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**Gay masculinities:  
A mixed methods study of the implications of  
hegemonic and alternative masculinities  
for gay men**

James Peter Ravenhill

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
School of Psychology  
University of Sussex  
September 2017

**Statement:**

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.

James P Ravenhill

15<sup>th</sup> September 2017

**Declaration:**

The thesis conforms to a paper-style thesis. Chapters three to seven inclusive are discrete articles written in a style that is appropriate for publication in peer-reviewed journals in the field. Chapters one, two and eight present discussions of the extant literature and of the research undertaken.

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## **Dissertation summary**

Contemporary theories of gender conceptualise masculinity as a socially constructed, pluralistic and action-oriented entity. Hegemonic masculinity is the dominant masculinity discourse in many Anglophone societies. Heterosexuality is the bedrock of hegemonic masculinity, and heterosexual expressions of masculinity are more socially desirable than gay masculinities. Although gay men are unable to embody hegemonic masculinity, prior research suggests that their behaviour may nevertheless be guided by its mandates. This may include gay men's sexual positioning behaviour in anal intercourse – previous research has demonstrated that gay sexual positions are steeped in gender role stereotypes. The mixed-methods programme of studies presented in this dissertation provides a greater understanding of the components of “gay masculinities”, and how positioning in relation to masculinity discourses is associated with how gay men experience their masculinity, including in anal intercourse.

A discursive qualitative approach used in Study 1 identified how gay men could “compensate” for their homosexuality by displaying attributes associated with hegemonic masculinity (e.g., muscularity). It was also found that gay masculinities were notable for their diversity (Chapter 3). Using quantitative methods, Study 2 demonstrated that gay men who are anally-insertive in anal intercourse were perceived as more masculine than those who are receptive, although muscularity and a deep voice were more strongly associated with perceptions of gay men's masculinity than sexual positioning (Chapter 4). In Study 3, an experiential qualitative approach identified how gay men's beliefs about masculinity were associated with their gendered perceptions and experiences of anal intercourse (Chapter 5). Insight was also provided into the range of beliefs that gay men have about masculinity, and how these beliefs are related to how

gay men negotiate their masculine and gay identities against the dominance of the hegemonic masculinity discourse (Chapters 6 and 7).



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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### **1-A: A background to the studies presented in this dissertation**

##### ***1-A-1: An introduction to this programme of studies***

In recent decades, academic interest in men and masculinities has increased. This is reflected by the founding of The Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity by the American Psychological Society in 1995, and the establishment of journals oriented to masculinities research, such as “Men and Masculinities” and the “Journal of Men’s Studies” in the 1990s, and “Psychology of Men and Masculinity” in 2000. Scholarly interest in masculinities has been influenced strongly by the observation that men have shorter life expectancies than women, have poorer mental health, and tend to engage in less healthy patterns of behaviour (White et al., 2011). An important influence on academic work in the field has been Connell’s (1995) book “Masculinities”, which emphasised the plurality and lability of masculinities, and highlighted their relationality to femininities, and to each other. Connell (1995) proposed that in many Western societies, including the UK, USA and Australia, there is one particular masculinity that is most valued. This masculinity is “hegemonic” because it subordinates its alternatives – gay masculinities most conspicuously. If “hegemonic masculinity” represents the most esteemed way of “doing manhood”, then gay masculinities represent the least (Connell, 1995).

Although there exists a substantial body of literature that employs hegemonic masculinity theory as a reference point for examining how men construct and experience their masculine identities, research into how masculinity relates to the identity and behaviour of gay men is more limited. This is despite Connell’s (1992, p.737) assertion that:

Research on masculinity must explore how gender operates for those men most vehemently defined as unmasculine: how masculinity is constructed for them, how homosexual and heterosexual masculinities interact, and how homosexual men experience and respond to change in the gender order.

The aim of the programme of research reported in this dissertation was to address this call for more academic studies into gay masculinities.

### ***1-A-2: The history of masculinity studies***

It has been suggested that the separation of men and women in terms of their social and economic roles occurred as a result of the rapid industrialisation of the Western world in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when men were encouraged to work in order to provide, and women to manage households and raise children (Brannon, 2011). The Victorian ideals of men as active, independent, emotionally resilient and financially dominant provided the foundations for the “male sex role identity” theory (MSRI; and later “male *gender* role identity” theory), which influenced the social scientific study of male experience for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Pleck, 1984). MSRI theory subscribed to a nativist interpretation of sex roles, and viewed them as universal, rather than being contingent on culture (Pleck, 1984).

From the 1970s onwards, MSRI theory became less influential, not least because scholars identified the need to distinguish between sex – the biologically determined characteristics that delineate male and female – and gender, the psychological and cultural construction of what it means to be a man and a woman (West & Zimmerman, 1987). The notion that psychological health depended on the accordance between sex and gender role was discredited; and the assumption that there exists an “essence” of masculinity that did not vary between time and culture was contested (Levant, 1996). In

part influenced by the rise of feminist theory and queer theory, scholars interested in the study of men turned away from conceptualising masculinity as a monolithic and unproblematic referent, an inevitable consequence of being male, and instead interpreted it as a problematic social construct, a consequence of male role socialisation, and therefore contestable and commutable (Levant, 1996).

Pleck (1995) proposed the concept “male gender role strain” as a paradigm for researching masculinity, in place of MSRI theory. Fundamental to the male gender role strain paradigm is the assumption that masculinity is not an inherent part of the person, but instead is a social process that is strongly influenced by “masculinity ideologies”. The endorsement and internalisation of masculinity ideologies inform expectations of how men should behave, and how they should not (Levant & Richmond, 2007; Pleck, 1995; Thompson, Pleck & Ferrera, 1992). Therefore, the extent to which an individual man endorses and internalises a given masculine ideology reflects the expectations of manhood that he applies to himself, and influences the experience of discrepancy between himself and the “ideal man”, as delineated by the ideology – hence the relationship between masculinity ideologies and the gender role strain paradigm (Pleck, 1995). The ideals of manhood vary depending on several factors (social, cultural and historical context, social class, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, etc.), hence the reference to masculinity *ideologies* in plural (Levant, 1996).

Pleck (1995, p. 20) observed that in Anglophone societies, there is a “particular constellation of standards and expectations” of men that may be described as “traditional masculinity ideology”, although the word “traditional” is used with caution, in acknowledgement of the labile nature of masculinity ideologies. Traditional masculinity ideology is characterised by: aspiration to achievement and higher status; emotional resilience; an emphasis on toughness and aggression; adventure orientation,

which could include the use of violence; objectifying attitudes towards sexuality; the avoidance and denigration of femininity; and disparagement of gay men and homosexuality (Levant, 1996; Levant & Richmond, 2007; Pleck, 1995).

When men aspire to achieve the standards of masculinity that they understand to represent what “being a man” is about, they are making a claim to their sex category (West & Zimmerman, 1987). However, to embody the mandates of traditional masculinity ideology is not an easy feat. It has been suggested that the majority of men experience gender role strain owing to discrepancies between ideological standards of masculinity and actual lived experiences (Pleck, 1995). It is also argued that certain men are more severely affected by gender role strain than others – for example, those who are non-white, differently-abled, of a lower socio-economic status, and who are non-heterosexual (Levant, 1996).

### ***1-A-3: The study of masculinity and male homosexuality***

Contemporary gender theories apply a social constructionist lens to masculinity, maintaining that “becoming a man” is consequent on engagement and interaction with culture, and learning the masculinity “scripts” (analogous to masculinity ideologies) extant in that culture (Kimmel & Messner, 1989). All men in a given culture are exposed to the same scripts of masculinity, but given that masculinity is not intrinsic in the person, not all men can be expected to aspire to them nor respond to them in the same way. Consequently, these theories offer pluralistic interpretations of masculinity, opening up spaces for “non-traditional” masculinities, including gay masculinities.

Discussions of gay masculinities emerged as social constructionist accounts of sexuality, particularly those of Michael Foucault (1926 – 1984), became more influential. Foucault argued that the emergence of new sexuality discourses in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century – encapsulated by what he referred to as the “science of sex” – reflected the

state's intention to regulate sexuality (Spargo, 1999). It was at this time that homosexual and heterosexual practices were separated and set up in opposition. Homosexuality was a category constructed within scientific and medical discourses which was used to distinguish between sexual normativity and sexual deviance (Edwards, 2005). This had implications for the understanding of "gay identities": Same-sex sexual activity had always existed, but gay identities *per se* could not have any biological or psychological essence if the sexual activity was unproblematised until this point in history (Edwards, 2005). Consequently, according to the social constructionist perspective, there is a distinction to be made between same-sex sexual acts and sexual identities: "homosexual activity alone does not a gay man make" (Edwards, 2005, p.52). As a result, some men who have sex with other men may identify as "heterosexual", as some self-identified gay men may be "straight acting" (Payne, 2007; Smith, Rissel, Richters, Grulich, & de Visser, 2003 – *see section I-C-3*).

Same-sex sexual activity was gendered long before the emergence of Victorian sex role ideologies that reified homosexuality. For example, in Greco-Roman times, male-male sexual relationships, particularly between older and younger men, were strongly tied to cultural scripts of manhood (Williams, 2010). Therefore, although the concepts of gay identities and gay masculinities only emerged when social constructionism became the dominant paradigm for theorising about and studying gender and sexuality, the association between male sexuality and masculinity has a considerably longer history.

The social constructionist approach assumes that masculinities are relational – they only have meaning in the context of femininities and other masculinities (Connell, 2005; Levant, 1996). Therefore, to understand gay masculinities it is important to consider where they are relationally positioned. There is some debate among scholars as



to the state of masculinities in contemporary Western societies, and this debate has implications for how gay masculinities may be conceptualised. Some argue that the cultural shift away from homophobia and towards acceptance of homosexuality means that masculinities exist side-by-side, in a harmonious arrangement where each is accepted as a viable “version” of manhood (e.g., Anderson & McCormack, 2016: *see section 1-B-3*). According to this “inclusive” interpretation of masculinities, gay masculinities have equal status to “heteromascuinites” (masculinities embodied by heterosexual men: Anderson, 2009). However, others maintain that men who cannot, or choose not, to subscribe to traditional masculinity ideology (including gay men, whose homosexuality renders them inevitably non-traditionally masculine) instead embody alternative, less desirable masculinities, which occupy subjugated positions in a hierarchy of masculinities (Connell, 2005). According to this perspective, gay men must somehow make claims for manhood against a cultural backdrop where their masculinities are less valued.

## **1-B: Theories of masculinity**

### ***1-B-1: Hegemonic masculinity theory***

Traditional masculinity ideology reflects the dominant cultural messages regarding what it takes to be a “real man”. In contemporary Western societies, the “version” of manhood culturally-sanctioned as the ideal is hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). “Hegemony” is a Gramscian term referring to the legitimisation of power inequality, whereby the media and other cultural institutions, and everyday social practices, normalise and perpetuate the dominance of one social group over others (Donaldson, 1993). Traditional masculinity ideology is hegemonic in that it promotes the status of white, heterosexual men to the detriment of non-white, non-heterosexual

men, and of women. Consequently, hegemonic masculinity exists at the top of a hierarchical structure of gender.

Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity – presented originally in the 1980s (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985) – has been applied broadly in social scientific research: to examine the behaviour of boys at school (e.g., Swain, 2006a); to explain the disproportionate rates of criminality among men compared to women (see Messerschmidt, 2005); to explore violence and homophobia in sports (e.g., Adams, Anderson & McCormack, 2010); to investigate organisational practices in the military (e.g., Barrett, 1996); and in discussions of men's health-related practices (e.g., Courtenay, 2000; de Visser & McDonnell, 2013). It has also been applied in discussions of male homosexuality and gay masculinities: The concept of a hierarchy of masculinities emerged from gay men's experiences of violence and subordination at the hands of heterosexual men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Hegemonic masculinity is intended to be conceptualised as a social process, a gender performance that it is “accomplished in social action”, and therefore as something that evolves alongside social definitions of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.837). Nevertheless, hegemonic masculinity may be embodied by men who possess particular attributes that perpetuate their social power over women and other men, including financial success, physical strength, competence at masculine sports, emotional resilience, violence, anti-femininity, homophobia, and imperatively, heterosexuality (Connell, 2005).

