily recognisable tropes, and that this left out the bits he enjoyed: "Going and shooting the shit for a couple of hours and then going off." Similarly, Anthony felt that all TV dramas showed men and women interacting in a way that was results led, that there was always a motive and this was not representative of his dating experiences.

Daryl felt it didn't show enough of the male paranoia about being judged, which was a relatively new occurrence in media because while women had grown up to be judged by their looks in the media and had therefore, in his view, developed defences, men were only just beginning to understand how to deal with such criticism. David felt that media relies too heavily on stereotypes for dating couples of both sexes and said: "You tend to get loads of slightly predatory males going after slightly weak women, or vice versa." Steve felt that the men who write for the media made mistakes second guessing female behaviour and often didn't know much about male behaviour either; this resulted in a simplification of representations of dating. He later added in an email:

I like women who are smart, assertive and self-sufficient. The problem is that these character types, when presented in mass media, are often also cold, haughty, and eventually 'conquered', romantically or otherwise. I'm really not interested in that representation, and it doesn't reflect my experiences (I find said women are usually witty, warm and complex). (Steve)

Stuart felt women ran relationships, from being sexual gatekeepers to running the home, and that the media was responsible for images of women keeping the house going whilst

the man appeared to be surplus, which is an interesting take on the debate about women's role as housekeeper in the media:

(Laughter) Every single advert and television programme has got the woman will be the one who is doing all the cleaning. And they do all of the cooking. And who is picking up the kids. And who's doing everything perfect. And who's doing it flawlessly while the man runs around making a mess.
(Laughter) (Stuart)

When asked about his thoughts on criticism of gendered stereotypes of women in cleaning adverts, he said he had not thought about it even though his parents shared household duties when he was young, therefore media representations of heavily gendered roles were unrealistic for him.

Of the men who felt that their experiences of dating were represented fairly well in the media, Spencer, who felt he had a better than average amount of dating success, saw media representations as quite accurate.

When asked whether they felt that they saw their dating experiences reflected accurately in the media, of the $n=9$ PUAs who answered relevantly, $n=2$ felt media did reflect their dating experiences, $n=5$ felt they did not and $n=2$ gave mixed or non-specific responses.

Of the men who felt that the media did reflect their dating experiences accurately, both had mixed feelings. PUA James felt that the media showed men who are nervous approaching women. Here then, he is coming from the position of the norm being men being nervous until they are trained not to be. He also found that many of men's experiences of everyday dating, such as "ending up in a marriage by default, some more unattractive woman who saw something in him most likely a money provider for the family and then he got stuck with her because nobody else would have him," were not often represented, probably because they were not very entertaining.

PUA Robert felt frustration when he saw attractive women in the media; he experienced them as powerful, which concerned him because it perpetrated an unjust agenda. PUA Tony felt that the women in most movies were seen as having the power and when men were portrayed as powerful, they were only powerful because they played the part of a “bad guy”; he felt that there were no powerful men who were represented as all good. In many of the interviews men were conscious of distancing themselves from a misogynist male stereotype. PUA Leon noted that women could misinterpret men’s performance of confidence for cockiness:

They don’t realise how hard it is ... At first. And you sort of have to prove yourself to them. Like that you’re not, or you’re okay, sort of thing. The guard’s up straightaway sort of thing. It can take a week or two or however long to get to know them and actually realise that you’re actually not like that. You’ve definitely got to sort of prove yourself I think.” (PUA Leon)

PUA Mufasa, who read a lot of men’s and women’s magazines, felt that women's magazines have more nuanced sex articles and they were therefore more realistic than those he read in men’s. He felt his historic experiences in the dating scene were more widely represented in the media than the dating life he currently experiences, which was more successful, so again he is someone who sees unsuccessful or nervous dating being represented in the media more often than not (unlike the dating males). Similarly, PUA Terry noted that one of his friends had a “traditional way of dating girls” in that he wined and dined girlfriends and this was a common representation of dating in the media – one which, interestingly, he understands as to be putting women in the position of power.

In varying ways, men felt their dating experiences were not represented in the media, usually with reference to stereotypical, shorthanded scriptwriting. That men’s insecurities around dating are rarely shown was commented upon, which added to the unreal feel of media representations of dating. Many men felt the media showed women to have more power than men, especially in the domestic and romantic spheres, both in the media and as consumers of it. It is interesting that representations of men as confident were not

interpreted as comforting for many men. Rather they were seen as unrealistic and often unhelpful because the men themselves did not compare themselves to them favourably.

9.4 – Monogamy

A significant minority of men aired frustrations concerning society's assumption that monogamous relationships are what should be aimed for, and they did so in varying ways. Victor was one of two men who spoke of an interest in polyamorous relationships and they formed part of his BDSM experiences, which, he said, had enriched his self-esteem through education and discussion. Daryl felt frustration at society's understanding of singledom in terms of being 'pre-marriage' and that it was a modern obsession where the sexually exclusive relationship is the only choice which is culturally valued: "You are either with someone and married to them. Or you're not. There doesn't seem to be any room in between for sort of people messing around." Elsewhere this has been described as 'monogamism' (Anderson 2012) and as mono-normativity (Pieper & Bauer 2006). Other interviewees were frustrated with monogamy while still remaining inside of monogamous relationships, but not always with equal commitment from both sides. Mark was married and was the only man to admit to being serially unfaithful to his wife who he referred to as his "life-partner". He had very established ambivalently sexist beliefs about the women in his love life:

My wife is to me very placid. Not particularly sexually motivated or sensuous. But that's still – you know, as vanilla as vanilla comes basically. I'm sure you'll understand the phrasing there. Just standard married life basically. In terms of other partners, generally people that are more adventurous. Willing to try different things. Anything and everything kind of thing. You know, I'll just try anything once and if I like it, do it again kind of thing. So just a more – more outgoing sort of sexually confident and experienced and adventurous person.

He felt that if he had a chance, he would choose a polyamorous relationship instead of marriage but acknowledged there would be social ramifications of such a choice, especially

as he was currently in a close sexual relationship with a half-sister whom he met recently for the first time:

I'm still young enough, if the marriage doesn't work out, then that is probably the way I would look to go ... it's quite enlightening. And it's quite comforting to know that there are an awful lot of people in, you know, non-standard relationships ... naturally, you know, you realise you are not alone. (Mark)

Mark's interview was interesting in that it contained many contradictions. He describes himself as passive, always waiting for the woman to make the move, and yet he has lots of short-term relationships, which implies that he must be more proactive than he understands himself to be. He is sleeping with his half sister who was raped by her brother and his father, yet he never seems to reflect on how or why she chose to be sexual with him. Although consent is something he is clearly concerned about (he mentions it a few times), and although he has empathy for his sister (and believes her to be very well-adjusted despite her experiences), he does not consider her involvement in such a relationship to be possibly related to or evocative of the previous abuse. Sexuality for him is quite simple in that consent is all that is of moral import. He speaks quite freely of his lack of commitment to his wife and of the risks he has taken with contraception with other women when they have been unable to have children, although he notes that a mistake would be devastating for her.

There is also a tension between his belief that he does not partake in one-night stands where he doesn't know the woman (at least not since he was 20) and his apparent lack of emotional investment in the women with whom he does have sexual relationships. He is clear that he invests time in getting to know people, yet he never speaks of experiencing emotional pain when relationships end, remaining matter-of-fact about them ending. He makes frequent observations which are largely egalitarian about how personality traits are not tied to a person's sex – for instance, “men aren't from Mars, women aren't from Venus” – yet some of his views are deeply entrenched, especially around benevolent sexist ideas (Glick & Fiske 1997) regarding the relative roles of women in his life. He appears to

appreciate a level playing field upon which both men and women can liberally explore their sexual imaginations (the pure relationship), and yet he thinks his wife is not capable of this. This may be because he is invested both in notions of the imperative of the male sexual drive which, as a man, means he needs plentiful sex with many women and, in relation to marriage, in the have/hold discourses, where he can think of his wife being primarily focussed on emotional security. Both of these discourses are useful for him since he personally can gain from both spheres alternately.

There was even less enthusiasm for monogamy and marriage within the PUA community where sex has been separated from relationships and has become an end in itself. PUAs, through a homosocial environment, are able to focus solely on interacting with women largely through sex and monogamy and marriage make this more difficult. In contrast to a study by Hockey et al (2007) which noted that heterosexuality per se remains relatively unproblematised and unmarked and always central to people's understanding of relationships, here non-monogamy was central to the PUA philosophy and essentialist ideas were invoked in support of the men's desire for polyamorous relationships, which remained unproblematised. Here the difficulty of finding 'the one after having lots of fun', which many of the PUA men interviewed sought, that is incorporating polyamory with the pure relationship, was minimised. Future ideal relationships were understood either in terms of couplings equally enjoying their time together and with other lovers too, or in terms of a PUA remaining emotionally disentangled at present, whilst retaining the dream of a pure relationship or confluent love over the horizon.

PUA Terry believed that men wanted marriage less than women and that men's natural instincts were to go with multiple women, in contrast to women who had instincts that steer them towards long-term monogamous relationships. It is interesting that such essentialist beliefs come from one of the younger men in the dataset and from someone who expressed a softer style of masculinity. PUA Liam also felt that men wanted marriage less than women, although, as with many of the PUAs in the community, his ambitions was still to eventually be in a long-term relationship. He therefore did foresee himself becoming

married one day, “5 or 8 years down the line,” because love could happen to him at any time. The idea of the pure relationship was often invoked in contrast to how the dating scene currently exists. PUA Brian felt that men are generally misunderstood as only interested in sex, which contradicts a previous statement made about the power in relationships being based on men's greater desire for sex. Later he says he wants a polyamorous relationship. PUA James was anti-marriage yet still aims for the pure relationship. He prefers choice to commitment and, in words that echo Bauman's analysis, (2000) values keeping fluid and uninvested:

PUA James: I do say this to girls. My view of marriage is that it serves no purpose except that of making it harder to split.

AA: Right. Okay.

PUA James: So, if, in fact, if I wanted to spend every night of my life together with the same woman, I would rather that we have a choice. I would rather that be out of choice. I would rather that be out of a choice made each night than out of respect for a promise that is not believed in, or, even worse, out of fear of the consequence of that splitting up with her. Which gets complicated even more by marriage.

The repetition and the need for continual choice sounds exhausting – “a choice made each night” – yet this is preferable to existing in the complications of marriage. Describing marriage as complicated implies a fear of the unknown and, indeed, PUA James had not experienced any long-term relationships, so he fears something that he has either hitherto successfully avoided or was never a likelihood anyway. On the same subject, PUA Dumervil felt that men aspired to have a playboy lifestyle while actually craving the security of a monogamous relationship with a woman.

One reason why PUA John was reticent about approaching women was that he feared they wanted marriage, but on engaging in communication with the women he dated, he found that they were much more in tune with his relationship ideology than originally anticipated. PUA Brian felt that marriage equated to a boring life, which he had witnessed

in people he knew: “all they talk about is their new sofa from IKEA and they are not such exciting and friends anymore.” Here, the perennial IKEA purchase is shown as proof of loss of individualism, or acquiescence to conformity, something one has to be careful not to be hoodwinked into by an attractive woman.

9.5 – Power Between Genders

When asked if women, men or neither sex held the majority of power in the dating environment, the dating men’s responses were evenly split between women holding the power $n=10$ and both sexes being equally powerful $n=10$. Of the PUAs, $n=5$ thought women held the power and $n=5$ felt that either/both had equal power. The fact that no PUAs thought they held the power is especially interesting because these men had undergone PUA training, which emphasises male acquisition of this very thing. The idea that women had power in dating was not contested by either group; what was disputed was whether or not the men did too.

Of the men who thought women had more power, Tom felt that women had the ability to choose a mate more carefully than a man did, (‘gatekeeping’ was likewise mentioned by many men of both types). Women, he felt, have more choice because they have more control over their libido – an argument which refers back once more to notions of the male sexual drive, yet interestingly this time the drive does not comfort; women are better off not being subject to such a discourse. He also thought that once the relationship was established, women’s control continued, but he was at a loss to say why:

Tom: I think its power in terms of, you know, they can control the man, if you know what I mean. Like, you know, I’ve had it in the past where I’ve wanted to go out with my mates. And she turns round and says, “Oh, no. I want you to stay in.” And I’ll stay. (Pause) And to this day, I’ve got no idea why.

AA: (Laughter) Right. So you think women kind of run the relationship, even after they’ve – you’ve got together? They are quite powerful in the relationship?

Tom: Yes. I think so.

AA: So – and it's interesting you say you don't know why you didn't go out. You don't know?

Tom: No. I mean – no.

Again, like the IKEA-purchase scenario, women are capable of robbing a man of his individualism, all the more insidious because of a clear distinction of self, he doesn't know why he didn't go out. Similarly, Joel felt women to be the powerful party but could not vocalise why, except to say he always felt "on the back foot" with women. Mike felt women took the lead in the relationship and chose which direction it went in and Mark concurred. Eric, the MRA, felt women's ability to bear children gave them the balance of power because men spent a lot of their energy trying to impress women:

(Pause) I suppose it depends on social-economic factors. But I think in general, women have more power than men in that regard by virtue of they're the child bearers. So instinctively, men are hardwired to seek out women and to impress them. And women are hardwired to choose the strongest, fittest man to raise – to raise her children. So in that regard, I definitely do think women have the power. But saying that, a man who is say a big CEO of a company or a famous or professional athlete, they're going to have the power to have women come up to them in nightclubs. And they know that. And they take – a lot of them take advantage of it. But for the average man, that's – that's power that I'll never understand. (Eric)

Here, biology is used to explain 'natural' power relations. Women are thought to be in control due to their biology, albeit through benevolent sexist means as innate mothers looking out for their children's wellbeing. Eric's essentialist ideas of gender are problematic for him. Because he sees women as so biologically determined to be unfair, it is difficult for him to reconcile his desire for equality with what he believes to be a biologically necessary reality. His position is a rare instance in which essentialist ideas of gender are not providing too much comfort to the believer. Unlike the PUAs interviewees, who sometimes also saw women as more powerful, biology does not come to the rescue. On the contrary, biology underlines male inequality, therefore it provides no reassurance. Throughout his interview, Eric understood equality in genuinely gender-neutral terms, which was rare in

the manosphere (he had been 'accused' of being a feminist when he first joined), and his frustration was with a gendered system in which he was positioned to experience inequality vis-à-vis women's power, not simply, as much online masculinist bloggers understand it, through women's outright (and singular) power over men.

Of the men who saw the power relations as more equal, David and George both noted the relative nature of power, and felt that both men and women would think the opposite sex had more. Steve felt that the power balance was related to how progressive a relationship was and noted that dating women who were not progressive made him feel paternal. Tomas had quite an intricate idea of how the power between genders panned out in dating relationships. He felt that it changed over time, depending on the sexes' socio-economic and biological realities. Victor felt the strong stereotypes around gender and power that really were in charge and neither sex was served by such generalisations. He notes that the idea of woman as gatekeeper was not always relevant because men could be well aware in advance that they were going to have sex and were gatekeepers to their own bodies. He was unique in thinking this however.

On the subject of the role of PUA training in changing power relations between men and women, PUA James saw it in terms of increasing men's power, rather than equalising power between the sexes. Similarly, PUA Dumervil felt that, on balance, women have the power in dating but that men were gaining the ground that women were losing because men were learning skills through the PUA community, which increased their confidence – a comment that somewhat overestimates the cultural penetration it has achieved in recent years. He refers, along with many other men interviewed from the PUA scene, to men regaining masculinity in a world where feminism has 'softened' men. He believes that women were historically seen in a negative light, especially by religion, and that now, through feminism and men's exposure to female beauty, in part through lads' mags, which put women on a pedestal, women are revered more and therefore men's relative power position has changed. He then says that only through men's weaning from the influence of female beauty will men be able to share an equal footing with women:

Personally I think that when you have a dating scene like this where, you know, men are kind of getting a little bit of a – a little bit of kind of evolutionary – I don't know what you want to call it. (Pause) A little bit of their – a little bit of their masculinity back, I suppose. I think that a lot of kind of manipulation by social and cultural ways is kind of being – it is a – I think there will be a growing trend of that being reversed. (PUA Dumervil)

It is another male establishment, the PUA community, which can topple women however, by means of a denial of the power of their beauty:

PUA Dumervil: And now, with the pick-up industry, you're kind of seeing a renaissance. And there's like blokes can do and say these things and women will fall into your arms. And it's like, okay, that will work some of the time. But then blokes are almost realising that everyone is different. And you don't have to go and have a, I don't know, you know, a *Loaded* girl, an *FHM* girl. That's not the be all and end all of it. Blokes are realising that, you know – I mean, I think, this is a very, very small minority of this. Don't get me wrong. I think there is still a lot of mainstream guys who are like, "Yeah, I want an *FHM* girl." You know. But for me, personally, the power – women still have a lot of power in the dating scene, yes. But that power – power will diminish over time. But it is a very, very slow, gradual movement. I mean, for me, my – I mean through my counselling and through some input with, you know – I hate the term 'PUA' and 'pick up'. You know. But it's a useful term to use. For me, personally, I feel I hold a lot more power in the dating scene than I used to. A lot more power.

AA: Do you think PUA is about equalising the power or is it about giving men the upper hand?

PUA Dumervil: I think it's a lot about giving men the upper hand. Like PUA as a product. Do you know what I mean?

Again, a historical male world where men are on top is envisioned and it gives comfort. The apparent lack of transition is understood as being a result of a slow but sure revolution. As PUA skills are understood as giving men power back, such men feel justified in stating their claim to 'reclaimed power' it seems, with such a situation being seen as historical and therefore correct.

Of the men who felt that power was split between men and women, PUA Mufasa felt that each sex had different power in equal measure yet he felt that it was a lot easier for women to date, such ease doesn't equate with greater power, however. As part of his projection of power, he underestimates the amount of time, effort and money spent by women in maximising their physical attractiveness in comparison to men's risk-taking behaviour in approaching women, which he knows takes a lot of effort: "She just has to look great. You know? And then be at a bar."

PUA Axl, who was a virgin and had not experienced dating a woman long enough to have sexual intercourse with her, felt that women held the power only up until the initial experience of sexual intercourse:

Having said all this, I think women only have power over men initially before sex. Men tend to get bored of sex from one partner so the balance of sexual power then goes to the man later in the relationship, unless he is desperate or gets clingy. In short, a man has a hard time finding an attractive enough partner and to get the dating process started. While women can attract a man alright but they will have problems holding on to him, especially if he is a catch and high-value man and she has nothing else than her looks going for her. (PUA Axl)

Here, PUA Axl speaks in generalisations about men and women, rather than in terms of his direct experience and comes up with a vision that is in keeping with media stereotypes around notions of the male 'need' for sex and women's for emotional security, such stereotypes encouraging ideas of women and men being essentially different and therefore somewhat tragic. Men can't help but stray and he sees this in terms of male choice: a man "has a hard time finding an attractive enough partner". This fits with other areas of PUA Axl's interview, such as where he focuses on having troubles with his taste for unreachable women being accepted by friends and family, and about not being attracted to the women who are attracted to him (and not focussed on problems around attracting women). His insecurities are therefore framed in a way that is safely in the realm of male action. Likewise, the man envisaged above is 'high value', not average, whereas the woman's (women's) dating value is not mentioned, the man is standing in for his fantasy self.

Throughout the interviews both the dating men and the PUAs utilised the male sexual drive and the have/hold discourses as a means of understanding sex and dating. As Hollway (1984) argues, men are able to split off their emotions and insecurities by understanding women as part of the have/hold discourse, meaning that they need not own their own emotions (see the Introduction). Instead they understand themselves as performing emotional understanding in order for women to be satisfied.

Apart from 'approach anxiety', women's power in dating was also felt through other means, such as the pressure to marry, motherhood, and their sexual gatekeeper role, as well as women's domestic skills (and men's lack thereof). PUA John was the only interviewee who spoke in detail about the power of an ex-wife, probably because he had divorced only a couple of years before the time of the interview. He was one of a few men who thought domestic skills gave women power and he needed to gain such skills in order to empower himself:

There's the greater mastery of domestic stuff in terms of cooking and childcare. You know the phrase "the way to a man is through his stomach". This sort of thing. They have oftentimes more mastery of those kind of things ... Personally, there are certain areas of my life that I want to get better at. I can cook a few good dishes, but I want to be able to be as good as any woman in terms of looking after myself. (PUA John)

Women's child-rearing skills were another source of female power for him:

I've got two kids. The connection and the control that gives them over the children is – I think – a massive power, The fact that, because she is the primary carer, and the law says the children are the most important, so therefore she gets everything if it all goes tits up. It's just the way it is. But it's a massive source of female power. (PUA John)

He also felt that women have the ability to use access to sex as a means to control a man's behaviour:

The fact that men are controlled by their dicks. You know, because that gives them huge power to control men ... So I think when you are in a monogamous relationship, access to sex is oftentimes used as a means to control men. And, yes, it's a situation I never want to be in again. Having been controlled by my dick by a woman. It's miserable. (PUA John)

PUA John was, at the time of interview, very guarded about entering into new emotional ties, going as far as recently breaking off a relationship with a woman he had dated for several months where they met up twice weekly, because, he said, he didn't want to upset her; he wanted to protect her feelings. He makes no mention of his own emotional attachment and arguably projects his affections and emotional sensitivities onto the girlfriend, whom he has to separate from for her 'own good'.

Anthony speaks of how leaving his ex-wife has dented his confidence; he describes her as very insecure, especially about his faithfulness. He says his ex-wife's insecurity was the reason why they split up because she was very worried about him working offshore and being unfaithful, resulting in him deciding to stop going to lots of car clubs and pursuing other hobbies in order to appease her jealousy. But, he says, "I could never quite get to the root cause of the issues. I would just try and give her the reassurance that she was looking for and that she seeks." He says that "insecurity absolutely drives me up the wall", yet:

But the ironic thing, I've never ever been insecure. I've always been very confident and, you know, very happy. It's after – after ending things with my ex-wife, I've suddenly started to be more insecure about myself, which I think is quite interesting. So somebody who's fairly confident, independent. But not so much so. I think it's nice to be reassured every now and then by somebody who actually needs a bit of reassurance from you. You know, it's nice to have somebody that comes to you every now and then because they actually want to hear that you love them or that they need that little bit of a pick-me-up. So I like somebody who is not too distant but (Pause) – yes, it's a difficult one to categorise really. (PUA Tony)

Here Anthony, after leaving his wife, is surprised at how he feels more insecure. This may be in part because he does not have a female partner on to whom he can project his emotions, or that he needs/likes her insecurity more than he admits. Later in the interview,

Anthony describes a break in the relationship with his wife in which he had a one-night stand with a woman who became pregnant. When describing the resulting problems, he frames himself as between two emotional women, focusing on his management of the situation, rather than on his pain:

There was a lot of back and forth, back and forth with that. I mean I – I was really falling to pieces over this at the time. I really fell to pieces. And so she eventually went off to have the baby. And all the way through the pregnancy, she really was just absolute psychotic nightmare. I was (Pause) – I really didn't know what to do. Because on the one hand, I had my now ex saying, "If you are involved in any of this, I will leave you. And that's an end to it." You know, and I thought, well I've got a girl who's pregnant who is absolutely emotionally unhinged and I was – one of my big fears was that she was going to use the child as a weapon. And with the relationship I already had with [my] daughter at the time and then this, I was just absolutely torn to shreds over what to do. And eventually, as I said, the girl kept saying, "I don't want you anywhere near it. I don't want you anything to do with this." So I was saying, "Well, you know, (Pause) I would like to have some involvement. But the most important thing is stability. So if we make a decision now, we are sticking to it. And that's it." And she went, "Well, I don't want you anywhere near it." "Okay. Fine. I won't come anywhere near but still pay maintenance. That's fine." She had the baby. She then decided she wanted me to be involved. Then she didn't. Then she did. Then she didn't. And eventually I just had to say, "Look I'm not getting involved now because you are being so emotionally unreasonable here. I can't keep up. And I can't be in a situation where you have this level of power over me." (PUA Tony)

Anthony's anxiety and emotional unease is apparent – "I really fell to pieces" – yet his focus remains on the women's emotional responses: "she really was just absolute psychotic nightmare." Elsewhere he notes a female friend referring to him as "the onion boy" because he was layered, meaning he appeared confident yet as one got to know him more he became less so. He doesn't go to see a counsellor or talk about the issues he has with his past, "just because there's been no real need to", so he doesn't truly acknowledge his pain. He also said that he doesn't want a woman to "fix" him in a relationship, which is something he feels that they often want to do. For Anthony, understanding emotions as something women do is a means of controlling his own insecurities.

When PUA Mufasa spoke about what he finds attractive in a woman, he notes that if a woman had slept with as many partners as he had he would not be interested in dating her. This is because he wants her to want something that isn't like himself, in order that she 'save' him from himself:

I mean like it's weird that I judge women considering the things that I've done. But it's like – when it comes to a woman I would want to date, as in like I want to make her my girlfriend, someone I might maybe even marry one day, I want someone that has a – a healthy deal of sex. Not – like not the deal that I have. Because I don't have a healthy deal of sex. So it's like – I want someone that like when I have sex with her, it's not just sex. It's like a – it's like something that she shares with you. You know? It's like sex is like an intimate thing for her. And like I found that the best girlfriends I've had have been girls that have been – and like the most faithful in a way – are the girls that have been like that view of sex as something more than just fucking.
(PUA Mufasa)

It is interesting that he is aware of his hypocrisy – “it's weird that I judge women” – and that he doesn't see himself as exemplary: “I don't have a healthy deal of sex.” Whilst on the surface this is purely a means for him to manage women's likelihood of faithfulness, it is tinged with a certain amount of self-criticism. In a way he wants a woman to save him from the male sexual drive into the 'have/hold' realm of confluent love. This mirrors the tendency for men in the PUA group to seem to want to 'have some fun along the way' towards finding 'the one'. He is much more confident since undertaking PUA training in the last few years, he says, yet as was felt with a number of the PUAs and PUA trainers interviewed, concerns about losing touch with one's emotional, 'real' self were there, albeit in the background.

As with many of the PUA trainers, essentialist ideas of gender and cherry-picked pieces of scientific knowledge are used to justify the male sexual drive for many PUAs. For instance PUA James gives an example of bonobo monkeys using sexual intercourse as a means of greeting each other. He believes that humans would act like bonobo monkeys if there were no social norms; we would all be sexually free and sex would be understood without shame. Yet gender orders were a large source of frustration for men like PUA James. He

was annoyed to see women ask a lot of questions in the initial exchange of conversation in order to evaluate a man's worth, to 'validate' him. It is interesting that he in no way perceives the dating experience as an exchange of information and of mutual evaluation. Yet he did not evoke essentialist/biological ideas of women finding the best mate, which ought to match his ideas about males wanting multiple sexual partners. The source of judgement ('validation') is not to be found in biology then, but in feminism:

- PUA James: The problem is society in a way, and feminism in a way have brought it to the point where a man would be socially compelled to seek approval and validation at every step of the seduction process. I mean, if you went and looked at court cases in the States of sexual harassment, even in mainstream culture in a way kind of that idea, [?] I'm going to exaggerate it in a way, "Oh, can I have your number?" "Oh, can I take you out to a date?" "Oh, can I touch your shoulder?" "Yes. (Well, he's a shy gentleman!)" "Oh, can I touch your back?" "Yes. (This guy really doesn't get I want him.)" "Oh, can I touch your breast." "Yes. (Oh my goodness, is he really that totally inexperienced?)" You can see what I'm talking about. The idea that a man has to seek validation at every step. Now, that is good in a way. I mean, okay, seeking approval is good. Seeking validation is not.
- AA: Okay. What's the difference between approval and validation for you?
- PUA James: Validation would – validation is when your own self-worth gets called into play according to the outcome of your behaviours. However, the problem is –
- AA: And approval I assume is just getting consent?
- PUA James: Yes.
- AA: Yes. Okay.
- PUA James: I mean consent is really good to have. (Laughter) You can't do anything without it.

That the PUA community aspires towards the pure relationship and often espouses ideas akin to that of confluent love (albeit in this instance, as bonobos) is always in tension with

essentialised gendered understandings based on cherry picked biological findings. How are such 'new' relationships to be achieved through historic understandings of gender, in which the PUA community admit men and women weren't free? One can imagine the ideal relationship for the PUA community being a neo-conservative construction where men and women are in line with their appropriate male sexual drive and have/hold positioning, yet these discourses are mutually utilised in order for women to be freely able to have guilt-free sex (by getting in touch with their male side), and men are able to admit emotions and concerns (by getting in touch with their female side). The emotional and sexual realms remain intact, providing certitude and confidence, yet the dream of the pure relationship can be used as a motivational tool; after all we both have both sides.

Within the PUA community, concerns about women's rejection are seemingly brought under control through technical knowledge. According to PUA Tony, the PUA scene says:

You have the power because you choose who you are attracted to. And as long as you make yourself a better person, then you can go out with different people and if you go out with one person, then she uses her power to say she's not interested and no relationship anymore, then don't worry about it. You can go out and meet someone else. And then that way. But if – without the PUA scene, a lot of guys would say, "Well, oh, no, she's broken up with me," and have turned to drink and try to do this, whilst I say, "No, no, no. You know? You have a life outside that relationship. And you should just make yourself a better and better person." (PUA Tony)

Men's power is again a focus – "you choose who you are attracted to" – as long as a man controls his market value – "as long as you make yourself a better person" – even in the face of female power, the unacknowledged force that renders men in need of self-improvement. The pain of loss of love is only felt by men outside of the community who have not learned the relevant skills.

The PUA philosophy argues that men should find their own validation internally, as opposed to relying on external validation from other people, especially women, so that when men do receive compliments from women they cannot be accepted (although they do

not advocate verbally rejecting them). This need to be the autonomous male is problematic not only in that external validation often leads to internal validation in much of life for both sexes, (appraisals at work, for instance), so therefore it is an unachievable aim, but also in that it proves to be an obstacle in the formation of a shared relationship in which mutual disclosure and support is crucial. Even for the PUA version of a relationship this is problematic, how else is the pure relationship meant to work?

One major theme within the PUA community is the desire to learn and accumulate new skills at the same time as disavowing the efforts and artificial nature of this education. When speaking about how women don't understand men's approach anxiety, PUA James notes how men can be mistaken in what is required of them to rectify the situation:

Because since men end up being so insecure about themselves, they think that some sort of tactic is needed to get a woman. Which is again is not true. You don't really need a tactic. You just make things happen naturally. (PUA James)

The contradiction in a statement "you just make things happen naturally" sums up much of the logic of the PUA teaching. Everyone is aiming to become 'a Natural', someone who does not need specific dating advice, indeed someone who never did. PT Dave noted that 'Naturals' responded to finding out about his work by confusion as to why it is necessary for men to learn such skills; this is the man PUAs are trying to become. They wish to already be an alpha male, but this is impossible and one must ask how much PUA training helps towards gaining genuinely secure confidence, or whether men after training will always feel slightly fraudulent as an unnatural 'Natural'.

PUA Axl comes from a traditional Indian background with orthodox parents and was expected to get an arranged marriage, which is problematic for him because he's not attracted to Indian women. He was still a virgin aged 35 and he agreed this was something that his Indian culture would not see as negative, but growing up in Western culture meant he was ashamed of his virginity. He describes himself as a very good catch due to his

playing music and his intelligence and thinks he should be dating the most attractive and intelligent woman that he wants to. In reality, he was too shy to lead the situation but also in his own words, clueless about the signals women were sending him. When women took courage to say they liked him, he didn't like them.

His interview is peppered with traditional language such as “worthiness”, “proposition”, “mating dance”, “untouchable”. When eventually he found one woman he liked and who liked him, he felt the process was happening too slowly and he left her after a month: “There's no way I could get what sort of result I want in dating and sex.” There seems to be a mismatch between his desperation to lose his virginity and his intolerance of anything but the perfect female partner in which to invest the time towards sexual gratification. He is cognizant of his tendency to walk away from willing women. PUA Axl is keeping women at a distance yet constantly striving to achieve intimacy with them. He is concerned about being relegated to ‘the boyfriend zone’ where:

... the girl withholds sex until a later point. I know I'm good relationship material. For now I want to have sex with a range of women. This will help me screen them for what is my most important criteria at the moment, physical beauty. And then if I get along with them and connect I can decide to be their boyfriend. I'd like to date a few girls at once as well or I may go for a series of short relationships or fuck buddies. After a few relationship experiences and sexual adventures, I'll choose a girl I really connect with who I can eventually marry. At least that is my vision for now. (PUA Axl)

He makes it difficult to find a woman because his criterion for what he finds attractive is so unrealistic not least due to the considerable age difference (her required youth) he mentions elsewhere. Again, the focus is on his agency, which is in reality unreal. Setting such unachievable goals may be part of his “self-rejection” as he calls it. As sexually inexperienced, PUA Axl is looking towards the PUA community to give him a sense of constructed certitude on which to base his game plan. The problem is the inherent contradiction in the PUA philosophy between the emotionally uninvested playboy and the desire for emotional and intellectual bonding, in the notion of the pure relationship/confluent love. PUA Axl responds by using a technical and distancing

language, which puts him in control: “this will help me screen them for what is my most important criteria ... I can decide to be their boyfriend.” In his inexperience, he thinks of dating as something that can be compartmentalised and controlled. His “vision” is not entirely formed because he can't decide which type of short-term relationship is preferable to him. Ultimately, the pure relationship is an aim; even though in other parts of the interview he is quite damning of marriage, he does envisage himself marrying somebody “I really connect with.”

Meanwhile he hasn't had any dates since he's been doing the PUA training. He describes himself as becoming a theory junkie, reading and watching everything he could about PUA skills; he “wasted” 6 years in theory. He notes that dating is a little bit harder than stopping women in the street and that ultimately women also choose their partners, which adds a contradictory underlying premise to the PUA philosophy. Men are taught they can learn the requisite skills in order to have any woman they want (even a 10!) and yet they are also told it is fundamental that they must work on themselves, the project of the self, in order to make themselves as attractive as possible, in order to appeal to women. Men like PUA Axl are stuck between these two opposing tenets of PUA in this case with a resulting lack of self-esteem, especially when he sees the PUA philosophy apparently working for other men in the community.

9.6 – Conclusion

These heterosexual men's responses to questions about dating were varied but some clear distinctions between the dating men and the PUAs were observed, especially around their understandings of women's power in dating and the direction in which the power between genders was going. Although both sets of men were evenly split between seeing women as the more powerful member in a dyad, or both members sharing power equally, the PUAs were far more likely to see themselves as disempowered, even in the face of empowerment training; this was often true of their interpretations of media representations of dating as well, whereas the dating men thought the TV representations of dating exaggerated men's skills and therefore they did not feel represented. In contrast, when images of men failing

at dating was shown in the media, the PUAs were more likely to recognise themselves in them. Even when PUA training appeared to be very successful for some men the concern about women's power remained as something that needed managing, so the training was effectively only partially successful in this respect, and all the time the alpha male stereotype remained at arm's length.