Exemplars of hegemonic masculinity are few and far between – the mandates of hegemonic masculinity are not easily embodied. As Messner (2007, p. 475) opined, “The accomplishment of a stable hegemonic masculinity by an individual man in daily interactions is almost impossible.” However, the majority of men benefit from the

subordination of women, and of certain groups of men (Connell, 2005). These men are not the “frontline troops of patriarchy” (Connell, 2005, p. 79) – they may in fact hold relationships with women based on compromise and negotiation – but they nevertheless may benefit from the institutional reproduction of patriarchy, in terms of honour, prestige, financial wealth and state-sanctioned power (Coles, 2009). Connell (2005) refers to this as “complicity” with hegemonic masculinity. Complicit men have a vested interest in supporting hegemonic masculinity practices, in order to maintain their privileged position in the social hierarchy. Although hegemonic masculinity may not be statistically “normal”, it is doubtlessly *normative*, and therefore both regulates the behaviour of men and provides a yardstick against which to evaluate other men’s behaviour (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

#### 1-B-1-1: Common critiques of hegemonic masculinity theory

The elusiveness of hegemonic masculinity to the majority of men – perhaps even all of them – raises concerns for some scholars. If even some of the world’s most powerful men (for example, political leaders of Western countries such as Justin Trudeau, current Prime Minister of Canada, renowned for his pro-feminist and pro-gay attitudes) display non-hegemonic patterns of masculinity, then it is questioned how useful hegemonic masculinity theory is for examining how masculinity relates to men’s psychological and behavioural practices. In other words, it is questioned what hegemonic masculinity can actually *look* like and how it may be experienced if most men are unclear as to what it actually is (Wetherell & Edley, 1999).

Further, some scholars have criticised hegemonic masculinity for its ambiguity. Donaldson (1993), for example, highlights the non-hegemonic patterns of masculinity displayed by Connell’s (1990) “Iron Man”, framed by Connell as an exemplar of hegemonic masculinity owing to his status as a revered endurance athlete – who (not

incidentally) is also white and heterosexual. Owing to his commitment to professional athleticism, the Iron Man is prevented from engaging in the masculine behaviours that preoccupy his peers, such as heavy drinking, engaging in violence, and taking risks (Connell, 1990). From Donaldson's (1993) perspective, it is contradictory to state that a man can be a model of hegemonic masculinity and be excluded simultaneously from other domains of masculinity.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that these critiques arise from a common misconception regarding hegemonic masculinity: that it exists as one unchallengeable, transhistorical model of manhood. The term "hegemonic masculinity" is not intended to describe a particular archetype of man, nor a stable pattern of specific behaviours. It maintains its hegemony owing to its dominance over its alternatives, not on account of how it "looks" from the outside. Hegemonic masculinity is embedded in social environments – it plays out within the family, at school, in business, in politics – but is rarely reflected in all of the behavioural practices of one individual man. Even an exemplar of hegemonic masculinity may enact non-hegemonic versions of masculinity at times, because masculinities vary given the gender relations that pervade a given social context (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Gough & Edwards, 1998). As Wetherell and Edley (1999) observed, sometimes it is by rejecting the mandates of hegemonic masculinity (for example, by framing them as brutish and outdated) that men can acquire hegemonic status (*see section 1-B-3*).

### ***1-B-2: Hegemonic masculinity and homosexuality***

In privileging the power of white, affluent and heterosexual men, hegemonic masculinity functions to subordinate other groups of men, including those who are non-heterosexual. In Western societies, the most conspicuous subordinated masculinities are gay masculinities, which reside low down in the hierarchy of gender (Connell, 2005).

Male homosexuality is set up as the antithesis of hegemonic masculinity because it is counter to the ideal that it is women, not men, who are the objects of sex for men: Women afford men sexual validation, for which men compete (Donaldson, 1993). The notion that men are able to provide sexual pleasure to other men therefore challenges hegemonic masculinity's preoccupation with intrasex competition and hierarchy (Connell, Carrigan & Lee, 1985). The Western cultural assumption of "opposites attract" prescribes that people who are attracted to the masculine must themselves be feminine: Male homosexuality is positioned as akin to effeminacy, to which hegemonic masculinity is set diametrically opposed (Connell, 2005).

However, gay men may not be necessarily excluded from some of the benefits of patriarchy – even effeminate men may benefit from the subordination of women, for example, in economic terms (Connell, 1992). This indirect benefit is referred to as the "patriarchal dividend" (Connell, 2005). Gay men's inherent failure to embody hegemonic masculinity, and their subordination by it, does not exclude them from masculinity altogether. In fact, hegemonic masculinity can itself be challenged by gay masculinity – for example, by gay men who excel in sport (Anderson, 2002) – and it has been suggested that some gay masculinities may achieve hegemony in a hierarchy of *gay* masculinities (Coles, 2009). Hegemonic masculinity theory does not intend to oversimplify gay masculinity by conceptualising it as a unitary category – it recognises the diversity of gay men's masculinities, but maintains that even the most masculine gay men are oppressed because their ostensible "straightness" is negated by their desire for a male sexual partner (Connell, 1992; 2005).

Heteronormativity – the values endemic in the institutions and practices that privilege heterosexuality – is afforded hegemonic status because it reproduces patriarchy (Avila-Saavedra, 2009). Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and into the present

one, gay men in the UK were subordinated to heterosexual men by a number of cultural institutions and everyday social practices, the most profound being the criminalisation of sex between men, and also including: the exclusion of gay partners from the institution of marriage (legalised in 2014: Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act, 2013); an older age of legal sexual consent applied to gay men (made equal to that for heterosexual people in 2001: Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 2000); the exclusion of openly gay men from the armed services (made illegal in 2016: Armed Forces Bill, 2015); the prohibition in education of the “promotion of homosexuality” (repealed in England in 2003: Local Government Act, 2003); and by the “undercurrent of threat” that pervaded, and may do still, gay men’s everyday social interactions with heterosexual men (Connell, 2005, p. 155).

The extent to which social and politically-directed changes to the status of non-heterosexual people in the UK have affected how they are positioned in society is contestable. For example, the number of homophobic crimes recorded in the UK has increased in recent years (Corcoran, Lader, & Smith, 2015). A 2013 survey found that one in five young people who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual had experienced verbal or physical homophobic abuse within the preceding three years, and two-thirds of the perpetrators were reported to be unknown men (Guasp, Gammon, & Ellison, 2013). Given this evidence, it might be concluded that heterosexuality remains socially privileged, while homosexuality continues to be socially subjugated by the threat of violence.

However, hegemonic masculinity is not always afforded legitimacy: Compared with the sophistication and modernity of some gay masculinities, hegemonic masculinity can appear outdated, the heteronormativity associated with it unexciting (Connell, 1992). The dominance of hegemonic masculinity as it was originally

conceived, and its relevance to the lives of 21<sup>st</sup> Century men, has therefore been called into question (e.g., Anderson & McCormack, 2016). Some argue that the political and social changes that have taken place in recent years are evidence that the structure of gender relations is changing, which has implications both for how gay masculinities may be positioned in the gender order, and for how gay men may construct and experience their masculine and gay identities (Anderson & McCormack, 2016)

### ***1-B-3: Hybridised and inclusive masculinities***

Hegemonic masculinity theory problematises masculinity by focusing on the negative consequences of masculinity for individual men (e.g., in terms of their physical and mental health: e.g., Courtney, 2000) and for society (e.g., the oppression of women and subordinated men: e.g., Connell, 2005). However, the theory has been criticised for its failure to account for the so-called “hybridisation” of contemporary masculinities, which some argue challenge the dominance of hegemonic masculinity, offer men “softer” alternatives to hegemonic masculinity, and offer scope for a change in gender relations (e.g., Demetriou, 2001). The hybridisation of heteromascularity refers to its appropriation of “bits and pieces” of femininities and subordinated masculinities, in novel configurations of gender practice (Demetriou, 2001, p.350).

“Metrosexual masculinity”, a feminised, narcissistic, masculinity embodied by affluent men who have a preoccupation with fashion and grooming, provides an example of a hybridised form of heteromascularity (Simpson, 2002; 2004). Along with other masculinities, metrosexual masculinity is constructed and presented in media intended for consumption by a predominantly heterosexual male audience, often via the promotion of fashion and grooming products. These features and advertisements often depict highly stylised and eroticised images of men (Hall & Gough, 2011).

Consequently, the metrosexual man’s preoccupation with his own image draws his

attention to the self-presentation of other men. In other words, it invites the “queering” of heteronormative expectations of what the objects of men’s attention should be (i.e., women), and provides multiple opportunities for the “homoerotic gaze” – men looking at and evaluating the appearance of other men (Schuckmann, 1998).

Hybridised masculinities like metrosexual masculinity are therefore not only feminised, they are also “homosexualised”, in that they incorporate elements of gay aesthetics – their interests, fashions, language, even their bodily comportment (Bridges, 2014). Demetriou (2001) links the widespread appropriation of gay aesthetics by heterosexual men to the increased visibility of gay culture, in particular gay imagery in the media. “Gay” versions of heteromascularity may be favoured by some heterosexual men because normative expressions of heterosexuality may lack the prestige of homosexuality, the visibility and acceptance of which has been (and perhaps is still) vehemently fought and struggled for (Bridges, 2014). If homosexuality is increasingly celebrated by heterosexual people, and is recognised as a source of symbolic, “gay capital” (Morris, 2017), then it is perhaps unsurprising that some heterosexual masculinities have diversified by “borrowing” from gay aesthetics.

The identification of hybrid heteromascularities may demonstrate the diversity and flexibility of contemporary masculinities, but the extent to which their emergence signals a genuine change to gender relations, the end of the dominance of hegemonic masculinity, and the advancement of gay masculinities in the gender order, is disputed. Some interpret masculinity hybridisation as the end of the subordination of gay men, and reflecting the emergence of more “inclusive” versions of heteromascularity. Anderson (2009) proposed Inclusive Masculinity Theory to explain his observations of the social dynamics that existed between young, heterosexual men operating in sporting and fraternity contexts, which could not be explained with reference to hegemonic



masculinity. Anderson (2002; 2005; 2008) noted that the relationships between these men were centred on emotional openness and physical tactility rather than homophobia, machismo, and femininity-avoidance. Rather than being homophobic, these men attended gay bars where they danced with gay men, and were apparently unconcerned by the possibility of being (mistakenly) taken for gay themselves.

The absence of homophobia and the inclusion of gay men within predominantly heterosexual peer groups is central to inclusive masculinity. According to Anderson (2009), inclusivity is a consequence of declining “homohysteria”, or the fear that men have of being perceived as gay. In homohysterical cultures, men are restricted in terms of what they may do, what they may say, even how they may look, particularly in male-dominated contexts where the boundaries of an “acceptable”, non-gay and non-effeminate masculinity are carefully policed (Anderson, 2009). In other words, hegemonic masculinity directs the behaviour of men when homosexuality is overtly feared and derided. Anderson (2009) argues that the decline of homohysteria provides opportunities for a diversity of masculinities to flourish side-by-side, rather than to exist in the hierarchical arrangement that Connell (2005) describes.