The PUAs focussed on learning skills as a means of controlling female power and they were encouraged to disavow external validation, that is, to ignore or avoid either complimentary or critical observations by women of their behaviour. It was thought that this was unrealistic, because such validation is a necessary part of human interaction, and also unhelpful because the pure relationship still remained an aim. One wonders how one is to attain such an aim when women are allowed no input in such a way. In reality also it is quite likely both that men would be affected by women's words and also that women wouldn't remain in a relationship where their input was ignored in such a way, regardless of what the PUA philosophy might argue. Practical issues like these were not thought through in a philosophy that focuses on performing well at the first three dates only, because the PUA phenomenon is about making men feel more powerful in the face of women's attractiveness in the form of telephone number collection, rather than about learning how to perform in such a way that encourages successful long-term relationships with women, regardless of many men's desire for the pure relationship or confluent love.

Both sets of men had experienced dating difficulties and the men were varied in their responses as to who made the initial approach, with some appreciating women's advances. Women were often seen as daunting, especially when the men were younger and if the women were beautiful or rich. Unlike other areas of the interview, biology did not always provide constructed certainty, not even with reference to men's sexual drives. This is possibly because dating is an area where women hold a lot of power in the emotional sphere, a sphere that is disavowed for men through the male sexual drive discourse. There was some frustration at what men perceived to be women's ease of attracting men and the corollary that women think that men must find it easy too. The extensive time women

spent preparing their appearance for such dates was not acknowledged. There was some link between this and men's disavowal of the women's beauty in the Beyoncé video. Beauty was seen as something that came naturally to women and not something that took much effort, so it was not seen as involving any skill and men only mentioned such a skill when they perceived women to fail to attract them (their skills and efforts being seen as in vain and therefore more apparent).

Throughout, a focus on male activity was observed, as was a background desire for the pure relationship or experiencing confluent love, even when monogamy was also criticised (something that was largely seen to be more attractive to women than men), along with more general gendered role expectations. Many of the men were happy to 'let' women approach them initially and were keen not to be seen as aggressive or unfair in their own approaches, yet few of the men relied largely or solely on women approaching them and even when, for instance Mark said he chose to "just leave the door open" he seemed to be very successful at attracting women using such a passive approach. The PUAs were interesting in this respect too; they wanted confluent love, for women to approach them, yet they still focussed heavily on their own activity towards making this situation a possible reality. One wonders how the men would respond if the PUA dream of turning the tables completely resulting in women becoming the ones responsible for approaching men romantically, thus rendering the men in the powerful position (they perceive women to already frequent, a position of power that needs to be 'taken back'). Would this make them feel stronger, more masculine? The investment in 'getting the girl' is perhaps deeper than the PUA philosophy really understands and although they focus on this ostensibly (learning skills, overcoming anxiety), their larger aim to redress the power imbalance is perhaps something that actually sits in conflict with their real desire, the desire to be a natural 'Natural'.

Running throughout the PUA philosophy is a contradiction between working towards a pure relationship whilst focusing on piecemeal aims at short-term sexual relations, 'having some fun before finding the one'. Neither the pure relationship or polyamory were thought

through or problematized, they remained distant figures of the imagination, just like the historical male. Such imagery was a useful backdrop for the community to justify both their investment in training and in the philosophy. They didn't have to think through their desires for the fruits of both the male sexual drive and have/hold discourses (although some clearly did and were concerned about effects of PUA training). They could imagine themselves having their cake and eating it too.

Men often contradicted their accounts of seeing themselves as confident daters and it can be said here is a snapshot of men experiencing anxiety, confusion and a lack of confidence who have mixed feelings about relying on women to start and manage relationships. For instance, many of the men are both highly critical of their own perceived failure at being dominant and at the same time deeply resentful of both what they see as women's increasing power and sometimes of what they perceive to be women's 'pretence' of disempowerment. Such power is experienced by means of women's innate sexual power, through to the political and social changes that have occurred through feminist advances. Again we see that men are confused as to what women want and how they should perform, and therefore find themselves in the position of guessing their best route of action. There was a real sense of men focusing on maximising their luck with women, which resulted in them having less of a defined understanding of what their own tastes in women were, especially when young; again a feeling of them being at sea. Some men who wanted to perform a softer masculinity felt that women wouldn't appreciate this so were not free to do so.

The PUA phenomenon is neoconservative with men and women having male and female sides, which refer to their respective male sexual drive and have/hold discourses. Such conservative constructed certitude did not always provide emotional support however because essentialist ideas around the powers of motherhood and female beauty did not alleviate concern. Much as the PUAs saw themselves as gaining support and certainty from essential ideas of biology, their words speak otherwise. That men should be constantly striving for the next beautiful lady to sleep with and that women should be constantly

striving to trap a man in a relationship in which their beauty fades, might be exciting but it doesn't enlighten upon any skills or framings that would be far more useful towards successful emotional and sexual fulfilment. This was compounded by the men's need to disavow both their efforts and the artificial nature of the education they were receiving in order to become a 'Natural', rendering them always suspicious of being an unnatural 'Natural.' That men are encouraged to believe they are able to have any woman they want, despite their physical, emotional or economic realities or with regard to realities around their personality, might at first appear to be both invigorating and supportive to hear, can actually become distressing if you see other men performing better than you having undergone the same training. That their active state of overcoming problems and achieving goals was a focus, whilst there was no simultaneous real acknowledgement of their insecurities and fallibilities, or of female power, meant that there was somewhat of a contradiction between their ideas of achieving power and their realities of remaining deeply concerned about women's dating power, at least on some level.

10.0 – Conclusions

10.1 – Introduction

The aims of this thesis were to explore how twenty heterosexual dating men and ten Pick Up Artists were behaving in dating relationships at a time of gender flux; how they understand and position themselves in regards to power balances in their relationships; and how can we understand their dating realities as part of a wider gender culture that includes feminist and masculinist discourses as well as theories around individualisation, including whether the men exhibited any dissonances between cultural norms and personal experiences. Overall I found that the men interviewed did not express a coherent male identity, or share the same understandings as to what it means to be a successful man at this time; they often contradicted themselves and were multifaceted

The men shared an overarching concern about how to be a man at a time when women were becoming more powerful and yet some very traditional dating ideals were still held

dear. The interviewees performed their masculinities in varying ways situated along a 'hard' to 'soft' spectrum; this was true regardless of whether they were Pick Up Artists or not. Whilst gender stereotypes and essentialist thinking were evident, especially amongst the PUA community (the dating males were much less reliant on essentialist ideas on gender than expected), most men were cognisant of variance amongst different women and different men, and were conscious of the socially constructed nature of gender in at least some areas. The responses regarding both emotional expression and intelligence - in which most of the men understood women to be freer than men to express emotion, rather than experiencing more of it - were a good example of this.

This did not stop some of the interviewees relying upon the have/hold and the male sexual drive discourses (Hollway 1984) as a means to understand dating relations between themselves and various partners. Men saw themselves as feminine when they were the most emotional partner, and other men focussed on helping women with their emotions (whilst ignoring their own). The PUA's fear of female emotional intelligence was based on the have/hold discourse where men understand women to be emotional caretakers, yet this was found to be a piece of essentialist imagery that did not offer solace, as women were thought to be able to 'see through' men's performances. Here we see these men's masculine performance as being tied up with responses to female behaviour, rather than with directing female behaviour as was the focus of the pick-up artist community.

The on-going emancipation of women has inevitably affected how heterosexual men perceive themselves as individuals, as members of homosocial groups and as part of dating dyads. This is in part resultant from both women's increased demands for equality, and of a re-aligning of masculinity - both in relation to ideas of 'masculine traits' and as the 'not-feminine' - in response to shifting definitions of femininity (Whitehead & Barratt 2001). In 2014 we live in a time of changes in gender roles (along with the resultant associated epistemological changes in how we understand differing perspectives on truth) that have also destabilised dating norms, putting into question many of the historical markers

hitherto used as delineators in a person's life, such as marriage, childbirth and lifelong monogamy.

Men did not share an idea of an ideal masculinity. Both the dating men (who were not chosen for any shared traits with the exception of being in a 20 year age range) and the pickup artists, who in theory ought to share a favoured masculinity due to their optioning for and tutorage in, the pickup artist ideal alpha male archetype. Instead what was found was that many men experienced conflicting ideals and desires around the type of man they saw themselves as or wanted to become. This was reinforced by how the men perceived other men's, especially male peers', masculinities to be in contrast to their own. In varying contexts (appreciation of female attractiveness being the most obvious) a number of the men saw themselves as outside of a masculine norm, with which they did not share tastes or ideals, yet with which they often compared themselves negatively, or at least distanced themselves from somewhat apologetically, resulting in some cognitive dissonance. Here we can see the influence of hegemonic masculine ideals resulting in a duplicitous masculinity that is not serving the individual men well, or that men with softer masculinities were not challenging the hegemonic form, as Bird (1996) predicted. These men appeared to make aesthetic, political and ethical life decisions individually, something that was not always comfortable. Indeed the PUAs had an intriguing version of homosociality, which included arm's-length competition and the imperative that female beauty be central to understanding men's own worth within the community.

The interviewees often expressed horizontal rather than vertical (Hammarén and Johansson 2014) homosocial experiences, although both sets of men had subjects that were unapproachable with their male friends. The dating men often prioritised heterosexual relationships over those with male peers and there was a real feeling of men not being defined largely by their homosocial relationships, women were often central to their lives and their decisions. This was probably in part because men did not always feel a complete homosocial connection, it was often partial and therefore did not present such a strong basis for organising their lives around, unlike the theories of Rubin, Kimmel or Connell

perceive it. Also with some subjects there was a clear lack of homosocial influence such as the likelihood of men to mainly interested in other men's opinions about their penile size. Unlike Bordo's (2000) findings here the interviewees did not mention the importance of a flaccid size and did show some deep concerns about women's opinions of their penis, something verified by the sex workers interviewed.

Understanding heterosexual men's homosociality as being of partial importance to men and that it is more often horizontal than vertical today than when Rubin was writing, is imperative to understanding how men experience women's power at this time. Also, when such men behave inclusively 'away from the flock' they also change other men (male children, for instance) so their effect can be felt in other ways that reinforce heterosocial relations. If we continue to believe that men always prioritise homosocial relations as per traditional patriarchal and hegemonic theories of masculinity, we will be blind to instances that do not fit such paradigms and will make the mistake of false generalisation that Foucault warned about. To take the colloquial term 'bros before hos' as an example, it would be too easy to see this declaration in terms of traditional theories of sexism where men prioritise their relationships with men. In order to develop our understanding of this more deeply, one has to ask why the declaration needs to be made at all. That is, it is the importance of women in men's lives that render homosocial relations vulnerable and make the declaration necessary.

Traditional theories of homosociality give men 'a curtain of arrogance' to hide behind, that is they encourage us to fear men's homosocial relations, yet behind such a curtain lays much insecurity amongst men, as well as concern about female power, of which we know very little. We must explore men's words to understand their behaviour that we might be able to better differentiate between their truly offensive behaviour (done solely in terms of self projection), from that which is on some level defensive against power felt by them to be held (and possibly used) by women. As assured in the introduction, this is not to say that women may hold the balance of power – in this instance, in relationships - but we can logically conclude that we cannot know the extent of men's offensive (sexist, callous,

misogynist) motivations without first eliminating their defensive behaviour. At present we are encouraged to see all men's motivations that hold negative connotations for women in terms of a presumed male drive for power as per HMT or theories of patriarchy. Only illuminating the shaded and perhaps well-hidden areas of male insecurities, can we truly define what are in fact motivations for extension or support of male power, as a privilege, over that which is largely about defence, rendering us able to think more in terms of shared similarities and concerns.

That one is now encouraged to understand the self as an on-going project that must remain fluid and be constantly improving adds to a culture of uncertainty in the face of seemingly perpetual choice. The move then is towards constructed certitude, to finding shared frameworks which can be useful as means to recognise and be recognised, and to provide comfort from the tyranny of choice. A clear example of this is the 'lads' mags' phenomenon of the 1990s that offered heterosexual men a shared direction, turning chaos into control via management and skill (Rogers 2005), with a shared view towards "a strangely nostalgic-obsessed future" (Jachimiak 2006:152). Similarly, the PUA industry offers a shared direction, again they use science to give constructed certitude (that was largely not available to the dating men) in an environment where men feel 'at sea' with women. Yet I have shown that denying softer masculinity traits and avoiding connecting with women, in preference for keeping fluid, doesn't actually provide support.

The logical incoherence central to the PUA communities in which softer masculine traits must be denied along with deeply emotional ties with women, in favour of a life made of Bauman's (2000) fluidity, means that these communities do not provide a helpful scripts for men to use towards security in a time of great uncertainty of gendered roles. When entrenched essentialism reigns, these men see themselves in contrast with multi-various changes in gender roles in wider society; such men must on some level realise they are fighting a losing game and biology did not always provide certainty either. All around the PUA communities is proof that gender is becoming a much more multifaceted and fluid performance in which a united conservative male front, such as is their dream, is never

going to be achievable when elsewhere, men opt for other masculinities out of choice. The distinct delineating of dating behaviour along the male sexual drive and have/hold discourses did not in fact help the PUAs because such a perception pictures men and women as far more different than they actually are. Some of the PUAs who appeared to aim for much success in attracting many women, did not in fact gain comfort from the male sexual drive discourse, because they felt they did not match up to their imagined alpha male, even with training.

The historical male was also problematic as the nagging reality that alpha status shouldn't need tutoring – one should already be 'a Natural' – meaning that although learning the PUA skill-set is central to the community, this is framed in terms of men becoming their 'real' masculine selves and of making things happen 'naturally': on some level denying the extensive work and reconfiguration of self that learning PUA skills requires. Naturalness of behaviour and authenticity of masculinity are also things that can't be proven, which is problematic in an environment that relies on constructed certitude gained from cherry picked scientific 'facts'. Similarly, neither the pure relationship or polyamory were thought through to their logical conclusions or problematized, they too remained distant figures of their imagination, used to provide a backdrop to the men's current dating concerns. I have also shown that the project of the self is of great relevance to the PUA community especially, as is Giddens (1992) concept of a pure relationship, which was in conflict with the fluid PUA logic. Similarly there is support for Beck & Beck-Gernsheim's (2001) idea that the men (especially the PUAs) are primed to want to 'try a partner out' before committing as part of a general imperative to be free and a desire for certainty of happiness as part of a rationalised dating system.

Within the PUA community women's beauty became part of a life project in which men rated women in a scale of nought to ten, and in doing so they rate themselves along the lines of how likely they are to 'achieve' trophy women. Men also reported having reasonable or high body satisfaction, yet also, many men framed their bodies as part of it life project, something they were working on, as a means of retaining a sense of masculinity

away from any potentially feminising vanity. The female gaze was conspicuous by its absence and actively avoided by the PUAs who were however, taught they needed to improve their appearance in order to improve their chances, again their activity was highlighted, this time to avoid appearing vain as much as dismissing the female gaze.

The majority of men had experienced some sort of unwanted sex with women and many had witnessed or experienced violence too, yet throughout, the men performed their masculinity by means of framing insecurities in terms of their management of the situation, rationalisation of likelihood, their 'blindness', or very often, female culpability. This reinforces Durfee's (2011) findings that men exist in a "gendered paradox", where male victimhood cannot be expressed because it is not experienced or known directly as such. I was surprised at how few men spoke of themselves as victims, even in the face of severe violence. A lack of 'victim' (to use the word very broadly) scripts for men means that they must utilise considerable courage in admitting loss at the hands of a woman because they must 'go it alone', something that is understandably unattractive for many men. It is much easier to think in terms of management than anxiety, therefore these men know themselves as managers rather than as victims. In this role they will be encouraged to criticise women's performance rather than explore their own vulnerabilities, because such exploration would risk not only loss of face homosocially but also, they felt, loss of desire and respect from the women in their lives.

If men are denied 'victim' scripts for themselves, we need to ask how this affects their ability to appreciate women's instances of victimhood. In a context where female power is not acknowledged, men may well feel justified in arguing that female victimhood is exaggerated to gain the effect of diminishing men's power, or that society's ignoring of masculine victimhood is reason enough for them to ignore female victimhood in turn, (as is the premise of the arguments made by online masculinist groups). Even in such male environs where male victimhood is central, there is still a focus on male action and a derision of softer masculinities, so arguably these masculinist spaces are not as supportive of men as they may claim. Others may perceive female inequalities to be more persistent

and wider ranging than they may actually be and may respond by minimising women's advances as a means to exaggerate and to keep a focus upon men's power, leaving women little room for acknowledgement of hard earned political gains. In both these instances men's own sense of victimhood is intrinsically linked to their understanding of women's.

If a language of male insecurity and 'victimhood' can be developed that enables men to know themselves in ways that do not focus on their action long enough to ponder on their insecurities enough to gain self-knowledge, then a dialogue around similarities and variance between genders can develop beyond the knee-jerk version of victimhood that largely is the case with the online masculinists whose focus on a perceived acute male victimhood, ignores wider structural inequality that disadvantages women. If we can begin to understand gender working in a way that damages both men and women (and transgendered people) we can reframe the debate beyond a polarised turf war into something far more useful. I have shown in this thesis that there are genuine instances of male victimhood and insecurities that range from slight to severe; I have also shown that these men are not free to frame their negative experiences with women in any supportive way because the relevant scripts of victimhood and softer masculinities remain largely underdeveloped.

10.2 – Masculinity Theories

Whilst researching existing work on masculinities at the beginning of my Ph.D. I was critical of some masculinity theories such as hegemonic masculinity theory, which I found to be more about ideological norms of masculine behaviour than men's everyday behaviour. It was an interesting theory with more relevance in a time of clearer gender positions (and class/politics) in the 1980s that provided novel discussion on how men affect each other, taking it beyond patriarchal theory, which focussed on how men affected women only. HMT then became superseded by poststructural thought that in part responded to how people behave regarding the demand for self-construction in a time of increased individualism. I looked for information to complicate HMT, to get an idea of the

complex experiences of power, rather than simple structural theories, which led me to Foucault and eventually to inclusive masculinity theory.

The trouble with HMT is it is a gender structure, which does not appreciate that when men fail the masculine norms, behind their bravado they are insecure on some level it assumes that men's expressions of power are psychologically genuine. This was not something I found with my interviewees' accounts that revealed more of a displacement between differing types of masculinity directed by both other men and women, which left many men feeling 'outside' of the hegemonic masculine ideal, which they (probably wrongly) assumed their friends frequented. Men can also hold conflicting positions on masculine ideals simultaneously, something not accounted for in theories of hegemonic or harder masculinities such as those by Kimmel and Connell. The PUAs especially held softer and harder ideals at the same time, for instance horizontal homosociality and the desire to be the historic male. We can I think, frame this situation usefully as men being subject to a 'lag' in the transition between the two masculinity paradigms, something that they feel as partial and largely unsupportive at this time, especially in the absence of a clear script for men who prefer a softer masculine performance.

Men fear losing both homosocial and female support if they perform a softer masculinity especially if it involves expressing insecurities when many men understood women to be keen supporters of hegemonic masculinity. Twinned with this was a need to control women's behaviour that was based on fear probably because they understood women's potential for defining them (bros before hos...) They focussed on skills they do have rather than admitting weakness, often putting a lot of effort into one area of their life, such as was found by Coles (2008) and de Visser (2009). For instance, men manage relationships with women through productiveness, Fordisation and scientisation just as Rogers (2005) found with the men's magazines. Men also respond by taking up positions of authority aligned with HMT when they feel insecure, as was clearly shown with the findings on female beauty in this study where men judged and morally criticised women exhibiting their beauty.

This study did not unearth any great concern with the interviewees about homosexuality or show these men to be experiencing a culture of homophobia, although homosexuality was not broached directly in the questioning. This may be why they were often inclined to admit to having a softer type of masculinity, and to being adverse to hegemonic masculinity as per Anderson's theory of inclusivity that states that homophobia is key to HMT and when it diminishes inclusivity is a possibility, however certain subjects were given a clear berth in homosocial situations, which implies some remaining underlying fears of being labelled homosexual.

One could understand pickup artistry in terms of extended adolescence as per Kimmel's Guyland, however when one reads his work on masculinity there is no real focus on horizontal homosociality as witnessed in this study. Also regardless of what the PUA philosophy extolled, some of the men involved certainly expressed a softer kind of masculinity that didn't align itself easily with HMT, (one wonders how long they would stay within the community). It is certainly true that PUA is more popular amongst the young, however, probably peaking around the mid-20s so this could be indicative of a tendency for young men to extend their adolescence, yet unlike Kimmel's American students, these men were focused on working out systems to better their chances with women that included much self-readjustment, rather than partying as Kimmel's men did. Indeed alcohol was frowned upon within the community that I spoke to.

I have shown here that inclusive masculinity theory goes far further in explaining how the men perform their masculinity, not least because it does not deny the real power of softer masculine men and women to displace harder masculine ideals in society, resulting in a real and present change in gender relations that represents women's stronger position. Many of the interviewees were genuinely striving towards a 'softer' type of masculine performance and many overtly questioned hegemonic masculine ideals and lived in ways that genuinely defied them, not as a means of realigning male authority but as a means of sharing power with women and encouraging emotional closeness with men, possible only through increased respect of women and the diminishing of both homosocial competition

and homohysteria. In this we can see considerable support for the work of Anderson and McCormack, not only in that softer masculine types exist but also that they coexist with more orthodox masculine types or discursive authority, with neither achieving hegemony. Yet a lack of relevant 'scripts' means that such men were left to calculate their aesthetic, political and ethical life decisions individually.

Inclusive masculinity theory is one way of understanding how men are changing in very real ways in recent decades, yet what needs also to be explored is how all types of masculine performance, inclusive or hegemonic, are in part informed by women's (equally constructed) desires and demands. Heterosexual men's need to impress women and to be validated by them (although the PUAs would have it that they do not need such validation!) is something that is not acknowledged widely in society, indeed it is actively avoided (whereas women's need to attract men has been extensively problematized and politicised), meaning that again, men must face their own desires to do so individually. Therefore it is not surprising that the PUA community feel the strong need to disavow women's power whilst simultaneously acknowledging the effects of it. When men understand hegemonic ideals as attractive to women (as was the case with a number of the men interviewed who worried that women would not find them attractive if they expressed insecurities), then harder masculine types cannot be understood as resultant entirely from homosocial design. On every level women and girls are in fact instrumental in how men perform but also understand themselves, either as real agents of power (mothers, lovers) or as cultural representations (women per se). It is important to remember this when exploring gender as part of a growing trend of recognising how women both perform and dictate others' masculine performances. My findings add support to those who studied women's desires in male performance by Firminger (2006) and Talbot and Quayle (2010).

Men's need for women's approval is now understood to be more central to homosociality than previously considered in hegemonic theory, where it was merely peripheral (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). Women are more key to men's performance of masculinity than Kimmel, Lederer or Rubin appreciate because men fear not being strong or attractive

enough for women, as well as fearing lack of homosocial respect. They fear losing face in front of both sexes, which is something these theorists all but deny. Elder, Brooks and Morrow's (2011) finding that homosociality, fear of homosexuality and the female gaze work together and all three are important in understanding men's sense of gender identity can be supported. All three aspects police men's masculine performances and therefore any theory of masculinity must incorporate how the female gaze affects men as well as the first two, which have been extensively researched. The interviews in this study show that both what men say and what they omit points towards considerable interest in women's opinions of them. Women are both a focus and an end result in PUA training, not just a conduit, for instance.

Future research must explore women's support of hegemonic masculine ideals, something that is incredibly lacking to date. Such female support was inferred by these interviewees, especially the concern of not appearing attractive to women if a softer masculinity were performed. As previously mentioned Talbot & Quayle (2010) that found that women not only police masculinities, but they also require different types of masculine performance in different contexts (work and home), meaning they exercise a certain amount of power of choice. Women may not be said to be in control of men, but at the very least when men are away from the homosocial flock, women influence them and they don't always demand a softer masculine performance. We must also look into how much of hegemonic masculine performance can truly be said to be done solely in terms designed by men and for their own benefit only, when women admit to preferring harder masculine traits both directly and as part of a culture of consumption of harder masculine imagery and portrayals, which may be part of the reason for the media's lack of a script for softer masculinities as decried by some interviewees here.

10.3 – Rethinking Misogyny

When I chose the title 'Rethinking Misogyny' for this thesis I did so because I wanted to return to some deeply held beliefs within the Gender Studies field about what knowledge is revisable and what is untouchable. Much as many in the Academy have moved from a 'top

down' understanding of patriarchy historically, towards a structure understood either in terms of hegemonic masculinity theory and/or intersectionality, there seems little movement if any that reflects what I perceive as a poststructural (in the sense that gender is relative) move by the public towards understanding psychological power of the individual being entirely relevant as to how person exists within society structure that disadvantages some. The Academy has been too slow in embracing this idea centrally; I say this even though Butler's work has been highly influential especially with third wave and postfeminisms. Yet for many the dichotomy between male and female is far too entrenched within academic circles to represent how we interact at this time in the West. I argue, that individual research findings must not be slotted into a pre-existing theory.

As I write this in June 2014 the world just witnessed what will be for many their first introduction to pick up artistry via a mass school shooting at the University of California, Santa Barbara, undertaken by an ex-PUA Elliot Rodger, who killed six people and injured thirteen others before turning the gun on himself, on the 23rd of May 2014. Before commencing his killing spree he uploaded a video called "Elliot Rodger's Retribution" in which he outlined his motives for killing people; that the women did not give him access to sex and that the men were more sexually successful than himself (who remained a virgin until he died aged 22). The responses to this in the media were initially about his white heterosexual men's privilege in comparison to the vulnerable position of his female victims. When it transpired that he was neither white, nor did he kill a majority of women there was a meta-discussion about how privilege works and how it is represented. When the stereotype of the spoiled white loner was assumed incorrectly and when the deaths of the women were given more credence than his male victims, how was power really working in the discourses around this instance?

What few people picked up upon was the fact that during his video, Rodgers performs his masculinity in a guise that is clearly un-relaxed (they reported him as being nonchalant or arrogant), and in what could be described as belonging to an aspirational male like a filmic antihero. He laughed in a way that Dracula might have done at several times during the

recording, he also sneered at the camera and rolled his jaw and face around in a manner that showed he was unsure of his playacting. The media took his performance largely at face value however, and reported his words about how he suffered at the hands of nasty women and how he was going to seek revenge, once and for all, as belonging to someone entirely unaware of his privilege. This shooting was not framed similarly to the countless other school shootings or mass shootings in America; indeed, within a couple weeks the USA had witnessed two more such massacres. That the discourse was framed entirely around gender is understandable because of the video focussed on women's power, however what was unfortunate was how little people delved behind his performance to look at what his words really meant, neither did they take anything he said to be indicative of something genuinely awry in gender relations from a male perspective. Much as his behaviour is reprehensible, those that tried to frame his tendency to murder in terms of mental illness, were accused by much of the feminist press of ignoring a larger pattern of domestic violence against women, such was the only alternative reading.

It is with some frustration that I witness this same polarisation between feminist media and masculinist online presences as had been established over the last decade, especially as this very pinpointed example could have lead to more discussion and more enlightenment, as for once the subject was specifically about perspectives on female power. We cannot dismiss Rogers' actions as either a pure expression of a mistaken patriarchal privilege nor as a singular instance of mental illness. Much as many people will fantasise about such revenge sprees on some level, it's probably true that mental illness is required to actually undertake such shootings, however, his diatribe definitely included elements of male privilege, which he was clearly blind to.

This does not excuse the blindness of others to look further into his words and to ask more questions that go beyond a patriarchal reading, yet this is what happened in the press and online social spaces populated by gender academics (academic articles having yet to be published on this subject). Such inability and unwillingness to listen to men about how they experience gender relations it could be argued inevitably leads to much pent-up anger and

frustration in men. I myself find the current state of play within Gender Studies (and the wider media interested in gender) to be equally frustrating and sometimes aggressive. Those with voices that try to blur or complicate wider thought around gender must develop a thick skin and a taste for perseverance; I have learnt this from defending feminist pornography in the past. When men or women don't align themselves with a well-established version of feminism they are often ridiculed or criticised by people who assume that the answer to gender inequality was found some decades ago and that more nuanced and developed, on-going discussion is largely unnecessary. This aspect of the feminist discourse was very apparent around the low conviction rate for rape at a debate called '*Is Rape Different?*' at London School of Economics in 2013 (see Gittos 2013). Here legal experts argued that the reason for low rates was not in fact sexist police or legal systems as is usually thought but that crimes with no witnesses were hard to prove, regardless of type, an idea that was not welcomed by the wider feminist sphere, and importantly again there was a call for silencing of such voices.

Similarly, when celebrities such as the singer Lily Allen question whether feminism is either right for them or entirely relevant today to women, the response has often been aggressive (mostly from other female feminists) without any real understanding or desire to explore what women like Allen are saying. I have always understood why women don't call themselves feminists or feel the need to a focus on gender, because people prioritise different aspects of their lives over others. Whilst feminists might see gender as the most important delineator, others see race, class or cultural belonging (such as one's nationality or cultural tastes) as their main focus in their life, if indeed they have any. White middle-class feminists in the Academy have had such different perspectives illuminated for them from the black and working-class feminists since the 1980s. Allen need not see herself as a feminist, she can see herself as a musician, after all it takes all sorts to make a world, and if feminism were prioritised over such other structural inequalities, who would sort other inequalities out? The Academy's more recent move towards intersectionality is of course useful towards framing all inequalities, yet it will probably remain the case that people have certain tastes in political alignments over others.

I am the youngest child of three with both a male and female older sibling and have always known that as a person I have power, mostly due to my strong will and personality. I was also somebody who got on extremely well with her father spending more social time with him and knowing more about him than I did my mother. He was key in teaching me to be emotionally intelligent and to care and consider other people's feelings. My mother played the role of the parent who read lots, something I was envious of her ability to do when young, she was funny yet I always remained more distant emotionally with her than with my father. In my relationship with my parents, with my siblings and with my husband I cannot recognise much of gendered relationships or what is thought of a 'men' or 'women', or especially an implied essence of 'sisterhood' discussed within the Academy. My formative experiences have always taught me that gendered roles are flexible and much of our gendered behaviour is arbitrary, long before I discovered poststructuralism, and that there are always more than one perspective that can be utilised to understand how power relations work.

10.4 – On-going Gender Studies

If gender equality is an aim, it is surely imperative to seek to understand men's words and interpretations of gender as much as those of women. Whilst historically feminists had to chart a female interpretation of the world in order to learn what a female voice could sound like in opposition to the supposedly neutral 'human' perspective defined solely by men, the focus now needs to move towards understanding gender as a construction which encourages certain performances between men and women. This means that feminist scholarship needs to include empirical work on men's own words and compare them to how men's behaviour has been historically understood. That the debate still hangs around whether or not men should be included at all within Gender Studies (for instance, see Landreau & Murphy: 2011) is unfortunate, such debate having occurred since at least the early 1980s and still largely understood in terms of a turf war (Jardine & Smith 1987). Whilst men are discouraged from joining the debate, for fear of censure, then exaggerated versions of gender understandings based largely on emotion, such as that of the manosphere, are, it could be argued, inevitable.

Within the Academy the focus on masculinities has largely involved studies around homosexual men, or how homosexuality affects heterosexual men. This study has moved the focus towards heterosexual men, regarding how they align themselves to female power as they perceive it. When I first studied for the literature review of this thesis I was surprised to see how very little has been written on men's experiences of female power, in any context. I believe this is because in part men are more feared as potential interviewees on the subject of gender inequality because they are unknown, especially in an area (Gender Studies) highly populated by female academics. I was less fearful as I had already faced such concerns many years ago regarding my filmic career. I also felt my experiences of men's fallibility in the adult industry were not appreciated in wider gender theory and therefore looked upon this as an area that is new and exciting to study; I wanted to explore the similarities between the sexes to find new areas of exploration/theory. We must demystify men by talking to them, if we are to gain confidence, this is especially true for female academics.

How much men's words are similar to or differ from women's perspectives is a line of enquiry which can realistically only be furthered by empirical research that is allowed to challenge cemented views. New knowledge can only lead to a better understanding of differences in perspective between the sexes. The fact that men are often socialised to express themselves to women with less censure than they would to other men places female researchers in a fortunate position, as I have found. Telephone interviews with men in their own home proved in this study to be invaluable in accessing men's thoughts and feelings on some difficult subjects whilst maintaining my own sense of safety and, to a certain extent, integrity. I was pleasantly surprised by the ease of men in talking to a woman about emotional issues, this says to me that we are perhaps guilty of some preconceived ideas about how men will respond to such interaction inspired by our own stereotypical thoughts around the have/hold discourse (Hollway 1984).

In this study I was struck by one interview that highlighted how perspective was of paramount importance. Below, Steve speaks of how an unintended rape can happen and of how a man can be genuinely confused about a woman's consent:

And so, you know, and we'd been kind of hanging off each other all day kind of (Laughter) getting at each other's clothes. Buttons and zips. And then I – you know, we're finally, finally, finally in bed together. And (Pause) I was incredibly drowsy. And I didn't ask her. And I expect she was tired as well. But anyway, I rolled on top of her and we had sex. And then (Pause) in the morning, she was being a bit funny. And I – it – again, it was one of those things where it just slowly dawned on me. It's like, "Shit." Despite the fact that all day we'd been talking about how we were going to have sex and stuff. We'd actually had sex of a sort earlier that day. Despite all that (Pause) all of a sudden there's a case where I – I'm finding myself asking is like, "Did you not want to have sex last night?" And she kind of (Pause) pulled a funny face and said, "Not really. No." And I just think, "Fuck." But I didn't know it – it could happen like that you know, it's mortifying. I feel awful. I feel absolutely awful. (Steve)

What struck me about what Steve says here is firstly how a lack of communication rather than a lack of care can result in such a heinous crime as rape being committed, but also how the default position in both Gender Studies and in wider culture is to disbelieve or disavow his perspective. Where in our understanding of gender relations is there room for genuine mistakes by men or genuine guilt and self-disgust? On this particular subject much work has been done to discredit the argument for the potential for unintentional rape, as though the only two positions that could explain all rapes are those of a miscommunication model or an intentional patriarchally driven power model (for instance, O'Bryne, Rapley & Hansen, 2006) and not something that could involve both aspects, or potentially neither.