A growing body of research has identified inclusive masculinity in a variety of settings where hegemonic masculinity would be expected to dominate, including among working-class, UK men employed in service industries (Roberts, 2013), in British printed sports media (Cleland, 2014), among football players in the USA (Adams, 2011), among British football fans (Cashmore & Cleland, 2012), and in peer groups of white, heterosexual male university students (Scoats, 2017). McCormack (2011) identified the “total absence of overt homophobia” (p. 90) among a sample of heterosexual 16-18-year-old secondary school students. Homophobia was stigmatised by these young men, and openly gay students were welcomed into heterosexual

friendship groups. McCormack (2014) suggests that the physical tactility and emotional intimacy demonstrated between contemporary young men are not active statements of inclusivity or “pro-gay” sentiment, but instead reflect the normalisation of the formation of close homosocial relationships, that are not characterised by the avoidance of feminised or “gay” behaviours. This has profound implications for gay men: If gay masculinities are valued equally to heteromasculinities, then gay men need not be preoccupied with making claims on manhood beyond their experience of being male.

One of the benefits of the identification of alternative, hybrid masculinities is that they have demonstrated the “heterodoxy” of heteromascularity. Heterodoxy refers to the departure from normativity, the break from orthodoxy, the challenge to homogeneity (Beasley, 2015). Rather than being framed as problematic and oppressive, heteromasculinities that are understood to be heterodox can be conceived as potential sites for social change because they challenge heteronormativity, and unlike the feminist and queer movements, can accomplish this in ways that are not necessarily politicised (Beasley, 2015).

However, a number of scholars take a decidedly less optimistic view of the extent to which hybridised masculinities are truly inclusive, and pose a genuine challenge to gender inequality, and to hegemonic masculine dominance. The crux of their argument is that hybridised masculinities may represent the reconfiguration of hegemonic masculinity into a softer, but no less oppressive form. Hall and Gough (2011) point to the appeal that hegemonic masculine ideals have to self-declared metrosexual men, who reject the less fashionable markers of hegemonic masculinity (lack of concern for personal hygiene, grooming, physique, and clothing choice) but nevertheless emphasise others, such as self-respect, an athletic physique, and successful heterosexuality. Similarly, Barry and Weiner (2017) found that heterosexual men who

were attracted to modern male fashion used “masculinised” discourses to describe their appearance, while simultaneously disparaging the subordinated others who had the same interest in fashion but appeared effeminate.

It has been suggested that when heterosexual men appropriate gay aesthetics, this serves to obscure the genuine struggle for sexual equality that gay men continue to experience (Bridges, 2014). Demetriou’s (2001) concern is that the appropriation of gay masculinities by heterosexual men serves only to maintain the dominance of heterosexual, hegemonic masculinity while simultaneously making it appear less rigid, more egalitarian, and less responsible for the reproduction of patriarchy. He argues that hegemonic masculinity sustains “external hegemony” – the subordination of women – by borrowing from subordinated masculinities whatever will maintain its dominance. This “dialectical pragmatism” reflects the flexibility of hegemonic masculinity to maximise its hegemonic success via continuous reconfiguration and negotiation with social conditions (Demetriou, 2001). Masculinities might be conceived as reciprocal, in that hegemonic masculinity incorporates non-normative masculinity practices in the same way that some non-hegemonic masculinities (including gay masculinities) emulate aspects of hegemonic masculinity (Coles, 2009; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Contrary to how it is sometimes interpreted, hegemonic masculinity does not describe one stable configuration of gender practice, but instead a variety that is flexible and “historically mobile” (Connell, 2005, p. 77). It is therefore feasible that the hybridisation and apparent inclusivity of “new” heteromasculinities are merely strategies utilised by heterosexual men to “repackage” hegemonic masculinity into new, equally oppressive versions – it is appropriate to discuss the emergence of new hegemonic masculinities (Arxer, 2011; de Boise, 2015; Hall, Gough & Seymour-Smith, 2012). In some contexts, ostensibly contesting the principles of hegemonic masculinity

may represent the ideal way of “doing manhood”: Men may acquire hegemony by denigrating those who conform to it, positioning them as immature, unsophisticated, and unable to resist social pressure (de Visser & Smith, 2007; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Therefore, the apparent recent subversion of hegemonic masculinity via the appropriation of femininity and gay aesthetics by heterosexual men does not preclude their heterosexuality from continuing to afford them social hegemony (Messner, 2007).

### **1-C: Constructing a masculine identity**

#### ***1-C-1: Masculine identity and behavioural practices***

Masculinity is not an essence of maleness, but rather something “done” in social action (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Men “do” masculinity in response to internalised scripts of masculinity, such as hegemonic masculinity, which delineate expectations of how manhood should look (Kimmel & Messner, 1989; Pleck, 1995). It is argued that these masculinity scripts are transmitted via social discourses, and that masculine identity construction occurs as a result of reflexive positioning (the positioning of the self) and interactive positioning (being positioned by others) in relation to these discourses (van Dijk, 2006; Davies & Harré 1990). Men who align themselves with hegemonic masculinity – or “(hetero)normative masculinity”, given that they might not consciously recognise its hegemony nor know it by these terms – must utilise certain behaviours and physical attributes in order to support the construction of a corresponding masculine identity.

Hegemonic masculinity is positioned in opposition to its alternatives: what does not constitute hegemonic masculinity must instead be non-masculine or feminine (Connell, 2005). Therefore, masculine identity is shaped by the extent to which an individual man is competent in the behaviours that are associated with hegemonic masculinity. Masculine identity formation has attracted research attention because many

of the behaviours associated with hegemonic masculinity are potentially unhealthy (Courtney, 2000; Levant & Wimer, 2014). They include: heavy alcohol consumption (Day, Gough & McFadden, 2007; Dempster, 2011; de Visser & McDonnell, 2013; de Visser & Smith, 2007; Peralta, 2007); lack of help-seeking for physical and emotional problems (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Mahalik, Levi-Minzi & Walker, 2007; lack of concern for maintaining a healthy diet (Gough, 2007; Mahalik et al., 2007); and ostentatious risk-taking behaviour (Iacuone, 2005).

However, men may also be able to engage in non-hegemonic health-related masculine practices and yet maintain a viable masculine identity. For example, seeking help for a physical health problem – particularly one related to sexual health – can be framed in terms of preserving masculinity by maintaining physical strength and sexual virility (O'Brien, Hunt & Hart, 2005). Similarly, limiting the use of alcohol or abstaining from alcohol does not preclude a man from presenting as hegemonically masculine and experiencing a strong masculine identity, if it is conceived in terms of exercising independence, resisting social pressure, making rational decisions and maintaining public decency (de Visser & Smith, 2006; Mullen, Watson, Swift & Black, 2007). Excessive health-damaging behaviour, and not caring about the consequences, can be perceived as signs of irresponsibility and a loss of control – which do not support hegemonic masculinity (Robertson, 2006). Consequently, it is not necessarily particular behaviours *per se* that enable men to embody hegemonic masculinity, rather the strategies some men use to make sense of these behaviours, which contribute to a masculine identity that reproduces hegemonic dominance (Wetherell & Edley, 1999).

A minority of behaviours associated with the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity can be health-promoting, including competence at (masculine) sports (de Visser, Smith, & McDonnell, 2009) and exercising for muscularity within healthy limits

(Gattario et al., 2015). Connell (2005) refers to “body-reflexive practice” to describe how men’s beliefs about masculinity determine how they use their bodies, and in turn, how their bodies’ achievements influence perceptions of masculinity, including their own. Social expectations of masculinity can determine how men use their bodies (e.g., to engage in violence), and the body’s “success” at achieving the desired outcome (e.g., being victorious in a fight) can have personal and social effects (e.g., an experience of social dominance).

Historically, physical strength was a marketable, economic asset because it demonstrated a man’s ability to participate effectively in industrial labour (Donaldson, 1991). Muscularity may still be a symbol of masculinity owing to its associations with masculine occupations, such as construction, and with participation (and success) in sport (Connell, 2005). Men are “trained” in hegemonic masculinity by way of “muscular athleticism” from an early age: Through participation in masculine sports like rugby at school, where aggression is sanctioned and physical strength and power revered, boys learn how to use their bodies to achieve hegemonic dominance (Light & Kirk, 2000; Swain, 2006b).

However, it has been argued that in a contemporary consumer culture where fewer traditional occupational roles for men exist, men’s bodies are less valued in terms of what they can do, and more valued in terms of how they look (Gill, Henwood & McLean, 2005; Shilling, 2012). In recent decades, the male body has grown in commercial value (Pope, Olivardia, Borowiecki & Cohane, 2001). Media targeted at both heterosexual male and female audiences have become saturated with eroticised images of semi-clothed, lean and muscular men (Hall & Gough, 2011; Gill et al., 2005). These images might appear to be promoting metrosexual (and therefore hybrid) masculinities, but the messages accompanying them express a particular hegemonic

masculinity ideal: The secret to success is a lean and muscular physique (Ricciardelli, Clow & White, 2010). Given the ubiquity of these images, it may be unsurprising that many men – both gay and heterosexual – report a desire to be more muscular (Tiggeman, Martins & Kirkbride, 2007).

Masculine subjectivity – men’s experiences of feeling and being masculine – is not restricted to the hegemonic form. Men who position themselves / are positioned in alternative, non-heteronormative masculinity discourses and who therefore reject traditional masculinity ideology are also active in constructing their identities, employing different patterns of behaviour. Such men can still experience masculine subjectivity, despite not recognising in themselves the machismo, stoicism, competitiveness etc. that characterise the men they understand to be “manly”, and acknowledging the co-existence of feminine qualities as part of their masculine identities (de Visser, 2009). These non-hegemonic masculinities are not hybridised in the sense that Demetriou (2001) uses the concept, because they do not necessarily involve the self-conscious appropriation of elements of subordinated masculinities. Rather, they exist as alternatives to hegemonic masculinity and thus highlight the heterodoxy of heteromasculinities (Beasley, 2015).

However, even men who do not identify with or aspire to hegemonic masculinity may at times experience social pressure to behave in more traditionally masculine ways (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013). Masculinities vary depending on the gender relations in a given social setting, therefore the way that they are expressed is highly contingent on social context (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Expressions of hegemonic forms of masculinity might be stifled in contexts where traditional masculinity is less valued, and alternative, more egalitarian, pro-feminist masculinities are more revered. Conversely, more egalitarian, pro-feminist and anti-homophobic

sentiments may be suppressed in contexts where traditional masculinity is celebrated. Men who align with hegemonic masculinity may feel obliged to “bite their tongues” in order to accede to the demands of the gender dynamics in certain environments – such as liberal university campuses – just as men who reject hegemonic masculinity may feel obliged to engage in traditionally masculine discourses in others, such as in a pub, in the company male friends (Gough, 2001; Gough & Edwards, 1998; Knight et al., 2012).

Homosocial relationships between heterosexual men are fertile ground for the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity, and the suppression of its alternatives (Bird, 1996; Gough & Edwards, 1998). Hegemonic masculinity depends on heterosexuality for the reproduction of patriarchy, and is therefore closely policed between heterosexual men (Connell, 2005). Ostentatious bragging about sex and the sexual objectification of women play an important role in maintaining hegemonic masculinity between heterosexual men, as does the explicit denigration of male homosexuality (Bird, 1996; Gough & Edwards, 1998). According to Connell (1992, p. 736), for many “homosexuality is a *negation* of masculinity, and homosexual men must be effeminate”. As a consequence, not only are gay men typically stereotyped as effeminate, but heterosexual men (or men whose sexual orientation is unknown) who lack competence in a masculine domain such as sport, display feminine or “gay” behaviours, or excel in traditionally feminine domains, risk being subjugated in the masculinity hierarchy by accusations of homosexuality (Conroy & de Visser, 2013; Emslie, Hunt & Lyons, 2013; Gill et al., 2005; Harding, 2007; Swain, 2006b). When a known heterosexual man affronts hegemonic masculine norms by, for example, abstaining from alcohol, homophobic abuse may be administered strategically in order to maintain the masculine integrity of the group (Conroy and de Visser, 2013; de Visser & Smith, 2007).