Such disbelief of and disregard for men's neutral or positive intentions can lead us to draw conclusions about male behaviour that disavows female power but also ignores the possibility of men's love for women. For instance, Gilfoyle et al (1992) argue that we should understand men's desire to give women orgasms solely in terms of their own desire to be seen as sexually talented as a means to prop up their own masculine identity: they argue for an addition to Hollway's three discourses around sex with their "pseudo-reciprocal gift

discourse". That men are thought to be incapable of respecting and having affection for women enough to want to please them as an end in itself, and that women's own demands for sexual equality with men remain unacknowledged, is surely caused by a blind spot in theory around women's power.

Similarly, Allen (2007) interviewed 92 young men about how they understood their romantic identities and argues that 'doing romance' was a means for men to perform hegemonic masculine ideals in order to subjugate women further. She sees such romantic behaviour as a form of hybridised masculinity (Demetriou 2001). Yet if we are to take this line of thought seriously then there can be no behaviour outside of those that strives for hegemonic power, even in the case of the most 'feminine' of behaviours like those enacted around romance. What needs to be done is to change our ideas about how masculinity is formed to allow the "micro mechanisms" (Foucault 1980a, 101), the everyday instances of power, to change how we understand larger more general mechanisms, such as how homosociality works, rather than shoehorning such instances into an umbrella explanation, such as that provided by hegemonic masculinity theory. As Scott (1990) noted, we should look for 'hidden transcripts', that is, how power is enacted behind the backs of the powerful, if we are to understand how gendered power works today.

The danger is that encouraging men to acknowledge female power will necessarily lead them down the road into deeper misogyny and self-interest. After all, men categorically do own and run most of the world's resources still and, in the absence of an understanding of how men's psychological and emotional insecurities diminish their happiness, how are we to know that 'entertaining' men's insecurities won't make things worse? This is an understandable concern and one I have grappled with throughout my PhD. Are we handing men more power by broadening their range of scope into traditionally female terrain? Such is the historic argument against allowing men to comment on feminism within the Academy (for instance, Jardine & Smith: 1987). But isn't this fear in part caused by our insistence on the male sexual drive and the have/hold discourses? As Holloway argued, each results in corresponding blind spots for either sex. We cannot know in advance what

such research will uncover but we can logically surmise that focusing on one sex is less useful than focusing on both, simply because less data and complexity will be gleaned. We need a conversation between the sexes about different perceptions to see how perspective plays a part in our lived gendered lives. Similarly, the role of the psychological as opposed to structural power is important because it informs all our choices, we mustn't prioritise one (either one) over the other. To ignore the structural is to miss important political patterns, yet in this instance, the lack of men's psychological appreciation of power is a blind spot in Gender Studies that warps studies to fit theories of gender that focus only on the structural, which assume a lack of female power (that may or may not be how those outside of the academy experience it). More than once I have been warned not to compare the online masculinist discourse to the feminist one because the latter is about equality and the former, a backlash against equality. This is to see these discourses solely from the feminist position, and to be to a certain extent solipsistic. If men are arguing the inequality on their side, we need to look towards a potential realigning of what gender inequality means, possibly towards something which we cannot accurately envisage as yet (in other words, the masculinists may also have it wrong). Fundamentally however we must understand men by the micro mechanisms they inhabit, towards theories such as hegemonic masculinity theory, or inclusive masculinity theory, especially in times of such rapid change that utilise hidden transcripts (Scott 1990).

To fear the encouragement of male power in this instance is, I believe, to underestimate again how power works. Foucault was right: power both suppresses and creates. In the case of my own experience, my extensive research in this area has resulted in an increased trust in, and understanding of men. I now see much more similarity between the sexes in how we are constructed through and within a gendered society and how we emotionally respond to this as individuals. Most of all, I have more confidence around men and find them significantly less threatening now that I know more about them; I mean this literally, I would find a group of men considerably less daunting to pass in an otherwise deserted public space now than I ever did before. To understand that much of male behaviour is performed defensively against what both men and women think of men is to know them as

less powerful individuals than the media and society would like to project. My self-confidence as a woman has grown as I have learned about how men perceive women to have power in ways I had not imagined previously. We are, in short, as Hollway (1984) said, more powerful than we know. Indeed, knowledge is power and remaining distant from men's voices, as has been the case in much of feminist research, will keep men mysterious, resulting in a higher level of concern about the opposite sex (just as Eric and PUA Axl had). I argue that we should do what Segal called for back in 1990 and see both sexes in terms of a "shared helplessness" (Segal: 2007, xxxi), without making the mistake of understanding masculinity as an "impoverished character structure" (Connell (no date) cited in Segal: 2007, 242) If we can achieve this, we can begin to comprehend gender in terms of something that both unites and divides us.

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Appendix 1

Interviewees' Dating Histories Summaries.

Dating Men

Anthony, a 29-year-old, single, white engineer from Northumberland first had a girlfriend at age 15 and then had a long distance relationship to three and a half years. He has had a series of one-night stands and experience of girlfriends finishing with him. He was once married for seven years. His friends in the forces have similar dating experiences to him but he is surprised at how much they lack confidence to go and talk to women and therefore he does better than them.

Joel, a 27-year-old cohabiting, British, white electronic engineering researcher who at the time of interview lived in the Netherlands. Started dating at the age 15 and has lived with various partners but never married. He has been with his current girlfriend for two and a half years. He never actively looks for women and usually dates friends although he considers himself more confident with women than he was when younger. His friends differ because some of them have been in long-term relationships since the age of 16 (and are currently in their late 20s).

Mark, a 31-year-old, separated, white mechanic from Berkshire who first became interested in girls at age 11 when he had a pre-sexual relationship of about one year. At 12 ½ he met an older girl with whom he was with over two years. This was his first sexual relationship. He then dated someone of his own age up until the age 17. From 17 to 20 he engaged in short-term relationships and one-night stands. He then had a four-year relationship, followed by a relationship with his wife of eight years. Whilst being married, he has engaged in a sexual relationship with his half-sister for the last four years, which was unknown to his wife. When in relationships, he still flirts and continues looking for other partners, although he describes his friends as being less cautious than him in approaching a woman, often breaking the ice for him to approach somebody.

Spencer, a 40-year-old, single, white tiler from Surrey has had 3 serious girlfriends for four years, five years and seven years respectively. He started dating at 11 years old and had a girlfriend at that age. He preferred to have a girlfriend all the time, rather than engaging in short-term relationships, although he has also had a lot of one-night stands. He described his friends as having varying levels of confidence in approaching women, one of which had slept with over 1000 women, something Spencer did not respect, nor did he respect his friends who sleep with sex workers whilst married.

Tomas, a 29-year-old divorced, white fund manager from London started dating age 15 and had a 6-12 month relationship at school. He was mostly single at university, engaging only in one-night stands but he married a woman after university with whom he separated in 2008, again engaging in one-night stands. 18 months ago he met a woman he is now engaged to. He doesn't understand his friends' lack of confidence in approaching women.

David, a 40 year old divorced, white health-service worker from Kingston upon Thames describes his dating history as intermittent because he doesn't actively look for partners, tending to bump into them resulting in an average relationship span of two years. Most ex-girlfriends end up as friends. Some of his friends are less confident with women, noting four of them who have given up completely, another not having had a date in seven years; another friend he describes as a "notorious womaniser".

Darryl a 37-year-old single, white Lancashire man who worked in advertising. Describes himself as a serial monogamist. His first relationship lasted about 18 months and ended because they went to university, which knocked his confidence. He then had a few short relationships and remembers only having two one-night stands at university. Ultimately he dated his sister's friend which lasted three years. She got pregnant and lost the baby resulting in them splitting up six months later. He then engaged in a relationship with somebody who was in a long-term relationship with somebody else but he wasn't happy being the third person. He has since had one long-distance relationship with someone he met on the internet. His friends have been in long-term relationships since they were 18. One of them has lots of attention from women and shorter relationships, which Darryl finds totally alien. Generally he finds his friends to be more confident with women than he is.

Steve, a 24-year-old, single, white man from London who works in marketing. Lost his virginity to a man when he was 15 and has since been with two men and about 18 women. He identifies as gender queer, not bisexual and primarily straight. His two gay encounters were physical and not romantic and were both short. He met a woman online whom he dated for two years after originally being uncertain of her gender because they met through a games website where she was playing a character. He considers his friends to be less successful in dating than he is.

Alex, a 24-year-old, single, white marketing executive from Portsmouth has had four relationships since the age 16. He had one-night stands at university as well as one relationship for four months in his second year. He has had a few short-term relationships and the last two years has mainly had casual sex. Although he acknowledges his friends have struggles approaching women, he doesn't talk to them openly about this yet considers them to have different outlooks towards dating than he does.

George, a 26-year-old, engaged, white business analyst from Birmingham. He has been with his current girlfriend for four years, previous to which he had a few short relationships before university and a two-year relationship whilst at school from the age 16. He has had a few one-night stands but not many. He describes himself as unconfident when he finds out a woman likes him but confident once he is in a relationship and thinks he is probably more shy than his male friends, although he acknowledges that they do not talk openly about the dating lives.

Victor, a 23-year-old single, white complaints handler from London started dating age 15 and his relationships vary between one and seven months, although they are usually relationships rather than one-night stands because he likes intimacy in sexual

relationships. He's had around six relationships in total. He considers his dating life to be similar to that of his male friends.

Tim, a 21 year old bike and car enthusiast started dating at age 16 and counted nine women he had experienced relationships with. His shortest relationship was two months, his longest 18 months and he had never had a one-night stand. He is open to talking to his friends about dating problems and he considers them to have a similar experience to him.

Stuart, a 27-year-old married, white medical secretary from London had a couple of girlfriends at school and then one fairly serious relationship at college. He met his wife at university and has been with her the seven years. He has never had a one-night stand. Some of his friends are very confident with women, resulting in a few short-term relationships. Other close friends had fewer but longer relationships, usually started by the woman.

Tom, 21-year-old British mechanic started dating at age 16, experiencing a few short-term relationships before commencing on a two and half-year relationship at age 17. Some of his friends have similar patterns and others haven't had any serious relationships at his age.

Mike, a 39-year-old, married academic from Finland started dating at age 17 and met his future wife in 1998, to whom he was still currently married even though he had had one extramarital affair, which was not sexual. He found dating uncomfortable, historically. He describes his male friends as inactive daters too.

Cheeko, a 33-year-old man from Manchester had just finished a nine-year relationship at the point of interview. Previous to this, he had lost his virginity at 15 or 16 and had experienced one-night stands up until the point of his long-term relationship in which he had a child.

Eric, a 27-year-old, white MRA activist from Australia mentioned going on one date with a woman but otherwise he described himself as very shy, which results in having female friends but not lovers.

Richard, a 40-year-old man started a five-year relationship with the girl he met through his parents at aged 16. When this finished, he went travelling to 10 years but had also had several medium-term relationships. He considers his dating history to be similar to that of his male friends.

Bryan, a 34-year-old man. He dated his friend's sister aged 18 but after this there was a long break and then a few short relationships until he married for two years as part of a relationship that was seven years in length. He was currently single although had had some short-term relationships from a dating site. He considers his friends' dating relationships to be both similar and dissimilar, depending on the person, in comparison to his dating history.

Justin, a 38-year-old, white, single dangerous-goods safety adviser from Lincolnshire started dating at age 20 and had four long-term relationships, all of which he described as ending quite nastily. Up to the age of 20, he had mainly one-night stands; he considers his dating life to be more varied than his friends’.

Pick Up Artists

PUA James, a 31-year-old single, white translator from London had started learning about PUA in 2008, attending a boot camp in 2010. At the time of interview, he had begun training to be a PUA trainer three months previously. By the age 29 James said he had slept with 50 women and was influenced by a friend who is a womaniser whom he’d known since 10 years old. He estimated he had slept with around 200 women (I had reservations about the accuracy of both of these figures). He did not really answer the question about his dating history, however, but noted that fashion sense and ability to hold conversation with women were sticking points for him.

PUA Terry, a 23-year-old white, web developer from London was interviewed on his second day of his first PUA boot camp having previously read a book called *The Natural* on the subject of PUA. Previous to his PUA training, he had a few brief experiences at university but no long-term relationship experience before PUA training. He felt the women didn’t approach him, focusing on men who were more comfortable than he was and therefore he did not try to approach them. He felt that most men started approaching women at a younger age and therefore developed past their awkward stages before he had. He mentions one friend at work who has a traditional way of dating a woman by wooing her and taking her out to dinner.

PUA Leon, a 31-year-old, single, white electrician from London was interviewed on the second day of his first boot camp after having read *The Game* six weeks previously. He was enticed to become a PUA trainee after seeing a friend at a stag party being successful with women who had previously been very unconfident but had improved since he had used PUA training. Previous to his Leon’s PUA training, he had quite a successful dating life, both in amounts of girlfriends but also quality of girlfriend, as he perceived them. He felt he hadn’t had any problematic partners like some of his friends had and referred to himself as pretty lucky in that respect. He had had two long-term relationships and a few women in between. He had his first long-term relationship at aged 18, which lasted nearly three years. His last long-term relationship ended in January, which was six months before interview and this relationship had lasted three years. He positioned himself as a bit less successful than some of his friends.

PUA Dumervil, a 33-year-old, white, single, assistant facilities manager from Hertfordshire discovered PUA aged 28 through the book *The Game* and subsequently a book about the Mystery Method. He found a number of PUA forums online and had attended several free boot camps run by the London Seduction Society. His pre-PUA experience was fairly non-existent. He lost his virginity at age 23 but he’d never really been on dates and had mainly

experienced casual partners at university, which were based around his existing social circle. When he returned to his home town after university, he describes starting again and experienced only one date per year on average. When comparing himself to his friends, he felt a lot of them could draw similar parallels but felt that his friends at work had more success than him.

PUA John, a 34-year-old white, divorced, financial analyst from London who read *The Game* in 2011 and subsequently became involved with the London Seduction Society, attending a free boot camp over one weekend. Previous to his PUA training, at age 15 he started having sexual experiences with women who selected him. John did not suffer from approach anxiety at the time of interview and felt happy in himself and did not require the need for somebody to give him the okay to approach a woman. This was different from his pre-PUA self that felt very inhibited and most of the women he'd had relationships with had been friends of friends and he did not approach women out right. He had got married and it lasted for nine years, which he described as "miserable". Previous to the marriage, he had what he described as random successes with women. He relies on sex workers for his sexual needs.

PUA Axl, a 35-year-old, single, Indian private tutor from London who discovered PUA in 2004 after a friend at university introduced him to it. He then describes himself as developing into a "theory junkie", not trying out his PUA knowledge in practice until the summer of 2011. He was self-critical about this lapse in time. Some PUAs from the London Seduction Society mentored him, resulting in him feeling "released from this prison" of his adult dating life. PUA Axl was of an Indian background and he reported it was normal for his parents to arrange a marriage for him. At 35 he felt that they had given up all hope of this occurring, however. He had not dated anyone long term, the longest relationship being a one-month relationship when he was 20. He did date some girls who fell in love with him that he did not like them. He remains a virgin and he found this difficult to admit to. Since starting PUA, he hadn't had any dates and could not 'convert' thank-yous into telephone numbers. Axl felt women had chosen his male friends as partners and one of the reasons he joined PUA is because he wanted to select rather than be selected.

PUA Tony, a 35-year-old, British/Nigerian web designer who was dating many women simultaneously discovered PUA aged 26 after breaking up with his girlfriend of 18 months, with whom he declares he is still in love. His first encounter with PUA was via watching other men successfully practice techniques in a bar. He then went on to read many books on the subject. Previous to his PUA training, he had one relationship for 18 months, previous to which he describes his dating life as terrible and blames this on being introverted. He mentioned his friends at school trying to instigate the relationship with him with a particular girl which never worked. Previous to his PUA training, if he saw a girl he was attracted to in the same room as him he would have to walk out because he was so nervous. This was damaging to his school life.

PUA Brian had come to PUA in 2009 after his girlfriend ended a relationship of 4 1/2 years; his friends had known about the community and encouraged him to join. Previous to his PUA training, at age 17 Brian had a girlfriend for four and a half years before which he

had a couple of short-term girlfriends and one-night stands. When speaking of his friends, one of his mates had much less success than he did and one very good-looking man had more and had experience of women approaching him. Previous to the PUA, he describes himself as not too nervous of women but that he was not approaching women either.

PUA Robert, 20-year-old, single, white student of music from London had come to PUA after reading the book *The Game* and discovering MPUA Forum online. At time of interview, he had been practising his PUA knowledge for only a couple of months. Previous to his PUA experiences, Robert describes himself as having the same level of success with women compared to his peer group, but then elaborates that perhaps it was probably less later on in the interview so it was hard to ascertain the truth. At school he noted that the good-looking boys attracted more girls and describes himself as probably average looking in comparison. He noted his social circle was fairly low down on the hierarchy. He mentions two women he dated before his PUA training, one he met whilst at school at a music camp, which lasted for two or three weeks. At age 18 he had another short-term relationship, which was ended by him so he could concentrate his efforts into his university application.

PUA Mufasa, a 25-year-old, newly married, South African nurse from London came to PUA after reading a book seven years ago upon which he made the decision not to ever pay for dating advice, utilising free sites online instead. Previous to PUA training, Mufasa felt he had a pretty average dating life but always dated people who were part of his social circle of friends. He would avoid interactions with women that he did not know. He describes in his past as having some success but no luck. Compared to his friends, he felt he was the least successful with women and he put this down to his history of attending an all-boys boarding school where he lacked interactions with girls until the age of 16. he described his previous self is quite a shy guy. His pre-PUA training choice of women were always people of his own race because they formed his social group. He married fairly soon after being interviewed.