### ***1-C-2: Masculinity as symbolic capital***

The meaning of certain behaviours and attributes can vary depending on the social context – or “field” (Bourdieu, 1977) – where they are produced. The heterosexual male friendship provides an example of a field where men who respond appropriately to hegemonic scripts of masculinity by, for example, regarding women as sexual objects and denigrating gay men, are afforded prestige (Gough & Edwards, 1998). Thus, behaviours associated with hegemonic masculinity can be a source of “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu, 1984; 1986), providing power and authority to the men who display them. It is within fields that the individual’s “habitus” is expressed and reproduced. Habitus refers to the dispositions of an individual that result from socialisation and the internalisation of cultural norms, which guide thought, feeling and action (Bourdieu, 1984). In terms of masculine identity, habitus can be conceived in terms of the subjective embodiment of masculinity discourses (de Visser et al., 2009). The status of a man in a given social arena is a consequence of an interplay between the implicit norms of the context, the man’s habitus, and the combination of behaviours he displays which may afford symbolic masculine capital (Bourdieu, 1984). The symbolic capital afforded by different behaviours and attributes is therefore dependent on who displays them and where. For example, explicit homophobia would not be a source of symbolic masculine capital in a middle-class, white-collar work environment, but may afford masculine power in traditionally working class, male-dominated workplaces such as construction sites (Iacuone, 2005).

Masculinity can be conceived as a form of symbolic capital that be accumulated, lost, and traded (de Visser et al., 2009). The concept of “masculine capital” can be employed to explain how men can maintain a masculine identity when hegemonic masculinity is so unattainable (Connell, 2005), and in light of the emergence of

hybridised masculinities, such as that embodied by the “New Man” (Messner, 1993), which incorporate feminine or “gay” behaviours (Demetriou, 2001). When men consciously subvert, or lack competence / willingness to engage in a traditionally masculine behaviour, this may be mitigated via competence in alternative masculine domains. Masculine capital helps to explain how men who are reified symbols of hegemonic masculinity may be unable to enact many of the behaviours associated with it. For example, the renowned success in the domain of sport enjoyed by Connell’s (1990) Iron Man may provide sufficient masculine capital to overcome his lack engagement in other masculine behaviours, hence his hegemonic masculine status.

Different behaviours and attributes are not equal in terms of how much they contribute to masculine capital (de Visser et al., 2009). Evidence suggests that sporting prowess may be a particularly important source of masculine capital for men who “fail” in other domains of masculinity (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013). For example, an aptitude for masculine sport such as rugby may mitigate the loss of masculinity associated with abstinence from alcohol (de Visser et al., 2009). However, whether male homosexuality can be as successfully surmounted is less clear. Although some research evidence suggests that proficiency at sport may afford sufficient masculine capital to overcome the femininity associated with male homosexuality (Anderson, 2002), findings are inconsistent: homosexuality and masculinity cannot always be reconciled (de Visser et al., 2009).

### ***1-C-3: The construction of gay masculine identities***

Despite their exclusion from hegemonic masculinity, many gay men may nevertheless construct their identities, and adjust their behaviours, with reference to its mandates. Against a cultural backdrop where they are often stereotyped as effeminate, gay men may experience greater social pressure than heterosexual men to make claims

on manhood and “prove” their masculinity, by engaging in traditionally masculine behaviours (Drummond, 2005b; Eguchi, 2009; Sánchez, Greenberg, Liu & Vilain, 2009). Scripts of hegemonic masculinity are reproduced (and policed) within many domains of gay culture, including: in gay pornography, which often features muscular men, adorned with tattoos and endowed with large penises (Burke, 2016; Morrison, 2004); in niche gay online communities, for example, for men who are interested in bareback (condomless) intercourse (Dowsett, Williams, Ventuneac & Carballo-Diéguéz, 2008); in gay online (or smartphone app) dating, where some gay men appeal for “straight-acting” partners (Payne, 2007); on the gay scene, where muscular men may achieve a higher social status (Ridge, Plummer & Peasley, 2006); in scripts of anal intercourse, where being the receptive partner can be stigmatised for being feminine (Taywaditep, 2001: *see section I-C-3*); and within certain gay subcultures, such as gay skinheads (Borgeson & Valerie, 2015).

Quantitative studies have revealed that gay men’s degree of endorsement and/or embodiment of traditional masculinity ideology (and therefore, the mandates of hegemonic masculinity) is associated with a range of outcomes related to their health and well-being. These include negative attitudes towards being gay (Sánchez & Vilain, 2012); body dissatisfaction (Brown & Graham, 2008); engagement in condomless anal intercourse (Brennan et al., 2015); use of tobacco, illicit drugs, and alcohol (Hamilton & Mahalik, 2009); and positioning choices in anal intercourse (more masculine gay men are more likely to be anally-insertive: Moskowitz & Hart, 2011). Hegemonic masculine socialisation begins from an early age for all men (e.g., Light & Kirk, 2000). It is therefore important to address how exposure to a hegemonic masculinity discourse may be related to the formation of young gay men’s masculine and gay identities.

### 1-C-3-1: Young gay men and the formation of gay identities

Boys and young men are not merely passive victims of the masculinity discourses they are exposed to; rather they have agency to actively construct their masculine identities, and therefore the power to challenge and resist these discourses (Courtney, 2000). However, resisting may carry negative consequences: Those who do may face the homophobic harassment that polices the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity. For example, boys who are not athletic may be labelled “gay” or “wimps” by other boys (Swain, 2006b). School has been identified as important field where masculine identities are constructed, and where gay identities may be suppressed. Young gay men may attempt to act as though they were heterosexual at school, and/or feign interest in masculine pursuits, like football (Barron & Bradford, 2007).

Homophobic discourse is used by schoolboys to regulate masculinity long before a sexualised adult identity is formed (Plummer, 2001). Therefore, boys who will in the future be gay men may be exposed to negative messages about homosexuality years prior to the formation of a gay identity. When they arise later, homoerotic desires may be difficult reconcile with the internalisation of the norm of heterosexuality, and with historical exposure to homophobic sentiment (Meyer, 1995). Internalised homonegativity, consequent of children’s early introduction to homophobia and messages propagating the desirability of heterosexuality, might explain the latency between the age that to-be-gay boys become aware of their same-sex attraction, and the age at which they disclose their homosexuality to others – a milestone in gay identity formation (Dunlap, 2016). Young gay men in the UK must construct their masculine and gay identities in contexts where homosexuality is often derided and heteronormativity is at least passively celebrated.

Despite the abolishment of the law that prevented the “promotion of homosexuality<sup>1</sup>” in UK schools (Local Government Act, 1986) institutional heteronormativity remains endemic in educational establishments, and gay identities continue to lack visibility in these environments (DePalma & Jennett, 2010; Sauntson & Simpson, 2011). A recent survey of the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people in the UK found that over half of school-aged boys reported homophobic / biphobic / transphobic bullying; fewer than a third of LGBT young people reported that educators intervened during such incidents; and forty percent claimed to have never been taught about LGBT issues at school (Bradlow, Bartram, Guasp & Jadvá, 2017). Family environments may not offer a safe refuge for gay people to develop their identities – they may be hostile towards homosexuality (Nordqvist & Smart, 2014), and/or family members may not have the knowledge or experience of alternative sexualities to support young people who are beginning to identify as gay (Valentine & Skelton, 2003).

If school and family environments inhibit gay identity formation, then young gay people may be inclined to seek out spaces where their fledgling identities have more freedom to develop. The gay scene has been identified as such a space (Valentine & Skelton, 2003). Gay social spaces, such as gay bars and clubs, may provide young gay men with a “refuge from heterosexism” (Adams, Braun & McCreanor, 2014, p. 424), an opportunity to be seen rather than to hide, and a chance to experience themselves as authentic members of the gay community (Barron & Bradford, 2007; Clarke & Smith, 2014). Upon entering the gay scene for the first time, young gay men discover a “whole new world”, where gay identities are celebrated rather than being subordinated, and

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<sup>1</sup> What constituted the “promotion of homosexuality” by educators in practice was not defined within the Act. However, it was stated that educators should not promote the “acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship” (Local Government Act, 1986, s 28(1)(2A))

young gay men feel freer to explore and express who they are (Ridge et al., 2006, p. 504).

However, involvement with the gay scene does not have exclusively positive implications for young gay men. It has been suggested that gay spaces establish and police a “normative gay identity”, which if not successfully embodied, can isolate young gay men in the very spaces that might otherwise offer a refuge from the isolation they experience outside (Barron & Bradford, 2007). Through patronage of these spaces, gay men learn normative expectations of how to look, how to act, what interests to have, what body to have, and how to be attractive (Barron & Bradford, 2007). These normative expectations prescribe femininity – particularly a feminised appearance (i.e., a slim body; tightly-fitted, brightly coloured clothes; and well-styled hair) – as the vehicle through which young gay men can secure and maintain an identity accepted within the gay scene (Barron & Bradford, 2007; Clarke & Smith, 2014). As a consequence, young gay men may find themselves attempting to strike an uneasy balance between displays of a heterosexual-looking masculinity when they are off the gay scene (especially at school), and an equally oppressive *femininity* when they are out in gay spaces. Further, frequenting the gay scene might suppress the formation of alternative gay identities, away from the scene, and lead to a loss of individuality – gay men face the danger of becoming “scene queens”, and identified as “too gay” if they patronise gay spaces too often (Clarke & Smith, 2014; Ridge et al., 2006; Valentine & Skelton, 2003).

It is claimed by some that the declining importance of homophobia to the masculinities of heterosexual adolescent boys is changing how masculinity and heterosexuality are defined, and therefore how male homosexual identity is experienced (McCormack, 2012). In the “post-gay era” – wherein millennial gay men (those born

after 1980) were socialised – homosexuality has become disentangled from political struggle, and sexual orientation is one of many, rather than *the* defining aspect of gay men’s identities (Ghaziani, 2011). Contemporary young gay men may find that their homosexuality is celebrated by heterosexual peers rather than denigrated, and that they can enjoy promoted positions in their peer groups, because gay identities carry social prestige (Morris, 2017). As a result, some young gay men may be more comfortable with overtly eschewing masculinity they deem as normative and embracing feminine behaviours into their repertoire of gender expression, including in mixed sexual orientation (i.e., non-scene) contexts (Morris, 2017; Wilson et al., 2010).

#### 1-C-3-2: Gay men and femininity

In constructing a masculine identity, gay men may start from a disadvantaged position because they are often stereotyped as effeminate (Blashill & Powlishta, 2009). The stereotyping of gay men is based on the assumption that they express the traits, behaviours and interests that are commonly ascribed to heterosexual women, and are therefore deemed to be feminine (Kite & Deaux, 1987; Madon, 1997). The “exotic to erotic” theory of homosexuality proposes that inherited childhood temperamental attributes (e.g., aggression; activity levels) influence the development of “gender nonconforming” qualities, which act as antecedents for gay sexual orientation in later life (Bem, 1996). It is argued that children who express more gender nonconforming behaviours and interests experience themselves as different to peers of the same sex. As a consequence of their unfamiliarity, or “exoticness”, same-sex individuals are the source of heightened autonomic arousal and thus become eroticised as children develop. Consequently, the theory proposes that childhood gender nonconformity is predictive of adult homosexuality.

The notion that gender nonconformity may have biological roots is supported by evidence of significant heritability for gender nonconformity (Bailey, Martin & Dunne, 2009). Additionally, it has been found via self-report and correlational studies that gay adult men are more likely than straight adult men to have displayed gender nonconforming attributes in childhood (Bailey and Zucker, 1995; Rieger, Linsenmeier, Gygax, & Bailey, 2008). However, the exotic to erotic theory fails to problematise the association between being male / female and particular gender roles: If masculinity and femininity are contestable and labile social constructs, then the idea that biological determinants can influence “normative” masculine and feminine behaviours is discredited (Levant, 1996). Neither does the theory account for the agency of the individual – some young people may actively choose to challenge gender normative expectations of them, in which case “gender nonconformity” becomes “an act of social and political resistance” (Gottschalk, 2003, p. 46)

One of the strongest components of the gay effeminacy stereotype is a “gay-sounding”, or feminine voice (Madon, 1997). Research into the properties of gay-sounding voices began with the work of Gaudio (1994), who found that participants were able to correctly identify the sexual orientation of target speakers at a level better than chance. It was also noted that heterosexual-sounding voices were categorised as more masculine, and gay-sounding voices as more feminine. More recent studies have also found that people use vocal quality to determine men’s sexual orientation. Men’s voices are more likely to be categorised as gay-sounding if they are characterised by hyperarticulated /s/ sounds, similar to those produced by women (Mack & Munson, 2012). Further, men’s voices which have a higher pitch are more likely to be categorised as gay (Podesva, 2007; Valentova & Havlíček, 2013)



However, it has been suggested that people can use certain vocal qualities for strategic purposes. When voices adopt a higher pitch – or a higher “fundamental frequency” (“f0”) – they sound more expressive and flamboyant (Podesva, 2007). Therefore, rather than being characteristic of an individual’s voice, high f0 can be used tactically to serve certain functions in discourse, including: to express surprise; to engage an audience, especially during story-telling; and to give emphasis when making evaluative comments (Podesva, 2007). Expressiveness in the male voice does not accord with hegemonic masculinity, which holds that male power is supported by rationality and emotional control (Connell, 2005). Therefore, sporadic, tactical use of a higher f0 may be constitutive of a gay identity – it may enable gay men to play on the stereotype of effeminacy and construct a “diva persona” in contexts where embodying such a persona may yield social benefits, such as within gay peer groups (Podesva, 2007, p. 491).

Consequently, rather than being conceived as something inherent in gay men, effeminacy – like masculinity – can be interpreted as performative, in that it can be used to serve certain social functions. Strategic deployment of femininity may be a source of symbolic capital. For example, young gay men may utilise feminine (or “camp”) behaviours in order to secure their membership, and make friends, within the gay scene (Barron & Bradford, 2007; Clarke & Smith, 2014). Femininity may afford gay men capital in the professional world (for example, for gay men working as hairdressers with principally female clientele: Huppertz & Goodwin, 2013), and when used as a means to entertain others in certain social arenas (Skelton, 2000). By using femininity in this way, gay men may “re-appropriate” the stereotypically gay qualities that might otherwise be used to ridicule them, and transform these qualities into something positive, and which may afford social or even economic benefits (Skelton, 2000).

Whereas some gay men are comfortable with combining femininity with masculinity – framing the display of femininity as an overt declaration of their homosexuality – others consciously eliminate femininity from their behavioural repertoire, on the understanding that doing so will help them to avoid homophobic hostility and facilitate bonding with other men (Wilson et al., 2010). Some gay men deploy a discourse of “straight-acting” in their self-presentation, a strategy that may be intended to overcome stereotypical perceptions of gay effeminacy via conformity to (heterosexual) hegemonic masculinity standards (Clarkson, 2006; Eguchi, 2009). Hegemonic masculine self-presentation – for example, descriptions of physical fitness – and appeals for masculine male partners are frequently observed in gay online / smartphone app dating profiles, particularly those posted by gay men who perceive themselves as masculine (Miller, 2015). As Woo (2015, p. 63) noted in his analysis of gay men’s profiles on the GPS-based, “hook-up” app Grindr, “The most prized men are youthful-looking, white, and thin, lean, or muscular. They proclaim themselves ‘masc’ or masculine-acting and prove it by wearing baseball caps.”

It is not only that masculinity holds a privileged status in the gay community, but also that male effeminacy is often vehemently opposed (Clarkson, 2006; Eguchi, 2009; Sánchez, Blas-Lopez, Martínez-Patiño & Vilain, 2015; Taywaditep, 2001). Anti-effeminacy – which can be referred to as “sissyphobia” or “femmephobia” – is a lynchpin of hegemonic masculinity, and is rife within some domains of the gay community (Connell, 2005; Taywaditep, 2001). It has been found that gay men’s anti-effeminacy is related to greater masculine consciousness (i.e., greater salience of masculinity to identity, and increased preoccupation with being perceived as masculine) and with negative attitudes towards homosexuality (i.e., internalised homonegativity: Sánchez et al., 2012). The use of a “straight-acting” discourse by some gay men may

not only be related to their desire to promote their own hegemonic masculine style, but also to marginalise gay men who violate masculine expectations perceived as normative (Eguchi, 2009). The marginalisation of effeminate gay men by other gay men may reflect the internalisation of a hegemonic masculinity mandate that prescribes homophobia and the subordination of the feminine in order to retain male power (Taywaditep, 2001). Further, the ubiquity and overtness of some gay men's anti-effeminacy suggests that such negative attitudes are normative and even desirable (Taywaditep, 2001).

From the perspectives of some gay men, there is a distinction to be made between “normal gays”, whose “gayness” is defined solely by their desire for sexual relationships with other men, and “radical gays”, for whom being gay is a strong social and political identity, or “master status” (Adams et al., 2014; Clarke & Smith, 2014). These typologies may be similarly framed as “good gays” – describing those who conform to normative masculine ideals to the extent that they might pass as heterosexual – and “bad gays”, those who attempt to disrupt established gender categories by asserting their homosexuality in political and cultural spheres (Epstein, Johnson & Steinberg, 2000; Taulke-Johnson, 2008). Brekhus (2003) offered the distinction between gay “identity peacocks”, for whom gayness is a master status; “identity chameleons”, whose gayness is only performed in gay spaces; and “identity centaurs”, who do not enact gayness and are therefore fully integrated into a heteronormative society.

Compared to those who are more traditionally masculine, effeminate gay men are viewed less favourably by heterosexual men (Cohen, Hall & Tuttle, 2015). A heterosexual-looking gay masculinity may be more acceptable to heterosexual *and gay men* because it conceals homosexuality. It is proposed that some gay men may have

internalised a heteronormative value of tolerance of male homosexuality, bestowed on the condition that gayness is not performed too ostentatiously (Eguchi, 2009). If it is effeminacy rather than homosexuality *per se* which is derided by heterosexual and gay men alike, then it may not be surprising that many gay men are motivated to distance themselves from effeminacy, and to attempt to construct masculine identities with reference to hegemonic masculinity. A highly visible symbol of hegemonic masculinity is the muscular body – and muscularity is argued to play an important role in the construction of some gay masculinities (e.g., Drummond, 2005b).

#### 1-C-3-3: Masculine identity and gay men's bodies

Connell (2005, p.45) opined that “true masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies.” Therefore, much of the extant literature regarding gay men's response to hegemonic masculinity is focused on the gay male body. The ideal gay masculinity, as expressed by the body, is defined as lean, hairless and muscular, reminiscent of the heterosexual, “metromasculinities” often portrayed in contemporary media (Drummond, 2005b; Duncan, 2007; Duncan, 2010). Both heterosexual and gay men tend to desire to be thinner and more muscular (Calzo, Corliss, Blood, Field & Austin, 2013; Tiggeman et al., 2007). However, body dissatisfaction is greater among gay men than heterosexual men (Calzo et al., 2013; Martins, Tiggeman & Kirkbride, 2007). This might be explained in terms of the preoccupation with image and appearance, particularly muscularity, which pervades the gay scene (Drummond, 2010; Filiault & Drummond, 2008; Ridge et al., 2006). Further, gay men may reflect more than heterosexual men on the state of their bodies, because they have experience of “continual masculine introspection” – a history of monitoring how their masculinity is perceived by others (Drummond, 2005b, p.277).

It has been argued that muscularity is important to many gay men because it affords them social status in both gay and heterosexual contexts, which can compensate for the loss of status associated with homosexuality (Duncan, 2007). It is suggested therefore that muscularity may be a source of compensatory masculine capital. Following the collision of gay and heterosexual masculinities in recent years, as represented by the arrival of the metrosexual man, hairless, lean and muscular bodies may afford gay men masculinities that reflect “new” embodiments of heterosexuality (Demetriou, 2001; Simpson, 2002). Muscular and therefore masculine bodies are “straight acting” (Filiault & Drummond, 2008), and can be used by gay men to accord with the heteronormative ideal of what all men should look like (Duncan, 2007). Consequently, muscularity can position gay men away from the gendered assumptions about homosexuality (i.e., that gay men are uniquely effeminate) and support the presentation of a more socially desirable masculinity (Duncan, 2007).

In terms of hegemonic masculinity, muscles are symbolic of power and dominance, reflecting a capacity for physical violence and the propensity to win in competition with other men (Connell, 2005). Like all men in Western societies, gay men are socialised to recognise the muscular male physique as the hegemonic masculine ideal, hence many gay men’s sexual attraction to muscular men (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). However, it has been argued that for gay men, muscularity is unrelated to the need to dominate using physical force. Muscularity may influence interactions between gay men because it is related to status and notoriety on the gay scene, and to attracting sexual partners (Drummond, 2005b; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011; Ridge et al., 2006; Sanchez et al., 2009). The appeal of exercising for muscularity may therefore be related to the acquisition of erotic, rather than masculine, capital. Although the meanings of muscularity for gay men may differ to those for heterosexual

men (at least in some social arenas, where muscularity may relate more to status than masculinity *per se*), the end result is the same – muscularity plays a role in achieving hegemony (Duncan, 2007).

However, to conclude that only muscularity can afford gay men social power in contexts populated by other gay men would be inaccurate. Research findings suggest that for younger gay men, it is thinness rather than muscularity that is valued on the gay scene (Barron & Bradford, 2007). When young gay men are inducted into the gay scene, they may feel obliged (or have a desire) to adopt a more feminised, “twink” identity, characterised by leanness without muscularity, boyish attractiveness, hairlessness and feminine attire (Barron & Bradford, 2007; Duncan, 2007; Duncan, 2010; Clarke & Smith, 2014). Young gay men who identify, or are categorised by others, as twinkies may possess greater erotic capital (because they are considered more sexually desirable) than their contemporaries who do not embody idealised young-looking, slender and hairless physiques, and acquire a higher status on the gay scene (Clarke & Smith, 2014; Green, 2011).

The value attached to gay male bodies can vary depending on the “tribal” affiliation of the man displaying the body, and that of the scene wherein that body is located. Tribal membership is principally contingent on appearance. Tribes include, among others:

- Twinks: Younger gay men with slender and hairless bodies (Lyons & Hosking, 2014)
- Jocks: Younger gay men who are athletic, lean and muscular (Maki, 2017)
- Bears (and bear-chasers): Older gay men who have large / overweight (but not muscular) physiques, hirsute bodies, and facial hair (and their admirers: Moskowitz, Turrubiates, Lozano & Hajek, 2013)

- Cubs: Younger versions of bears (Lyons & Hosking, 2014)
- Otters: Gay men who are hairy and slim (Maki, 2017)
- Wolves: Gay men who are hairy and muscular (Maki, 2017)

The body as a gendered entity is central to tribal affiliation. For example, bears may claim to embody a more “natural” gay masculinity than the normative and idealised gay masculinity, and to express greater comfort with the inevitable consequences of ageing on the male body (Monaghan, 2005). Gay men may move between tribes (for example, from twink to bear) as their bodies change with age – an example of a body-reflexive practice, where the body’s age-related characteristics (e.g., development of more body hair) and its limitations (e.g., proneness to weight gain) influence subjective experiences of masculinity, and the development of social identities (Connell, 2005; Green, 2011).