Appendix 2

Transcript of Interview with DM Spencer

Audio Length: 1:08:22

START AUDIO

[From 0:03:40]

Interviewer: Spencer, can you summarise your dating history to date please?

Respondent: What, completely? Or since the last relationship?

Interviewer: In a nutshell. In a nutshell. From the beginning to the end. Just roughly. Just so I can get an overview.

Respondent: Well, I've had three serious girlfriends. And more than a few temporaries, let's say.

Interviewer: Right. Okay.

Respondent: Yes. My three serious girlfriends, they lasted for four years, five years and seven years.

Interviewer: Okay. And your shorter-term ones, from what age did you start dating?

Respondent: (Pause) 11.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. Quite young then?

Respondent: Well, yes. I mean if you want to know the truth. Yes. I first had a girlfriend at 11. So, quite young. Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. And have you – have you often got a girlfriend or somebody? Or do you spend much time on your own, sort of thing?

Respondent: I prefer to have a girlfriend.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: I don't really like playing the field, so to speak. Well, I do. But I don't. I get bored of it easily.

- Interviewer: Okay. So you tend less to have less one-night stands and more sort of serial relationships?
- Respondent: Well, I prefer serial relationships. But, you know, I've had plenty of one-night stands as well. Yes.
- Interviewer: Okay. Brilliant. Thank you. Can you tell me what you're looking for in a partner. What would be your ideal woman?
- Respondent: Funnily enough, I think I just met her but.
- Interviewer: (Laughter)
- Respondent: But she will make me laugh. She will have a good sense of humour generally. She'll be kind. Loyal is the main thing. I've been let down a lot in the past, so loyalty is hugely important to me. Intelligent. Well dressed. Likes a bit of makeup. More of a girly girl than a – than an Ugg-Boot type of girl. You know. Nice hair. That's generally about it. Quite pretty actually, to be fair. She's got to be quite pretty.
- Interviewer: Okay. Is your idea of an ideal woman, is that similar to your male mates' idea of an ideal woman do you think?
- Respondent: (Pause) No. I think they – they differ. I think the pretty works. But (Pause) most of my male mates (Pause), I would say have different agendas.
- Interviewer: Okay. What would they like? What would they be looking for?
- Respondent: Big tits. Easy. (Laughter) Well, a perfect girl. Oh, yes. Easy to get on with. Lets them get away with (Pause) doing what they want really. (Pause) Probably quite a lot into drinking to share, you know, share a lot of that with them. A good mother. That sort of stuff I would have thought.
- Interviewer: Right. Okay. Who makes the first move when you see an attractive woman and she sees you?
- Respondent: Depends on the situation.
- Interviewer: Right.
- Respondent: You know, if I'm passing them in the street, I rarely would go up to them. Maybe. I have done in the past. If you were in a bar, it's a lot easier. You know, I'd more 99% I would at least have a try. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: Occasionally you get a good looking – a girl will come up to me. It has happened.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. Have you ever found the dating scene quite difficult?

Respondent: Yes. It's fraught with liars and cheats. There's millions of them. Especially online dating. It's a nightmare. I mean I was getting so frustrated with it, I was literally going to pack it all in. And then I've just met – like I said to you, I've just met someone –

Interviewer: She sounds nice. Are you happy, yes?

Respondent: – who I really, really like.

Interviewer: Is that just one date you've been on?

Respondent: Yes, yes. She's fantastic. She's – she's beyond my wildest dreams at the moment.

Interviewer: Ah.

Respondent: I think I am with her as well. So, you know, we're getting on absolute great guns.

Interviewer: Oh, that's good. I met my husband on a website – dating website online. Guardian Soulmates.

Respondent: Oh, right.

Interviewer: Yes. So it does work. (Laughter)

Respondent: Yes. Well, my ex-girlfriend, the daughter of my mother, she met her new fella. They've just had a baby. She met him on match. And the one I met was on the free site actually. Plenty of Fish.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: Yes. Which has surprised me. Because I generally don't get much luck from that.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. Cool.

Respondent: Yes, a minefield I would say. Online dating. Go on.

Interviewer: Is it just that you find the women are dishonest, is that your main problem with them?

Respondent: No. Some are. (Pause) I think the main problem is the ones I like, obviously, I'll be honest, I do like a pretty face. If they're pretty, I'm more inclined. But then I will look at their profile and generally see how that's written. Because I'm quite – I'd say I'm quite intelligent. So I would get a good gist of how a person is, just by the way they write. So I'd look at the profile and if it's all text speak and rubbish, then I won't even bother. But, yes, I mean there's – I do like a pretty girl, like I said. And I (Pause) – I will email them. But they get hundreds of emails. And I think some of the girls I've managed to have spoken to, they've said, you know, they can get up to 300 emails a day. And they just spend their time deleting, deleting, deleting. Not even reading them. Just deleting them. One after the other.

Interviewer: Wow.

Respondent: That's the frustrating thing.

Interviewer: What about not online dating? How do you find – do you find that difficult? Or is that easier?

Respondent: (Pause) I'm quite a confident person. So (Pause) I wouldn't say I'm ugly either. I've – I've always been quite lucky like that. So (Pause) there's always someone. I feel like there's always someone out. But if I'm in the mood, I could always go home with someone if I wanted to.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: Well, potentially get a girlfriend if I wanted to.

Interviewer: Cool. Can you talk about a specific time when you have found interacting with an attractive woman difficult? Does that make – does that ring a bell with you?

Respondent: As in a new relationship or an existing?

Interviewer: Anything in the past that springs to mind when you've found – like you've been a bit nervous or, I don't know, just an interaction with a woman. Or it could be dishonesty as well. But can you tell me about a time – I just want to

kind of get a feel of how you felt when you were sort of dealing with a difficult situation.

Respondent: I don't really understand what you mean by difficult. I mean –

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: I get – like anyone else, I get rejection. But you know, what do you mean by difficult? What difficult with any – any point of difficulty with a pretty woman?

Interviewer: Okay. I haven't made myself clear. Okay. Sorry about that. When I asked you before, I said did you find the dating scene difficult, you said, "Yes." You found that women are liars, etc., etc. I –

Respondent: Some are.

Interviewer: Some are. Yes. Sorry. (Laughter) I'm not saying we all are for sure. I just wanted you to go in a specific time, anything that sort of springs to mind from when you said that. A time. Just so I can get a sense how you feel.

Respondent: Well, I did go on a date where I arranged to meet an absolutely stunning lady. You know, I'd talked – she blew me away with her looks. And she emailed me back and we hit it off. And we went to go and have a meet. And she turned out to be at least 15 years older than her picture.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: And I had right go at her. And I said, "Do you know what? You've – you've just lied basically. You know, and it's complete fabrication. And I don't know how you could honestly expect me to stick around." And I walked out. I did – I had a situation where I arranged to meet a date, and she just blew me out. That really pissed me off.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Completely. Yes. Even said, "I'll be there in five minutes," and then just didn't bother turning up. You know, that annoyed me. I wondered whether actually it was a previous (Pause) person had set up another profile. Because I only get one picture. And (Pause), yes. I've had a mate who has said that, you know, he – he reckons he knows – he's had a girl who has set up a few profiles to try and screw him over. Because he rejected her. And I wondered that would be possible. Whether are girls that do that.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: I would say there would be.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: I did wonder whether that – that blow out one was, you know, someone I'd pissed off and said, "No. I'm not interested. Sorry."

Interviewer: Yes. Okay. How does your dating experiences compare to your male friends' experiences dating women? Are all your mates online?

Respondent: What online dating?

Interviewer: Yes. I don't – when I'm talking about dating, I don't necessarily mean online.

Respondent: I would say, most of my mates are all married now.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: Because I'm 40 I'm the only single one.

Interviewer: Right. Okay.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: So how do you think they experience dating women? Are they – would you say they're more successful?

Respondent: Back in the day when they were dating? I think some of them were happy just to have a girlfriend. (Pause) Others were players. Proper players. I've got one mate, he's slept with over 1,000 women, easy. He's really – every week, every day almost, he was out with someone else.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: I mean, I always looked down on him actually, to be honest. I've got a lot of mates that, even though they're married now, they still go out and cheat and sleep with prostitutes and stuff like that. And I think – I look down my nose at them to be honest.

Interviewer: Yes. Yes. I can see what you mean.

Respondent: It shows that, you know, they've got different standards to me.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: But I would say that they (Pause) – they obviously do what they want to do. That's the way it is. With my friends anyway.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay. Sorry. I just want to talk a bit about the media now. Just to get an idea of what kind of culture you're into. Can you tell me what sort of magazines you buy and what your favourite TV shows are and films and stuff like that please?

Respondent: I buy scientific magazines. I bought New Scientist yesterday. Focus. BBC Focus magazine. How it Works magazine. And All About Space is a new one that I've just bought. I'm fascinated by (Pause) that sort of genre. And science. I've got a scientific brain, I would say. TV programmes, I'm really into obviously Wonders of the Universe and all of that stuff. Everything with David Attenborough. I love my comedies. So Big Bang Theory. Rules of Engagement. How I Met Your Mother. QI. I've got quite a wide taste. (Laughter) You know, I could even happily sit down and watch an episode of the Waltons. It's quite random.

Interviewer: Right. Okay.

Respondent: It's generally, I'd say, learning but not necessarily – (Pause) Not nec- – well, if I find it interesting, I'll – you know, I'll watch it. If I find it funny, like South Park, you know, I'm addicted to that at the moment.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. Yes. I used to watch that. (Laughter) Good fun.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: What was the other question? What films that I like?

Interviewer: Yes. Films. Websites.

Respondent: Films and websites. Right. Okay. Occasionally porn. (Laughter) To be honest. But that's more because I'm single.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: And Facebook. You know, I'm – I'm on that. I'm not on Twitter. I can't see the point in that at all. (Pause) yes, that's – not a lot really. I'm not massive

online. I do my banking and stuff, like most people do. Films-wise, anything with Brad Pitt in it really. I like Brad Pitt. If it's got a good story in there or director, generally quite interested. I watch a lot of films I would say.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: Recent films that I've liked. Inception. I watched one called Moneyball with Brad Pitt the other day about a baseball team. That was fascinating. True story. Yes, I mean, I'm quite current. I'm quite sci-fi. So went to the cinema at the weekend with this new girl that I've met. So, yes. I'm pretty open to anything really.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you think your type of dating experience with women is represented accurately in the media? TV, magazines and stuff like that?

Respondent: (Pause) I think some of the rep- – some of the ideas I get from the media are that it's easy to get a date on a dating site and, you know, if you want to, you can get laid easy and this that and the other. (Pause) And I can't honestly say that I disagree. I mean, but then I'm in that I'm slightly lucky in the fact that I'm – I've been told that fortunately, in (Pause) most of my life, that I'm good looking. Now, I don't think I am anything, any special, but a lot of people have said it to me. So I must – I tend to think of myself as better than average. And because of that, I've – I've, you know – I've got to struggle like anyone else. But I have – I don't struggle like some people. So I think for average or below-average looking people, you know, it can be a real headache. A nightmare even. (Pause) People without any confidence. But I mean, I've got quite a bit of both.

Interviewer: So, do you see yourself – you know, your dating experience. You do (Pause) – when you see characters on – or on – on the telly or – you kind of recognise it. You think, "Yes, that kind of is – that makes sense." You don't feel like an outsider.

Respondent: No. Definitely not. No. Yes, I would say it's – you know, it's quite representative. The media is. Yes. It is what it is, isn't it? You know.

Interviewer: Okay. Cool.

Respondent: It's what you make of it. Yes. Is that what you were looking for ?

Interviewer: No, no, no. No, no. There's no wrong and right answers in all of this. Yes.

Respondent: Alright then.

Interviewer: Don't worry about it. I'm just trying to get an idea of where you kind of fit into – you know, there are different people fit in different places.

Respondent: I'll tell you what I do find, that dating's a woman's game. They – they rule. It's like they used to rule the porn, years ago. You know, but now [?]. But dating is a woman's game. They will pick and choose. Men – unless you're absolutely stunningly gorgeous bloke, and even then, I would say a lot of women would think that you're a knob. So it's definitely 100% down to the women.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: They pick and choose. They are the game masters, let's say.

Interviewer: Is that about online dating? Or dating in general?

Respondent: I think dating in general. And if I go up to a really pretty bird, there's no way I could definitely guarantee that she'd be coming home with me. Whereas if she went up to me, she could pretty much guarantee she could have whoever she wanted.

Interviewer: Yes. I was going ask you. You think women are powerful in dating, yes?

Respondent: Without a doubt. Yes, the most powerful. Yes. Without a shadow of a doubt.

Interviewer: Likewise, do you think men ever find women intimidating? Or vice versa or something?

Respondent: Yes. I think a lot of blokes do. Yes. Especially with a good-looking woman. I mean you get a lot of lairy geezers who will go up and try it on. Because my ex-girlfriend was absolutely really, really pretty. And she used to get hit on all the time. Even when I was there. People used to come up to me and say, "Look, I'm going to have a –mate, all fair in love and war, I'm going to try and chat up your missus." (Laughter) And I'd be like, "Whatever, mate."

Interviewer: Right. Nice. (Laughter)

Respondent: Yes. So I've had that before in the past. So I think some people get intimidated. But (Pause) I don't know. There's a lot more – it seems like there's a lot more confidence out there. It doesn't necessarily mean they're going to get anywhere.

Interviewer: Do you think your mates are intimidated by women?

Respondent: (Pause) No. Maybe a couple of them. Yes, I'd say there's a few of the shy ones. Maybe. But generally, no.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: I mean, I'm from a – I'm from a – well, quite well-off as a child. You know, I had private school and that. And then now I live on a council estate. And I'd say it's different. The wealthier you are, the more intimidated you are by women. Whereas the less well-off you are, the more cocky and arrogant you can be. And the more confidence you have. So I – you know, less [?], the less intimidated. So for the latter half of my growing up, teenage years, you know, it was all council estate. And all my mates now, they would all go up to a girl and chat her up without even batting an eyelid.

Interviewer: That's interesting. Why do you think that is?

Respondent: I think it's all about you get taught about respect and privacy and whatnot. And you know, politeness. And it's all drilled into you when you are in private education. And I think when you are at state school, it's fucking fight for yourself. You know. It's one rule for us. Another rule for them. We'll do what we want. It's – there's just a totally different ball game.

Interviewer: What sort of things were you taught about women when you were at your private school?

Respondent: (Pause) I suppose to respect them all and be nice and kind and (Pause) loving and that sort of genre. But as I've grown up, I realise that's mainly a load of bollocks. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: Because you do that and, you know, a woman would generally think you're a bit of a wet blanket.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: You know, you'll get walked over. (Pause) I've learned that.

Interviewer: And do you think, like, by being polite to women, it actually makes you less confident?

Respondent: No. I think (Pause) if you show a bit too much respect, it can make you less confident. Because (Pause) how could I say? Well, if there was two maybe similar personalitied blokes, one from a council estate, one from a private school, I would guarantee the council-estate bloke would go – get home with the woman. The, you know – if it was a confidence thing, the private-school bloke would go in showing respect with the – you know, the council-estate bloke would just go in with all gun’s blazing. Bit cocky, “You alright?” Yes I’d say in that way.

Interviewer: That’s really interesting.

Respondent: If you show more respect, I wouldn’t say – you know, because I do know a lot of people who have got loads of confidence. But it’s different. It’s different for different classes.

Interviewer: Yes. It’s interesting. Okay. Because normally, people would say that, you know, the one with the more money, the one with more opportunity in life, would be more confident. So you’re actually saying the opposite. That’s quite interesting.

Respondent: Yes. When it comes to women. Yes. I would say. You know, the well-off person, they’ll have more confidence in other aspects of their life. You know, they could deal with talking to the bank, getting a house, this, that and the other. And, you know, running a company and whatnot. Whereas someone down on the council estate would find stuff like that more intimidating, definitely. Yes, so there’s other areas of confidence that, you know, being well off will benefit you in.

Interviewer: Yes. Cool.

Respondent: I think regarding this instance, what you’re asking about, women, I’d say definitely (Pause) yeah.

Interviewer: Interesting. Thanks for that. It’s interesting. Okay. Did you manage to watch that video?

Respondent: I did. Yes. Beyoncé.

Interviewer: Have you seen it before?

Respondent: Do you know what, I don’t know if I have. But I’ve seen clips of it. So, yes. Maybe. I don’t know if I’ve ever watched it through before.

Interviewer: Yes. It's quite – it's usually on in the gym and stuff like that. (Laughter)
Making the men stop. Okay. What are your thoughts and feelings about what you just saw, about the video? Just anything that comes to mind.

Respondent: (Pause) Well, I'm thinking, hot. Beyoncé's hot. I like what they're wearing. I thought the energy in the dancing was fantastic. I quite like the song anyway. (Pause) I was aware that she's taking power. You know, she's sort of (Pause) – it's her song. Singing, you know, look, "If you liked it, you should have put a ring on it." So I was aware of that. But, yes, mainly my initial thoughts are energy and fit. (Laughter)

Interviewer: (Laughter) Okay.

Respondent: To be perfectly honest.

Interviewer: Yes. You do think Beyoncé is attractive then, yes?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes. She is – I do. I think she's very pretty.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think – yes, when you said about the lyrics, do you – what do you think about the lyrics? Saying, you know, "You should have married –" Do you know the story?