With their large, hairy bodies and bearded faces, as well as their lack of preoccupation with weight-maintenance and grooming, bears epitomise hegemonic masculinity (in terms of appearance, sexual orientation notwithstanding), and yet may be excluded from the commercial gay scene because the favoured masculinity in those spaces has a more modern and metrosexual style (Duncan, 2010; Edmonds & Zieff, 2015; Manley, Levitt & Mosher., 2007). Status among gay men may therefore be acquired by displaying the “right masculinity” in the “right place” – the value of different characteristics in terms of the symbolic capital they afford is contingent on the field where they are produced (Bourdieu, 1984). Gay men who are less masculine in terms of appearance (e.g., twinks) may have more *erotic* capital in the mainstream commercial gay scene, but may be subjugated on the “bear scene” – bears can be wary

of gay men who *do* have the viable option of mainstream scene membership (Edmonds & Zieff, 2015).

#### 1-C-3-4: Masculinity and anal intercourse

As well as physical disparities between gay men of different tribal affiliation, differences have been identified in their sexual positioning behaviour in anal intercourse. Twinks are more likely than cubs (younger bears) to be anally-receptive (Lyons & Hosking, 2014), whereas cubs are more likely than twinks to identify as “tops”, gay men who are principally anally-insertive (Lyons & Hosking, 2014). Top and bottom are used by gay men as sexual-self labels to convey to other men their preferred position in anal intercourse (Hart, Wolitski, Purcell, Gomez & Halkitis, 2003; Moskowitz, Rieger & Roloff, 2008; Wegesin & Meyer-Bahlberg, 2000). Men who wish to express their inclination to be either insertive or receptive often self-label as “versatile” (Hart et al., 2003; Wegesin & Meyer-Bahlberg, 2000), although a versatile self-label does not necessarily indicate an equal proclivity to adopt one position or the other (Lyons, Pitts & Grierson, 2013).

Sexual self-labels are used by gay men to engage in discourses of gender and power in their sexual relationships (Carballo-Diéguez et al., 2004; Hoppe, 2011; Kippax & Smith, 2001). Whereas bottoms are often described as passive and effeminate, tops are typically ascribed attributes associated with hegemonic masculinity, such as power, dominance and physical strength (Johns, Pingel, Eisenberg, Santana & Bauermeister, 2012; Kippax & Smith, 2001; Wilson et al., 2010). Men whose physical characteristics are perceived as less masculine are more likely to be perceived as bottoms than tops (Brennan, 2016; Tskhay & Rule, 2013). Self-labelling may be related to gay men’s masculine capital, and contribute to the construction of a gendered identity. Tops may experience themselves as more masculine than bottoms: They score higher on measures



of social dominance, and some report feeling that their masculinity is reinforced when they engage in insertive anal intercourse, whereas some bottoms claim to feel more submissive and vulnerable (Gil, 2007; Kippax & Smith, 2001; Moskowitz & Hart, 2011; Tan, Pratto, Operario & Dworkin, 2013; Zheng, Hart & Zheng, 2012). Therefore, gay men may interpret their experiences of anal intercourse in terms of the gendered sexual-scripts they have at their disposal.

Discourses of gender and power in sexual positioning may influence gay men's adoption of a particular sexual self-label. Compared with tops, bottoms are more likely to have displayed more femininity in childhood (Weinrich et al., 1992). They are also more likely than tops to show a preference for a masculine sexual partner (Zheng & Zheng, 2016), in particular one who is strong and controlling – in other words, one who “mimics the stereotypical, hegemonic male” (Moskowitz & Roloff, 2017, p. 283). Tops report having larger penises than do bottoms (Grov, Parsons, & Bimbi, 2010; Moskowitz & Hart, 2011), which may reflect the belief that large penises are a symbol of masculinity (Drummond & Filiault, 2007). Further, the relationship between sexual positioning behaviour and gender has been shown to intersect with race. For example, black gay men – who are perceived as more masculine than white and Asian men – are more likely to report a preference for the top position, and to engage in more insertive anal intercourse (Grov, Rendina, Ventuneac & Parsons, 2016; Lick & Johnson, 2015).

Versatility in anal intercourse may provide gay men with opportunities to avoid the gender stereotypes associated with self-labelling as top or bottom, to be positioned outside of the gender and power discourses, and to present an expression of gender that balances masculinity with femininity (Johns et al., 2012; Pachankis, Battenweiser, Bernstein & Bayles, 2013; Wilson et al., 2010). For couples in longer-term relationships, versatility may reflect a desire for sexual reciprocity and power-sharing

(Carballo-Diéguez et al., 2004). However, in short-term “hook-up” arrangements, position decision-making among versatile men has been shown to be heavily influenced by gendered sexual scripts. The sexual partner deemed to be comparatively more masculine – i.e., more macho, more aggressive, more muscular, and endowed with a larger penis – is more likely to be the insertive partner in a casual sexual encounter (Carballo-Diéguez et al., 2004; Johns et al., 2012; Moskowitz & Hart, 2011).

Although they often direct sexual behaviour, the gender role stereotypes associated with sexual self-labels and sexual positions are contested by some gay men. It has been identified that bottom men do not necessarily position themselves as passive receptors of anal pleasure; rather they can acquire masculinity by controlling the top’s pleasure and determining the degree of power he is afforded (Hoppe, 2011; Kiguwa, 2015; Kippax & Smith, 2001). It has also been identified that receptive gay men who bareback (i.e., who are receptive for a sexual partner who does not wear a condom) may frame their behaviour in strongly masculine terms: receiving semen directly into the anus is an act reserved for “real men” (Dowsett et al., 2008). This suggests that bottom men do not necessarily experience subordination at the hands of the top (who, by penetrating, embodies a masculinity reminiscent of hegemonic masculinity). Moreover, some gay men reject altogether the notion that sexual positioning in anal intercourse is gendered, maintaining that the gender role stereotypes associated with tops and bottoms reflect heteronormative constructions of relations in sexual intercourse that do not apply to gay men (Carballo-Diéguez et al., 2004).

Research findings suggest that sexual self-labels are fluid, and may change with age, in relation to gender stereotypes (e.g., orientation towards top to avoid a stereotype of femininity), or merely owing to increased experience of intercourse in the different positions (Moskowitz & Hart, 2017; Pachankis et al., 2013). Position preferences are

not necessarily guided by beliefs about gender or internalised gendered sexual scripts. For example, men with smaller penises may self-label as bottom to avoid the sexual anxieties associated with penetrating, or because they associate the receptive position with sexual pleasure (Moskowitz & Roloff, 2017). “Top” and “bottom” should not be conceptualised as monolithic categories, because the motivations for self-labelling in a particular way, the reasons for preferring a particular position, and the psychological and behavioural practices that accompany a particular self-label are likely to be varied (Moskowitz & Roloff, 2017).

Sexual self-label is the most frequently cited partner preference in profiles on the gay hook up app Grindr, and the second most referenced aspect of self-description after body / fitness (Miller, 2015). This suggests that sexual self-labels, and preferences for partners with a given self-label, are highly salient aspects of gay men’s sexual identities.

### **1-D: Dissertation outline**

Literature on gay masculinities tends to be referential (for example, examining what the position of gay masculinities reveals about the state of masculinities in general), or focuses on the meanings to gay men of particular behaviours or attributes (for example, the male body), in relation to masculinity. A small amount of the research has been undertaken in the UK, but much of it has emanated from Australia and the USA. Therefore, the main aim of the programme of studies presented in this dissertation was to use masculinity theories and the concept of masculine capital to investigate and elucidate the state of gay masculinities in the UK, in the “post-gay era”.

The key research questions were:

1. How is “gay masculinity” constructed in discourse?
2. How does the concept of “masculine capital” apply to gay men?
3. To what extent are gay sexual self-labels perceived as gendered?

4. How do gay men's sexual self-labels contribute to their masculine capital?
5. How are interpretations and experiences of masculinity related to beliefs about, experiences of and behaviour in anal intercourse, and to sexual self-label identification?
6. How are gay men's interpretations of masculinity related to their experiences of being masculine and being gay?

The papers presented relate to three studies, two of them qualitative and one quantitative. The first paper (Study 1; Chapter 3) identifies gay and heterosexual participants' discursive constructions of masculinity and homosexuality, providing insight into discursive possibilities that gay men have for masculine identity, and identifying the components of masculinity that may be particularly salient for gay men. The second paper (Study 2; Chapter 4), informed in part by the findings from Study 1, presents a quantitative study which examines the gendered nature of gay sexual self-labels, and reveals which of sexual self-label, voice quality or muscularity contribute most to perceptions of gay men's masculinity. Three papers are presented relating to Study 3, which used an experiential qualitative approach to gain a greater understanding of gay men's masculine and sexual subjectivities. Chapter 5 examines how gay men's interpretations of masculinity and their masculine identities are associated with their beliefs about and experiences of sexual self-labelling and anal intercourse. Chapter 6 studies how gay men's positioning in relation to masculinity discourses is associated with their masculine subjectivities, and their behavioural practices. Chapter 7 presents a case study of one young gay man and the strategies he uses to negotiate a masculine identity, in the context of his positioning in relation to discourses of masculinity and homosexuality. Chapter 8 presents a discussion of how the key findings relate to

existing theory and other research, and of the implications of the findings for theory and practice.

## Chapter 2

### Methods

#### 2-A: Introduction

This chapter describes and justifies the selection of methods used for the three linked studies presented in this dissertation. As discussed in the previous chapter, the studies relate to two sets of literature concerning gay identities. One is concerned with how gay men construct and maintain masculine identities, including how different attributes and behaviours contribute to gay men's masculine capital. The other investigates sexual self-labelling in relation to gender role stereotypes and masculine identity. The programme of studies undertaken adopts both quantitative and qualitative approaches. In what follows, the method selected to address each set of research questions relating to each study is described and rationalised; alternatives are considered; research quality is discussed; and issues concerning the mixing of methodological paradigms are addressed.

#### 2-B: Study 1 – An exploratory study using Foucaultian Discourse Analysis

##### *2-B-1: Research questions*

The research questions addressed in Study 1 were:

- How is “gay masculinity” constructed by discourse?
- How does the concept of “masculine capital” apply to gay men?

##### *2-B-2: Introduction: The turn to discourse*

Around the mid-1980s, increased interest within social psychology was directed towards the performativity of language – how it has consequences for action and therefore experience – a period marking “the discursive turn” (Boatzis & Dragonas, 2014). Discourse analysis, introduced by Potter and Wetherell in 1987, emerged as a part of this turn to language, and was intended to challenge the cognitivism that

dominated the discipline (Willig, 2013). Discourse analysis is an umbrella term that encapsulates two main approaches to working with discourses: discursive psychology (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and Foucaultian Discourse Analysis (FDA). The key difference between discursive psychology and FDA is that whereas the former is focused on discursive practices (i.e., how language can be used to achieve objectives in specific interactions, such as disclaiming responsibility and managing stake), the latter is concerned with identifying discursive structures (i.e., the knowledge available in a given cultural context).

The following example, based on a similar example provided by Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006), illustrates the difference between the two approaches by examining how they might conceptualise the study of “masculinity”. A discursive psychology approach might examine how speakers construct masculinity and consider the rhetorical purposes these constructions might serve the speakers in specific social interactions – e.g., in “banter” between heterosexual men. A Foucaultian discourse analysis approach would view the various constructions of masculinity as constitutive “bodies of knowledge” (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 109) that are rooted in a particular cultural context. It would also consider the implications of these constructions for possibilities of experience – i.e., what men can think, feel and do about their masculinity: Willig, 2013

### ***2-B-3: Possible approaches to addressing research questions***

#### **2-B-3-1: Conversation analysis**

Discourse analysis was influenced strongly by conversation analysis, an approach that had emerged in the 1960s in response to the domination of quantitative approaches in the social sciences (Antaki, 2014). Conversation analysis is more concerned with the organisation of talk than its content, and (like discursive psychology) is oriented to examining how social actions are achieved through verbal

interaction. However, unlike discursive psychology, it does not involve speculation as to the motives of the speaker. Conversation analysis therefore asks what was said and how it was said; but it refrains from asking *why* it was said. Instead, its focus is on the normative structure of talk in interaction, from the minute detail of two utterances taken in turn, to the more extensive turn-taking that shapes a prolonged exchange (Antaki, 2014). The micro-level study of conversational nuances that characterise most domains of human interaction was not appropriate for addressing the research questions in Study 1. This is because Study 1 aimed to identify macro-level social discourses of masculinity and gay men that *precede* social interaction (Parker, 1992), rather than examples of social actions that are identifiable through the fine-grain analysis of the structure of speech.

#### 2-B-3-2: Discursive psychology

With its focus on the details of language use in relation to the outcomes expected or hoped for by the speakers, rather than on how discourses are related to experiential possibilities (Potter, 1998), discursive psychology could not address the research questions related to Study 1 as successfully as FDA. Unlike FDA, discursive psychology does not theorise experience: Whereas the former assumes that subject positions demarcate experiential possibilities, the latter sees “experience” as a discursive construction itself, used for rhetorical purposes (Willig, 2013). Therefore, discursive psychology would be better suited to addressing the question: “How do people use rhetorical strategies – including references to their experience – to construct masculinity in relation to gay men?”

However, despite their differences, Potter and Wetherell (1995) advise against distinguishing too sharply between discursive psychology and FDA. Although each has a different research emphasis, a discourse analysis study is likely to combine a focus on



discursive practices and discursive structures. For example, taking an FDA approach in Study 1 of this dissertation did not preclude the identification of rhetorical claims or examples of respondents managing stake and accountability.

### 2-B-3-3: Foucaultian Discourse Analysis (FDA)

A discourse can be defined as a “system of statements that construct an object” (Parker, 1992, p. 5): Discourses bring objects into being, reifying them as a particular version of something “real”. The purpose of FDA is to identify the discourses available in a given culture, at a particular point in history – the “discursive economy” – that people use to construct the objects of interest to the researcher. FDA is influenced by the post-structuralist belief that discourses define people and enable and constrict lived experience (Belsey, 2002; Willig, 2000). Therefore, an important concept associated with FDA is “subject positioning”: the idea that people situate themselves (reflexive positioning) and others (interactive positioning) in relation to discourses, and this positioning influences their “subjectivity” – what they are able to feel like – and their practices – what they are able to do (Davies & Harré, 1990; Willig, 2013).

Proponents of FDA opine that language does not reveal an objective external reality, nor a stable subjective “reality” of the speaker (Boyatzis & Dragonas, 2014). Language does not expose pre-existing cognitions, because people’s attitudes (as they manifest via talk) are shaped by the social context where the language is produced (Willig, 2013). Much research that takes an FDA approach is therefore oriented towards social constructionism, the belief that knowledge is not bound to perceptions of an objective reality, but rather that versions of reality are constructed between individuals and societies, and therefore knowledge is historically and culturally relative (Burr, 2003). Given that dominant social discourses change and transform over time, no version of the world can be said to represent the “truth” (Willig, 2013). However,

Parker (1992) argues that cultural conditions underlie certain *versions* of the truth, which are then constructed in discourse. Study 1 can be said to come from this “critical realist” position, because it is recognised that objects like “masculinity” are not constructed idiosyncratically, without being anchored to some extent in wider social and cultural structures (e.g., the family, school, workplace).

FDA is suitable for addressing research questions that are not oriented towards the experiential investigation of individuals, but rather the exploratory examination of available social discourses that have implications for “ways of being”. In other words, when the research focus is not on individual experience but the *possibilities* for experience delineated by discourse, then FDA is appropriate.

In Study 1, FDA allowed for the identification of different constructions of masculinity and of gay men in social discourses relating to gender and homosexuality. Therefore, it was possible to see how masculinity was reified by discourse; how gay men were positioned in relation to these discourses; and how this positioning had implications for gay men’s possibilities for masculine subjectivity.

Central to FDA is the assumption that discourses reproduce ideologies that legitimise existing power structures pervasive in institutions such as science, religion, the family, etc. (van Dijk, 2006; Willig, 2013). Hegemonic masculinity might be conceptualised as one such ideology: If discourses reproduce and privilege hegemonic masculinity, then they privilege it as a social reality that legitimises the subordination of women and gay men. FDA was chosen as the analytic approach in Study 1 because it provided an opportunity to consider how a hegemonic masculinity discourse might constrain the possibilities for gay men to be masculine.

#### ***2-B-4: Data collection: Group discussions***

Data for Study 1 were collected via group rather than individual interviews. This was in part owing to the study's focus on identifying social discourses rather than yielding experiential data: The interview questions were designed to prompt definitions of masculinity and gay men (which might be tied to individual experience), but they were not intended to elicit detailed autobiographical accounts.

Kitzinger (1994) outlined a number of benefits of using group interviews for data collection. In group interviews, participants provide an "audience" for each other, increasing the diversity of communication that may occur. This might include anecdotal stories, jokes, impressions, and if the participants are already known to each other, discussions about shared experiences and/or mutual friends and acquaintances. All of these are useful for identifying discursive constructions of the objects of concern. Researchers using group interviews for data collection can also identify where there is divergence in the participants' perspectives, thus drawing attention to alternative discourses that might not be accessed in individual interviews. Another advantage of using group interviews is that more outgoing group members may "break the ice", thus encouraging less forthcoming participants to contribute. This might be of particular benefit when the discussion topic is potentially socially sensitive. However, a potential drawback is that some group members may deliberately or inadvertently silence other group members. Furthermore, group interviews are useful for researching with minority groups, such as gay men, who may feel less inhibited in a group context compared to an individual interview, since there are others present to corroborate their (minority) perspective.

One criticism of the use of group interviews, especially when respondents are unknown to each other – as was true of some the groups in Study 1 – is that talk does

not occur naturally because the social context is contrived. However, it is argued that talk in naturally-occurring contexts is bound by the same constraints as it is in contexts arranged specifically for research, reducing concerns regarding threats to ecological validity (Hollander, 2004).

Some may argue that a problem inherent in the group interview method is that data are biased by conformity to group norms or social desirability, so that divergent perspectives are less likely to be voiced. However, this need only be considered problematic if it is assumed that individuals hold “real”, underlying beliefs that an interview is able to access. From the perspective of social constructionism – where FDA is situated – beliefs and opinions are produced as a consequence of interaction in the interview context. Therefore, issues of conformity and social desirability are *a part of* the data, rather than a threat to it (Hollander, 2004).

## **2-C: Study 2 – A cross-sectional quantitative survey**

### ***2-C-1: Introduction***

Prior research has shown that sexual self-labels are associated with gender role stereotypes (e.g., Carballo-Diéguez et al., 2004); that gay men are often stereotyped as having feminine-sounding voices (Madon, 1997; Valentova & Havlíček, 2013); and that gay men understand muscularity as a vehicle through which masculinity may be embodied (e.g., Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). However, it is also known from prior research that attributes/behaviours associated with masculinity are not weighted equally in the degree to which they afford masculinity to the men who display them (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013; de Visser et al., 2009).

Therefore, the main purpose of Study 2 was to discover which of sexual self-label, voice quality or physique were most strongly associated with perceptions of gay men’s masculinity – in other words, which may make a greater contribution to gay

men's masculine capital. The masculinity (relative to femininity) of gay sexual self-labels were also measured. Tribal affiliation (bear, twink, etc.) was not included as a variable in Study 2 for two reasons: First, because it is closely tied with physique (Lyons & Hosking, 2014), so may not be easily disentangled from the physique variable; second, because to have included it would have over-complicated the design.

The research questions addressed in Study 2 were:

- From the perspective of gay men and heterosexual people, to what extent are gay sexual self-labels perceived as masculine and/or feminine?
- From the perspective of gay men and heterosexual people, what is the contribution to perceptions of gay men's masculinity of their sexual self-label (top/versatile/bottom), their voice quality (deep/high-pitched) and their physique (muscular/thin)?

### ***2-C-2: Rationale for method***

Although Study 2 did not test hypotheses generated from Study 1, it can nevertheless be considered complementary to it in that its purpose was to “seek elaboration, enhancement, illustration, clarification of the results from one method with the results from another” (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989, p. 259). Using a cross-sectional online survey allowed for quantitative data to be collected on some of the exploratory findings from Study 1, so objective comparisons could be made between sexual self-labels in terms of their gendered nature, and between sexual self-labels, voice quality and physique in terms of their contribution to perceptions of gay men's masculinity.

An important part of collecting objective quantitative data is the use of standardised instruments of measurement, that are intended to produce consistent (reliable) results, and could be employed by other researchers testing the same

phenomena (Bryman, 2016). For Study 2, there were two key measures, each comprising two numerical scales. The first measure asked participants to rate from 0 – 10 (anchors: “not at all”; “extremely”) the masculinity and, on a separate scale, femininity, of four gay sexual self-labels (top/versatile/bottom/power bottom). This measure addressed the first research question. The second measure required participants to rate the masculinity of eight hypothetical men, who were described as either top or bottom, with either large/muscular or small/thin physiques, and either deep or high-pitched voices. An additional description was added of a heterosexual man who received anal penetration from a female partner, was muscular, and had a deep voice.

By subtracting masculinity ratings for all the bottom men from ratings from the top men; for all the high-pitched voice men from the deep-voiced men; and for all the thin men from the muscular men, quantitative measures of the contributions to perceived masculinity (masculine capital) made by self-label, voice quality, and physique were produced. Both of the key measures employed in the study, as well as the technique for calculating the contribution to masculine capital made by the different attributes, were based on those employed in previous published research (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013).

Typically, quantitative methods such as the one employed in Study 2 are situated in the realist/positivist camp of social cognition, because underlying their use is the assumption that an objective external reality exists outside of the human mind and can be measured independently of the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Willig, 2013). Thus, in Study 2 it was assumed that it was possible to measure beliefs about the masculinity of certain attributes by using numerical scales, and that the data collected reflected the inner cognitions of those who participated (Smith, 1996). However, Study 2 was characterised by a critical realist rather than “naive realist” position. For example,

in the survey used to collect data for Study 2, the concepts of masculinity and femininity were not explicitly defined by the researchers. A naive realist stance may be to assume that both concepts have essential, “true” definitions, and therefore the masculinity rating of a given attribute (e.g., “top”) must correspond to an objective reality of the term “masculine”. On the other hand, a critical realist stance would be to acknowledge that concepts such as masculinity and femininity are provisional, and there is a distinction to be made between them as objects, and the terms that people may use to define them (Bryman, 2016).

### ***2-C-3: Data analysis***

The analyses in Study 2 explored within-subject differences in relative masculinity ratings of the four sexual self-labels, and masculinity ratings of the hypothetical men, and between-subject differences in these measures between gay men, straight men and straight women. Parametric statistical tests – i.e., analyses of variance (ANOVA) – were applied. However, because data were non-normally distributed on some variables, all statistical tests used trimmed means and bootstrapping. This was because these robust methods of analysis do not make distributional assumptions about the data (Johnson, 2001), and because they can control for the probability of a Type 1 error (Wilcox, 2012).