Respondent: I think – well, if – if I think about the lyrics, it's saying, "Don't dilly dally, mate. If you like me, put a ring on it otherwise someone else might come in and take me away."

Interviewer: What do you think of that?

Respondent: What do I think of that?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: I think it shows that the women have the power. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Right. Okay. Cool. And how does that make you feel? So if women have got that power, do you think women normally sort of ask – kind of prompt men to ask them to marry them or – ?

Respondent: Yes, I think generally, it's a – a woman would broach it more than a man will. You know, you say who first brought it up, I'm sure if there was a straw poll, with God knows how many people, the majority would say a woman brought it up first.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay. The women in the video, are they performing for you?

Respondent: No. They're performing for Beyoncé.

Interviewer: Oh, sorry, I meant Beyoncé. The three of them. Like just as a – as you see them. Are you – are you the intended audience?

Respondent: Am I the intended audience?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: I wouldn't say. No. I'd say I'm not the intended audience. But (Pause) I'm part of the realistic audience. Yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: If that makes sense. I'd say the intended audience is, you know, mid-20s and younger.

Interviewer: Guys or girls?

Respondent: (Pause) right. I think It's aimed at – I'd say it's more aimed at girls. Actually.

Interviewer: Why's that?

Respondent: I think it's like girls telling girls (Pause) what – he's a dickhead type thing. But also giving a little warning to blokes that they're listen to me, otherwise you're going to lose it. Yes. I'd say the main audience, if it was a ratio, I would say, or a percentage, it would be 60% 70% women and 30% blokes.

Interviewer: Right. Okay.

Respondent: That's the target audience, I would suggest.

Interviewer: Okay. It's interesting you say that. Because they had – there's certain videos online of flash mobs of women when they come together in public places and then they suddenly do a dance. And it has been used, kind of, as a video for kind of women feeling like, you know – it's a bit – I think – I don't know – I

don't know if it's a bit sticking two fingers up to guys that won't commit. I kind of get that impression. I don't know. (Laughter)

Respondent: It could be. Yes.

Interviewer: So do you – ?

Respondent: It would make sense.

Interviewer: Do you think it gives that kind of message?

Respondent: (Pause) Yes. Definitely. Yes, without a doubt. Yes. Of course. Yes.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: It's saying, "You lost out," isn't it? That's what – that's what it's meant to be saying.

Interviewer: Okay. What would your male friends think of the video?

Respondent: (Pause) Most of them would think (Pause) would you do Beyoncé? Yes. That would be the main thing on their – in their heads. (Laughter) If I'm perfectly honest.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. Anything else?

Respondent: No. I think the girls – I think all their girlfriends or wives would like the video.

Interviewer: Would like it as well?

Respondent: They'd like the song. Yes. I think, you know, I could see them all getting up and dancing to it. Can't see many of my male friends getting up dancing to it.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. Okay. Yes. Because I said like in the gym, one of the guys said the other day that it came on and all the blokes stopped using the machines.

Respondent: (Laughter)

Interviewer: And started watching it. (Laughter) He said he just saw it the other day. (Laughter) So I think guys do watch it. (Laughter) Okay. Do you think the women in the video are using their beauty to gain power? Or do they lose power by using their beauty? Or neither?

Respondent: (Pause) Do they think they use their beauty for power.

Interviewer: Are they empowered or disempowered by –

Respondent: Oh, no. They're empowered.

Interviewer: Empowered. Yes.

Respondent: Yes, yes. Definitely. I think they look good, they know they look good, and they're telling the bloke off. I think that's (Pause) every woman's dream, isn't it?

Interviewer: Yes. I mean, I don't disagree with you. But one of the sort of feminist criticisms of a film like that would be, "Oh, the women are having to resort to using their beauty because – "

Respondent: Yes. No. See that's women's feminism gone mental. Because they don't actually – they are taking away the thought of the idea that women are actually independent creatures and they can choose to do what they like. They're not forced to do anything. Nowadays. You see, that's feminism gone wrong.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: So you don't think they're disempowered at all?

Respondent: It's Beyoncé's choice. I'm sure she had every – you know, she – she went right through the whole video, through clothes design, everything. Nothing gets past her. So, yes. I would say she's a bright, bright lady. And there's no way on this earth anyone would force her to do anything.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So, yes. I'd say it's totally her choice. And if she feels confident wearing that, then, you know – but then I sometimes think that women wearing scantily clothes and that are not actually in competition for men. They're in competition with other women. To say, "Hey, look at me. I'm hotter than you, bitch." You know, that sort of thing.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: If I'm perfectly honest. That's what I generally think.

Interviewer: Yes. I don't disagree with you. (Laughter) But I think what the feminist thing would be saying, and I'm not – I'm sitting on the fence here. Would be saying that kind of women's beauty is the only power that's really respected by men. And encouraging that is taking the emphasis off of other areas where they could grow power, like economic power or, you know, work. Getting promotion at jobs. And stuff like that. What do you think of that?

Respondent: Well, I think to a degree, they are right. But, you know, this is the modern world now. And, you know, women generally are treated a lot, lot more equal nowadays than they ever were. I mean, you've got loads of women in super high-powered jobs and positions nowadays. You know, it's not all about looks. But (Pause) to certain elements, to a certain few, I mean (Pause) I suppose – you're stereotyping all men I suppose. You know what I mean? Where it's not like that. There's a group of men that like looks and they like looks first. You know, that's what they like in their life. And there's a group of men who likes strong women. There's whole different (Pause) genres of people that different things are attractive to. I think to stereotype all men as – as – you know, as looking at women as beauty objects, and that's all they're good for, I think that's completely – you know, it's a misnomer nowadays.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay. Good point. Okay. Do you think women are very successful in public life these days?

Respondent: Yes. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: What in – in – yes, in the public eye?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Famous women?

Interviewer: Well, not just – no public eye. I mean all areas. Say the job market, politics, media, how they're represented in media.

Respondent: What was the question again, sorry?

Interviewer: So do you think women are very successful in these areas?

Respondent: Are very successful?

Interviewer: Or successful.

Respondent: (Pause) Let's not beat around the bush. It's a male world still at the moment. And there's a long way to go. But I'd say, yes, women are having more success than they've ever had ever before in history. I wouldn't say all women are successful.

Interviewer: No. Okay.

Respondent: But that's the human life, is it?

Interviewer: What areas do you think women have got power in, in public life?

Respondent: (Pause)

Interviewer: It's just like a wide question. Like I said. I'm just asking whatever springs to your mind.

Respondent: (Pause) Fashion.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: I think women dominate the fashion market. (Pause) Blokes haven't – you know, we're a long way behind on that. And that's a huge market. Clothes is generally, whether it's retail or designing or whatever it maybe that is a huge – you know, that's a big thing. They're very dominant in that I would suggest. (Pause) I would say finance because I know quite a lot of women that are in finance. So I was in finance for a while myself. And, you know, there was quite a lot of successful women in that. So, I would indicate those two as being my top two that I can think off the top of my head.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. No worries. So, let's say, not Beyoncé. But say a woman that is as beautiful and as glamorous, say if you were to be crude and rate women of beauty out of a 1 to 10, whatever your personal taste is, like whatever a 10 is to you, if you saw a beautiful woman like that, how would you feel? If you were in your local pub or whatever, wherever you feel really nice and relaxed, and a woman like that walked in. What would you be thinking and feeling?

Respondent: On her own or with someone else.

Interviewer: Oh, yes. Alone.

Respondent: Oh, right. What would I feel?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: I've got to talk to that woman.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: Yes. Unless – assuming I was single. If I wasn't single, I would think, "My God, she's beautiful. Shit." (Laughter)

Interviewer: (Laughter)

Respondent: But that would be it. You know, I wouldn't do anything. I'm a very loyal boy.

Interviewer: Okay. Would you feel nervous at all?

Respondent: No. I'm pretty confident.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay.

Respondent: So, no. I mean, maybe a little bit. If I hadn't been – at the bar and I'd had a drink, I'd definitely wouldn't be nervous. But if she was – if she got on a bus with me, which I've done before in the past, (Laughter) yes, it took a little bit of bottle then to go up and talk to her.

Interviewer: So if it was daytime and you saw her on the street or something.

Respondent: She was at a bus stop with me. There was about 20 other people there And I was thinking, "My God, you're beautiful." And she was absolutely to die for. Stunning. And (Pause) I eventually plucked up the courage to talk to her, which I did. And we chatted all the way home. She got off at the same stop as me, sort of randomly. And we arranged a date. But it never happened.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: I pissed her off. Because I'd planned to play football. So, yes. But it was nerve racking. Yes. Being stone-cold sober and in the daylight and talk to a stranger in front of other people. That wasn't pleasant. (Laughter)

Interviewer: (Laughter)

Respondent: But I did it.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay. So you would go up and chat up a woman if you were single. You wouldn't have a problem with – I mean, you know, it's better when you're drunk, but you would feel confident enough to do that?

Respondent: I wouldn't say drunk. But, yes. I definitely – I will – yes, I've done it in the past and I'll do it again. Yes. I would.

Interviewer: Okay. Have you ever been out with a beautiful woman in order, the main reason, to impress your mates?

Respondent: (Long pause) Just to impress my mates?

Interviewer: Well, I mean, I don't know. You tell me. What's your answer?

Respondent: Well, no. I've been out with a beautiful woman to please myself. And I've shown her off to (Pause) – to my mates. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes. So –

Respondent: Yes, I've done that in the past.

Interviewer: So is there a – yes, so you'd always choose the woman kind of for yourself.

Respondent: Always for myself. Yes.

Interviewer: Yes, I mean – how important to you is the opinion of that woman to your male friends? And female friends. Family and stuff.

Respondent: What – I don't care about what other people's opinions at all. It's all about what I feel, I think.

Interviewer: Okay. So you wouldn't – you might – you said earlier you might show – show her off to your mates. So –

Respondent: Oh, yes. I've done that. Yes. Yes. I've taken – I've taken – well, yes. Of course. Like I said, my last girlfriend was (Laughter) – she had film-star looks. She was probably one of the most beautiful women I've ever clapped eyes on. And I ended up going out with her for nearly seven years. Yes. I couldn't wait to show her off to my mates.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: And they all thought that as well. They all – they – you know, to me, they were like, "Yes, yes, yes. She's alright." But when I heard, you know (Pause) –

I heard them in conversation, “Oh, fucking hell. [****]’s missus, have you seen her?” you know what I mean? That gave me a massive ego boost. But also got me worried. Because I know what my mates are like. They’re cheating little shits and I reckon most of them would try and chisel her away from me.

Interviewer: Right, okay. Yes. So there’s a double-edge there.

Respondent: Yes, there’s always a double-edge. Yes.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay. How do you feel about your own body? Are you happy with how you are physically? Or is there anything you’d want to improve?

Respondent: No. I mean, I’d like to be more toned and fit and ripped and (Laughter) whatnot. But it’s not me. So – I mean, I’m comfortable with who I am. But I wouldn’t say I’m 100% happy.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay. But you don’t feel – you know, you don’t – do you go to the gym or do you work – you know – ?

Respondent: No. I don’t. I have quite a physical job. And that keeps me at bay. (Pause) I usually flutter between 12 ½ and 14 stone. Sometimes push over that. But, you know, I try – if I do, then I just go on a diet. I don’t eat for a week. Drop it all down.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. When you’re dating with a woman, do you look after the contraception side of things? Or does she?

Respondent: Right. This is a bone of contention for me at the moment. Because I’ve had quite a few one-night stands recently. And I’ve been an idiot and taken a risk every time. So, no. I haven’t. (Laughter) But I do carry them. I do carry contraception. But I just fucking hate using it.

Interviewer: Yes. Because you physically don’t like the feeling of it?

Respondent: Yes. It just kills it. It’s a passion breaker. It’s just pointless.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay. So how does that – you say it’s a bone of contention. Are you worrying at the moment about unwanted pregnancy?

Respondent: No. Well, yes. But I’m more worried about STDs. You know, as I said, I’ve had three serious girlfriends. All three of them cheated on me and gave me chlamydia. So, I keep thinking, it could have been anything. It could have

been something much, much worse that I can't get rid of. So, yes – I'm a bit worried about it.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay. I don't want to dig into that too much if you're worrying about it at the moment. I'm sure you're fine.

Respondent: No, no. I'm alright. No, no. I don't sit here worrying and worrying. But I'm just thinking, "Right. I've got behave. I've got to sort my life out. I've got to be sensible. Stop taking risks."

Interviewer: Okay. I mean, how do you feel about women being kind of – if you do take risks like that, women are kind of in charge of whether you become a father or not, aren't they really.

Respondent: 100%. Yes.

Interviewer: How does that make you feel?

Respondent: Well, no. Yes. Mm. No, it's six of one and half a dozen of the other, isn't it? (Pause) You know, I could withdraw – basically is what I'm saying. And I do. So, yes, I try and take that out the equation. But that's not – that's no guarantee. Probably takes the percentage down. I don't know. 80/20 or something. There's still a 20% chance.

Interviewer: Is it something you think about?

Respondent: What would happen if one of them announced they were pregnant?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Do I think about it?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: I try not to. I have done. Those thoughts. What would I do? Yes. (Pause) I have thought about it. Yes.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: I try not to though, because it's scary.

Interviewer: Yes. It is a bit – yes, I can imagine. Okay. Also, with your body, how are you about your penis and stuff? Are you okay with your size, erections,

ejaculation, that sort of thing? Or is that something you'd like to improve as well?

Respondent: If I'm honest, I'd say I'm not happy with it flaccid. It always looks a bit small. But when it's erect, you know, I've been told that it's bigger than average. So, yes. I suppose in that respect, I'm quite happy with it.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. So you don't – you don't worry about it too much?

Respondent: No, not really. It is what it is. I know I'm not tiny. So I'm happy. Yes.

Interviewer: Yes. What – is this something, like bodies and stuff like that, would your mates ever tell you if they are happy about their own body or anything like that? Do you ever have conversations?

Respondent: Rarely. Yes. No. Not – that's not the sort of things blokes really talk about. Maybe. I mean, a couple of times, they'll be like, "Oh, you know – " If it was gym stuff, "I'm not happy with my arms and how I want to get them. They're a bit flabby. I want to sort that out." But they won't be talking about they're – they're dicks. No way.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: (Laughter) very rarely. No one even likes changing in the changing rooms when we all have a football team together. You know, getting in the showers and that.

Interviewer: Yes, you don't? No, that's interesting. Okay. Yes, I know. I never meet a bloke that –

Respondent: Some don't mind.

Interviewer: Sorry?

Respondent: But generally, the ones with the biggest cocks (Laughter) They didn't care. So, yes.

Interviewer: (Laughter) I've yet to meet a bloke that says, "Yes, we talk about it all the time." So that doesn't really happen.

Respondent: No. It doesn't.

Interviewer: Okay. Going back to women a bit.

Respondent: yes.

Interviewer: Do you think women are more emotional than men or vice versa?

Respondent: Oh, definitely.

Interviewer: Do you think so?

Respondent: Yes. But I am actually – I am a bit of a break from the norm. I'm more of a woman in that respect.

Interviewer: Okay. Why's that?

Respondent: I'm quite emotional. I'm – I think a lot. I'm sensitive and stuff like that. My old girlfriend used to say that I was the woman and she was bloke in the relationship.

Interviewer: Okay. So you think – because – I mean, does that include expressing your emotions? Like will you talk to like your girlfriend or whatever quite openly?

Respondent: Yes, yes. I would. She wouldn't. My ex, she wouldn't ever. No, she's quiet cold and didn't talk about stuff. You know, you bury it. And stuff like that. But I'm like, "No, no. Let's talk about it and get it all out and talk through it all." But –

Interviewer: Is that how you were brought up, to talk?

Respondent: No, I didn't really have much of a great upbringing. I just am what I am. I'm a product of myself really.

Interviewer: Yes, you weren't – ?

Respondent: I suppose some of it comes from – you know, I do put good stock in that was privately educated up until 13. But (Pause) and I thought – I learned a lot of values there.

Interviewer: Because a lot –

Respondent: I don't know. I'd say it's generally – if – you know, it's a – it's a brain thing, I think.

Interviewer: Yes. I mean, a lot of guys will talk about how when they were younger, they can remember being told you shouldn't cry. You should, you know, bottle up and stuff like this. You don't remember being told that, or do you?

Respondent: My mum was quite liberal like that. But then she wasn't really there for much of my life. Well, she was there until I was eight. And then she disappeared for either years.

Interviewer: Right. Okay.

Respondent: Well, didn't disappear. She wasn't at home.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. Do you think the women that you date are supportive to you emotionally? You've touched on one of them not being so much but –

Respondent: (Pause) The women that I've dated supporting me? No. Do you know what? I tend to go for the colder type of woman. I don't know why. I wonder what it is. All three of my serious girlfriends, they've all been very similar. Big drinkers, right lairy party girls. Pretty. Girly girls. But all really quite cold emotionally.

Interviewer: Because there's this thing –

Respondent: But the new one I'm about to isn't. I don't think. I think she's [?] the opposite. She's very similar to me.

Interviewer: Because there's this thing in the media. They sort of say that women have more emotional intelligence than men. I mean, I'm not saying I agree with it. What do you think about that? I'm sitting on the fence.

Respondent: Describe emotional intelligence? Do you think, what clever with their emotions? They're playing blokes with emotions?

Interviewer: Well, it can mean that. It's usually said in a positive way.

Respondent: I would say definitely. I would say, yes, my ex, sometimes she used to get upset. Yes, sometimes, she would use her emotions to get what she wanted. Yes.

Interviewer: You think she was manipulative with her emotions?

Respondent: Sometimes. Not often. But when – sometimes definitely.

Interviewer: How would she do that? Can you give me an example?

Respondent: Well, I still talk to her. And the other day she – her birthday is coming up. And (Pause) I mentioned a few months ago, while I was still really quite in love

with her, that I'd get her a laptop and that for her birthday. And then since then, you know, we've drifted and time's moved on and I – I'm now not in love with her anymore. And then yesterday, she sent me a couple of messages saying, "Oh, I'm not looking forward to my birthday. I wish I had someone to spoil me like you always used to spoil me. And I'm not going to have a laptop." And it's dropping subtle hints. And – and, yes, she's trying to play with my emotions to get a laptop. I know she is. (Laughter) But she's not getting one.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay. Yes. That sounds – yes, that's quite manipulative, isn't it? I think.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay. Other examples. I mean, not just in a negative way. But they say that women are more intelligent in that they are in tune with their emotions. Like you say that you are – you think you are rare.

Respondent: Yes. No. Yes. I would definitely say, yes, a woman is well in tune with her emotions.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: I'd 100% [?] with that.

Interviewer: Okay. Have you – sometimes in the media, you see women getting aggressive when they are drunk. Like you see it sometimes like when they pushing out at nightclubs and women start attacking –

Respondent: Yes. My ex was. All the time.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: My first ex and my third ex, the one I've just got rid of, both of them were violent drunk.

Interviewer: Right. Okay.

Respondent: In fact, that's the reason why we split up.

Interviewer: What did they used to do, if you don't mind me asking?

Respondent: What, both of them?

Interviewer: First and the second.

Respondent: Okay. The first one used to get drunk and she'd put – well, she'd get off with other blokes in the club in front of me. And when we'd get out – or if we were at home, sometimes she'd just throw random objects at me. Like pint glasses and knives. She threw a knife at my head once.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: The third one, she had issues with [?] and she used to come home and punch me and kick me and, you know, sometimes I used to have to – I'll be honest. Sometimes I slapped her back. I – it would take a lot for me to get – get to that state. (Pause) But, yes. Ultimately, it led to our downfall.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay. Okay. What about attacking your penis? It's a bit of a side question. (Laughter)

Respondent: Attacking it?

Interviewer: Yes. Attacking it. Have you ever – ?

Respondent: Yes. She done that before. The third one did.

Interviewer: What did she do?

Respondent: Punched me in my nuts while I was fast asleep.

Interviewer: Right. Did you ever fear that she might cut it off or something like that?

Respondent: (Pause) As well. (Pause) Sort of. I was fast asleep me and shoved – shoved her fingers up my arse while I was asleep. And that was so bad that the police got called and they wanted to press charges. But I wouldn't let them.

Interviewer: Okay. So –

Respondent: What was the other question? What was that bit after that?

Interviewer: Do you ever fear that she might cut your penis off or something like that?

Respondent: I sometimes did worry about that. Yes. Yes. But I don't – you know, (Pause) it wasn't a real concern if I'm perfectly honest. No.

Interviewer: Yes. But why was it – ?

Respondent: But it did – it did cross my mind a couple of times. Yes.

Interviewer: Why – why did she – can I ask, why didn't you go to the police? What were your thoughts?

Respondent: When – well, I did. They came. They got called the house. Because we had a massive row. I – I got anger issues myself. But, you know, I'm quite loud and aggressive. When I care enough. And I haven't got the best – I've got a bit of a potty mouth when I lose my temper. And, yes, our neighbours called the police because they were worried about her, ironically. (Laughter) Which, yes. So they – they came. And they were like, "What's going on?" And I told them. And they said, "Right. We're going to arrest your girlfriend." And I said to them not to. And I told them I wouldn't – I wouldn't offer any evidence and this that and the other.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. Yes. That's very hard, isn't it? To deal with that.

Respondent: Yes. It was tough. Yes.

Interviewer: Did you ever tell any of your male mates about that?

Respondent: I did tell a couple of them. Yes. It was difficult. But I had to get it off my chest. I had to talk to someone. And both of them said "Get rid." But I never did. I stayed another three years.

Interviewer: Was it her aggression that eventually made you split up? Or was it just lying?

Respondent: I'll be perfectly honest. My mum died in November and I went out. And I wanted to get absolutely ratted. Which I did. She was going out the same night, which pissed me off because I really wanted her to be with me. Because my mum had died two weeks before. And she decided she was going to go out for a mate's birthday instead. And this is in the same town. We met up in a nightclub And I was completely drunk. So drunk that I can't remember anything. My mate – I think I've got this horrible feeling my drink was spiked. Because I went missing then for like seven hours. But actually I'd seen her in a nightclub. We were in the nightclub together. And she was dancing with other blokes. And it pissed me off. Because she always used to do that. Yes. She was being a little bit too fresh with someone. We had an argument in there, I nearly got kicked out. So and then I disappeared for seven hours. I came back and for some reason I hit her and that was the end of that.

Interviewer: Right. Okay.

Respondent: yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: But like I said, I just – I have done stuff in the past and I felt like I'd been on acid for two days after this stage. And my mate who was with me said I was – I was pissing a lot of blokes off at the bar. Someone had threatened to do me, I was thinking do me as in beat me up but maybe they did me by dropping something in my drink.

Interviewer: Right. Okay.

Respondent: So, yes. But ultimately violence. Me being violent to her. She had actually cheated on me six times. And I forgave her. Did all loads of other stuff. She wasn't [?]. Because I hadn't ever hit her before. Got close. But no, I hadn't actually done anything.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. That sounds hard. Hard time. I'm sorry to hear about that.

Respondent: Yes. It was really near Christmas, so it was quite tough.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: And [?] gutted. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Okay. My next question is, do you think women understand men?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Okay. What don't they understand?

Respondent: I think the thing is for us. Men understand men, because we are men. So we can – I can sympathise and empathise with what goes round and round a blokes head. I think in the case of women, women can understand women, but to be fair, men are from Mars and women are from Venus thing. I think generally, for us – like I said, I'm a little bit of an exception to the rule. Probably because I'm more in touch with my emotions and stuff like that. But I can sort of understand other men and other women and where they're coming from. But, no. 90% my mates think women[?] try to understand.

Interviewer: And –

Respondent: Generally. So I would, yes, generally (Pause) women don't understand men.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: [?].

Interviewer: Yes. Okay. Going back a bit. Have you ever engaged in a sexual act with a woman that you did not want to do?

Respondent: Yes. I have.

Interviewer: Do you mind telling me about it?

Respondent: (Pause)

Interviewer: You don't have to if you don't want to.

Respondent: (Pause) Let me think about that. (Pause) Yes alright. Yes. Anal. [?].

Interviewer: Sorry. I couldn't hear that.

Respondent: Anal to me.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. Was that done without your consent?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Was it something – a situation where you were trying it out, something new, that a partner wanted to do and you thought, “Oh, I don't really want to do this but I'll do it.” Or were you actually raped do you think?

Respondent: (Pause) Well, I was as a kid, you see. So – and I sort of grew to like it.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: A bit. That's – that's what's happened. Yes.

Interviewer: Is that with a woman?

Respondent: Yes. It was. Yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: Two women sexually abused me when I was young. One when I was five. One when was 11.

Interviewer: Is that whilst you were at school, private school?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: I'm sorry to hear that.

Respondent: That's okay. I've dealt with it now. So –

Interviewer: Yes. I hope I'm not digging up something –

Respondent: No, no, no. You're not digging up anything.

Interviewer: Okay. But – so you have had a woman sort of – when you got – when you were an adult as well. Anything since then? That you've been forced to do.

Respondent: Abuse-wise?

Interviewer: Sorry?

Respondent: In what respect? Abuse?

Interviewer: Yes. Has somebody – not necessarily raped you or something like that. But have you found yourself doing something and thought, "I don't really want to do this,"
or – ?

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: When you're an adult. Yes?

Respondent: Yes. But, you know, the women I've been with have been understanding and just stopped. So –

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. So that's just like a relationship where you go, "Well, actually I don't want to do this," and then stopped.

Respondent: Yes. That's right.

Interviewer: That sort of thing. Okay. You've not experienced a sort of strong sexual abuse when you're an adult from a woman, no?

Respondent: No, no. Only when my girlfriend did that to me when I was asleep.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay. Alright. What about your friends? Have you ever heard any of your friends talk about being engaged in something they didn't want to do sexually with a woman?

Respondent: (Pause)

Interviewer: Even being kissed.

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: No.

Respondent: No. It's all blagging. Like. So no, they didn't wouldn't say anything about anything bad. (Pause) I did have one mate who. No, no. Just forget it.

Interviewer: Okay. If you want. That's up to you.

Respondent: No, it's got nothing to do with women. It's all to do with paedophiles and shit. So, no, we'll forget that.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay. Last, difficult – well, two questions to go. One of them's a little bit more difficult. But the other one is easy. How concerned are your mates and you about being falsely accused of raping a woman?

Respondent: I'd say it's quite high on the agenda. You know, a couple of mates who've actually gone to court over it. And it's been dropped either in that stage or they've been found not guilty. So, yes, it's definitely a talk – a subject we have broached in the past.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay. And what about you? How do you think?

Respondent: Well, I like to think – I don't like to think about it. But I'm aware that any woman, especially if she's had a drink, can go to the police station, make a claim and my name is dragged through the mud and I'm guilty before I'm even, you know, found innocent. There will always be suspicion. So there is a worry about it. But I try – try not to even think about it.

Interviewer: Right. Okay.

Respondent: That's could be a vindictive woman. I would never do it. So it would be a vindictive woman that would want to do that to me.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay. And do you ever sort of think – because the reason why I asked, there's a study that shows in America, that young men are actually stopping date – perhaps sleeping with drunk women, because they are concerned that the woman might –

Respondent: I would say maybe that's America. But over here, I think a drunk – my ex-girlfriends used to get so drunk. And (Pause) it's an easy lay for a lot of blokes these days. They don't even bat an eyelid. They're more than happy to take a drunk woman home and shag them. A free shag as far as they can see it. And because my ex was beautiful, it was a free shag with a bonus that it's a fit bird.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So, yes.

Interviewer: Was she unfaithful to you then.

Respondent: Yes. At least six times that I know of. And, you know, I even heard her in the cab once. So, yes. Not good.

Interviewer: Right. Yes. Okay.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Well, hopefully this new lady of yours sounds like a bit of a change of a pattern, doesn't it?

Respondent: She's lovely. She's absolutely lovely. Yes. She's really pretty and she's really, really kind. And lovely. Pretty much everything that I've ever wanted. If my ex had been a little bit more personality wise like she is, I think we'd still be together now. We'd never have had our problems.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: My ex has got issues.

Interviewer: Yes. She sounds like she might. (Laughter)

Respondent: (Laughter) [?]. That's the main thing in her life. The main problem.

Interviewer: Is what sorry?

Respondent: BDD. Body dysmorphic disorder.

Interviewer: Oh, right. What's that –

Respondent: I think that's what she's got.

Interviewer: What she doesn't eat properly.

Respondent: um.

Interviewer: She thinks she's fatter than she is?

Respondent: Well, she is larger than she wants to be. Yes. She'd like to be a size eight. But she's a 12 to 14. And she never bothers to lose the weight. And she goes out and gets blottoed, five or six times a week at the moment, from what I've heard and what I know about her. If she only realised she's making things worse by doing all that beer and alcohol, she's putting on weight and making it worse. So she looks in the mirror and thinks she's disgusting. But she is in fact – like I say, one of the most beautiful women I've ever seen. So –

Interviewer: Right. Okay.

Respondent: So she's got issues.

Interviewer: Yes. One – have you ever been to a lap-dancing club or do you go to them often?

Respondent: No. Do you know what? I never have and I don't think I ever will. It's not really my cup of tea.

Interviewer: What is it you don't like about it?

Respondent: I think it's a bit sleazy. It's a little bit pervy. I don't really like pervy. I'm not at all. In fact, the girl I met yesterday, she said to me, "Do you know what? We've been chatting for over a week and you're the first – you've never even mentioned sex or been pervy to me in any way." And she goes, "And that's not happened in the three years of dating." (Laughter) So, I was like, "Well – " I told her, "I am different from most blokes."

Interviewer: That's –

Respondent: But, yes. No, I don't – I don't – I will say all my mates have been and they will go and do go, yes, quite often.

Interviewer: When they go to lap-dancing clubs, what do you think they experience? Why do they like them?

Respondent: I think primarily it's because they want a woman they can't have. I'm really pretty, really fit. You know, sexually (Pause) – what's the word I'm looking for, creative. Yes. I think that's what my mates fancy, I think.

Interviewer: Don't they get – I mean, it's an interesting thing that they go to something that they can't have.

Respondent: Yes. Because most of them – most of my – I would – if I'm perfectly honest, I'd say most of my mates are pretty average looking and they wouldn't really get a really pretty girl. I mean, there's no reason why they wouldn't. you know, what I mean? I've seen some really pretty girls with some really ugly blokes in my time and I've thought, "How the hell have you got her?" But, you know, it's not – I think with women, it's not all about looks. Whereas for blokes, a lot of it is about looks.

Interviewer: Yes. And don't they feel sort of frustrate – don't they find it frustrating? Doesn't it kind of remind them that they're not going to have those women? (Laughter) Do you know what I mean?

Respondent: Yes. Well, yes. Almost certainly. Because I had a conversation with my mates. And they were like, "oh the old dog at home," and all of that. So they're never happy.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Yes, never happy with what they've got.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay. Alright, that's my last question. Is there anything else you'd like to add? Or is there anything I should have asked you?

Respondent: Well, yes. You said this is all about misogyny. And that's generally about men hating women. And I don't understand what – is this what you're (Pause) suggesting? That generally men hate women?

Interviewer: No. Okay. I hope you didn't take that. What I'm actually doing is almost the opposite actually.

Respondent: Right.

Interviewer: I'm questioning – a lot of feminist theory kind of comes to the conclusion that a lot of men's behaviour is misogynistic. And that men are these powerful sort of beings and women are victims. And I am saying, I think, in my experience growing up, I know that I had power and I know that guys had less power than me and some guys had more and some had less. And what –

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: And what I'm saying is, I think it's a very simplistic way to interpret men's behaviour as misogynistic. So that's why it's called Rethinking Misogyny. I'm getting how men – because a lot of what might be perceived as (Pause) misogynistic behaviour, by men, is actually a reaction to power that men perceive women to have.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: So it's not an action – like they're not doing it first. They're reacting to something the woman does. And there's nothing really written about that in gender studies. So I'm writing about it saying, "Look –

Respondent: Right. Okay.

Interviewer: – we need to understand how men perceive women and we have to make that part of our theory because otherwise our theories are rubbish. Do you see what I'm saying?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: If they don't –

Respondent: What happens now? Do you – will you keep me up to date with things ?

Interviewer: Yes. I'll tell you what will happen. If you can send me back that release form, that would be lovely. You will get a transcript of your – it will probably take about a week to two weeks. You get a transcript. I email it to you and you go, "Yes. That's fine. That's what I'm happy – " just in case something's been misheard or you feel that you haven't really got across what you meant to say. Like you look at it in black and white and you go, "Actually, that's not what I meant." And you can email me back and go, "This is what I meant." And we can amend it if you want that. And then what happens is, I've got to write it for the whole for the next year. So I'll hand it in a year. And it'll take about another six months after that until hopefully I finish. And then I'm

going to send a copy of the whole paper to everybody that's been involved. So if you want to read it. It's going to be 80,000 words long. (Laughter) But if you want to.

Respondent: Yes, I'd be fascinated by it. I really would.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, you will get a copy. But I warn you, it will be 18 months, yes. Because it's going to take a long –

Respondent: That's alright. That's no problem.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: But anyway, can I just say, thank you so much, Spencer. I really – of all the people I've interviewed, I can tell tonight you've actually been quite open. And I hope you don't go away and sort of think, "Oh, I wish I hadn't said that."

Respondent: No, no. I'm quite an open person really.

Interviewer: Okay. Because I really respect what you've said. And it's – there's some fascinating things that – your point of view's really come across with some really unique stuff. So I'm really chuffed to have spoken to you.

Respondent: Thank you very much for asking me.

Interviewer: No, no. I'm really pleased. Thank you. So shall email you now. Just a reminder to send that form.

Respondent: I'll get the laptop out and I'll get it all signed and scanned and printed off.

Interviewer: Lovely.

Respondent: No worries. Have you got a time limit on that, because I'm not sure if my printer's knackered. The cartridge I mean. I haven't had time to go and get one. So do you need it like within the next day, 24 hours?

Interviewer: Well, just as soon as you can do it. No, there's not a time – but –

Respondent: I'll do it soon as I can.

Interviewer: But if you leave it, I'll just keep pestering you. (Laughter)

Respondent: No, no. I want to do it. Because I want my – the reason I did all this is because I'm interested by it.

Interviewer: Yes. Your opinions will be taken seriously and will – hopefully I will be publishing a book and stuff like that. And you'll know that you've made a difference. Yes?

Respondent: Yes. Okay.

Interviewer: Wicked.

Respondent: Thanks, Anna.

Interviewer: Thanks a lot, Spencer.

Respondent: Cheers.

Interviewer: Cheers bye bye.

Respondent: Bye.

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