Bootstrapping works by taking numerous random samples from the study sample, treating the latter as a population in itself (Johnson, 2001). Since they are taken randomly, the assumption can be made that the replacement samples are representative of the sample used to collect the data. In Study 2, robust analyses were based on 1,000 or 2,000 bootstrapped samples, to compute bias-corrected and accelerated 95% confidence intervals (see Efron & Tibshirani, 1993). It is acknowledged that bootstrapping does not reveal anything additional on a *population-level*: A flaw of any

quantitative study that uses a non-probability sample is that population-level generalisations are tenuous.

## **2-D: Study 3 – An experiential study using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

### ***2-D-1: Research questions***

The research questions addressed in Study 3 were:

- How are interpretations and experiences of masculinity related to beliefs about, experiences of and behaviour in anal intercourse, and to sexual self-label identification?
- How are gay men's interpretations of masculinity related to their experiences of being masculine and being gay?

### ***2-D-2: Possible approaches to addressing research questions***

#### **2-D-2-1: Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) emerged as a qualitative method in response to the domination of the quantitative methodological paradigm in the social sciences in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Charmaz, 2000). In a challenge to the historical assumption that qualitative research could only produce *descriptions* of phenomena, grounded theory provided qualitative researchers with a methodological framework within which theory generation could occur (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In its original conception, grounded theory was aligned with a positivist view of the world: theories could be generated from qualitative data by a process of induction, because the data held an objective truth that was available for discovery by an independent observer (Charmaz, 2000).

Contemporaneously, a social constructionist version of grounded theory exists alongside the more traditional approach, in part intended to challenge the rigidity and



prescriptiveness of the method as it was originally proposed (Charmaz, 2000; Willig, 2013). It is this approach that is most widely used in psychology (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The constructionist approach to grounded theory emphasises the role that the researcher has in interpreting qualitative data: it “recognises that the viewer creates the data and ensuing analysis through interaction with the viewed” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 523). Rather than generating testable theories of objective reality, this version of grounded theory defines *conditional* concepts and hypotheses that can applied elsewhere, and acknowledges that what is produced represents one (or a number of) possible interpretation(s) of the phenomena in question (Charmaz, 2000; 2014).

Grounded theory shares with IPA a focus on symbolic interactionism (see Denzin, 2004), the theoretical perspective that an individual’s action is a response to their interpretation of social processes, and that social processes are affected by an individual’s action, which in turn affects how they are interpreted (Charmaz, 2014; Smith, 1996). Another point of convergence between grounded theory and IPA is therefore the emphasis on interpretation: the assumption that people make sense of their lives by interpreting reconstructed pasts, experiences in the present, and envisaged futures (Charmaz, 2014; Blumer, 1969).

Whereas grounded theory uses individual accounts to support a conceptual explanation of a given lived experience, IPA produces a more nuanced account of individual experiences, valuing divergence between accounts (i.e., where a single explanation cannot be supported) as much as convergence (Smith et al., 2009). IPA was selected above grounded theory for Study 3 because the aim of this study was to present the idiographic analysis of the unique experience of individuals, rather than to generate more generalisable theories regarding social processes. Furthermore, grounded theory demands the use of a constant comparative method of data collection, data analysis,

theory development; further data collection, data analysis, theory refinement, etc. – a task that was too big for this mixed methods programme, and not essential given the existence of the influential theory of hegemonic masculinity.

#### 2-D-2-2: Narrative Analysis

Narratives are texts or verbal accounts written in a sequential story form, used by people to bring a sense of order to an ever-changing personal world (McAdams, 1988; Ricoeur, 1984). They are therefore inherently interpretative. Narratives are not fixed descriptions of past events, rather are constructed in relation to personal and cultural, and historical and current contexts (Murray, 2003). Therefore, narratives do not mirror past events, but instead reflect how the narrator constructs an experience by making links between the past, the present and an imagined future – links that are dynamic and unstable, dependent on the imagination and strategic interests of the narrator (Riessman, 2005).

In telling stories about their lives to themselves and to others, people construct “narrative identities” that connect them to different social relationships and also anchor them in different versions of their world. Narratives do not only function on a personal level: Social narratives are the stories that groups of people tell about themselves, that construct group narrative identities and also influence the personal narratives of group members, and therefore their individual identities (Murray, 2003). The purpose of narrative analysis is to gain an understanding of the subjective experiences of the narrator in the world they inhabit (Murray, 2003).

A useful data collection method for the researcher involved in narrative analysis is the life history interview, which takes the form of either one or a series of unstructured interviews, aimed at collecting detailed information about the respondent’s life story as they tell it (Riessman, 2005). In particular, respondents may be asked to

describe their daily lives in relation to certain disruptive life events (for example, illness); hence why narrative analysis has attracted the attention of those studying subjectivity in health research (e.g., Gilbert, Ussher & Perz, 2014).

There is considerable overlap between narrative analysis and IPA, in terms of their shared focus on understanding subjective experience and meaning-making, the requirement for the researcher to take an interpretative stance towards the data, and their roots in a social constructionist ontology (Smith et al., 2009). However, IPA is more concerned with the meaning-making of the experience itself rather than *how* meaning-making happens via the structure of a narrative. Narrative analysis could have been utilised for a study in this dissertation is if there was an intention to examine how early (childhood) socialisation experiences and gay socialisation experiences are related to beliefs about masculinity, masculine identity and beliefs about and experiences of anal intercourse. Given that this life-history approach was not necessary for answering the research questions of Study 3, IPA was a more appropriate analytic approach.

### 2-D-2-3: IPA

IPA emerged as an experiential qualitative approach in the mid-1990s, in response to concerns over the divergent epistemological and methodological standpoints of social cognition and discourse analysis (Smith, 1996). On the one hand, the social cognitive tradition holds that quantitative measures of beliefs and attitudes can reveal the “true” cognitive states of those who complete them; on the other hand, discourse analysis maintains that cognitions are constructed by discourse rather than being pre-formed entities, and are therefore strongly tied with social context. Discourse analysts do not need to go beyond verbal accounts to examine cognitive states, because the accounts themselves are behaviours and therefore warrant analysis (Smith, 1996). IPA bridges the gap between the social cognition and discourse analysis approaches because

while it recognises the role that language and social context play in shaping people's experiences, it is also committed to examining how experiences are made sense of – i.e., people's cognitive and emotional reactions to them (Smith, 1996; Smith, 2011).

Therefore, IPA allows for the identification of cognitive structures that underlie experience, and shape behaviour (e.g., Flowers, Smith, Sheeran & Beail, 1997)

IPA shares the social constructionist stance of discourse analysis, but in a less rigid form: Although pre-existing cultures and discourses shape identity, the individual has agency in fashioning the material from those cultures and discourses into an identity – that material becomes an essential part of the person which influences how the world is experienced. (Smith, 2003; Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, IPA holds that although what people report about the external world does not represent a “truth” about that world (IPA is ontologically relativist), it does reflect a “truth” about how they *interpret* and *experience* it (epistemological realism: Smith, 2003; Willig, 2013). Interpretation gives rise to meaning, and this does not happen in a vacuum, but instead is closely tied with interactive events with other actors (Willig, 2013). Therefore, IPA is said to come from a “symbolic interactionism” perspective (see Denzin, 2004).

With its dedication to the “painstaking analysis of cases” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 56) rather than a concern for making group-level, generalised claims, IPA adopts an idiographic approach to the study of experience. Therefore, IPA studies typically involve small samples of 5 – 10 participants (Smith, 2004). However, the focus on individual people in specific situations does not preclude the opportunity to identify consistency between individuals' accounts (Smith et al., 2009), nor from making tentative suggestions that other (similar) individuals in similar situations might experience the phenomena of interest in a similar way (Smith, Harré & Van Langenhove, 1995).

As well as its commitment to idiography, IPA has at its core concerns for the philosophical traditions of phenomenology and hermeneutics. It is phenomenological because it aims to produce detailed accounts of human experience; it is concerned with hermeneutics (interpretation) because it aims to provide a critical commentary of people's sense-making, anchored in psychological theory. The IPA researcher must try and understand the world-view of the participant and describe *what it is like* to experience the phenomena under investigation (the phenomenological process); and they must also consider *what it means* to the participant to have thought/felt that way about the experience (the hermeneutic, or interpretative process). Smith (2011) refers to the process of interpretation that characterises IPA as the “double hermeneutic”, because it is formed of two layers: the researcher's interpretation of a participant's account is based on the *participant's* interpretation of their own experience.

IPA's phenomenological focus is influenced by Heidegger's interpretation of phenomenology (Smith et al., 2009). Like Husserl, who founded the phenomenological approach and was Heidegger's mentor (Larkin et al., 2006), Heidegger maintained that human beings are intrinsically a part of the world they inhabit, and therefore subjective experience should never be examined in isolation from external contexts: The person is always a “person-in-context” (Larkin et al., 2006). According to Heidegger, human beings are born into a world of people, objects, language and culture that is already riddled with meaning. Therefore, it is erroneous to believe that human beings can impose meaning onto this world that is already meaningful. Heidegger's use of the word “Dasein” – meaning “there-being” – to describe human existence captures this interpretation of phenomenology: Human beings are always “there”, located in some meaningful context, and consequently human experience can only be understood in light of their involvement with this meaningful world (Larkin et al., 2006).

Importantly, for Heidegger phenomenology was inherently linked with hermeneutics, because access to knowledge could not occur without interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). Things in the world have surface-level meanings to people, but may also have deeper, concealed meanings – phenomenology is charged with bringing these meanings to light, which is necessarily an interpretative activity (Smith et al., 2009). Central to Heidegger’s “hermeneutic phenomenology” is the assumption that interpretation is always based on pre-supposition (“fore-conception”), and therefore new stimuli are inevitably interpreted with reference to prior experiences (Smith et al., 2009). This challenges Husserl’s postulation that it is possible to “bracket” assumptions about the world to focus solely on an individual’s perceptual experience of it and has implications for a researcher’s reflexive practice. Fore-conceptions may exist before a stimulus is encountered, but it is only through engaging with the stimulus that researchers can examine what fore-conceptions were relevant, and can consider how they might be involved in the act of interpretation (Smith et al., 2009).

IPA was suitable for addressing the research questions of Study 3 because its phenomenological focus allowed for the examination of *what is was like* for participants to be gay and to experience their homosexuality, their masculinity and their sexual behaviour in the way they described. In particular, a greater understanding was acquired of how gay men managed their identities and made sense of who they were in relation to normative messages regarding what it takes to be a man. Further, the emphasis on phenomenology provided the opportunity to address how gay men’s subjective experiences of anal intercourse – how they made sense of their feelings towards and behaviour in anal intercourse – was influenced by their beliefs about and experiences of masculinity.

The interpretative aspect of IPA allowed for a critical commentary on the participants' accounts. For example, rather than taking their descriptions on face value, there were opportunities to consider things like *why* objects/experiences were described as they were; whether the participant was trying to avoid describing a certain meaningful experience; and whether there were concealed meanings in the participants' accounts (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Another benefit of using IPA was that its idiographic approach afforded an opportunity to present a case study (Smith, 2004; Smith, Harré & Van Langenhove, 1995). The purpose of presenting a case study in this dissertation is to provide an in-depth, fine-grain example of how one gay man experienced and managed his masculine and gay identities, in particular in relation to his body and his voice. Although there is limited generalisability from a case study such as the one presented, if it is known how even one gay man interprets his experiences of his body and voice, then understanding of how gay men interpret and experience their masculinity and homosexuality, with reference to these attributes, is deepened (de Visser & Smith, 2006; Smith, 2004). Further, if a researcher is engaged at a deep level with the detail of one person's experiences, then s/he are more likely to consider how they and others would manage the situation/phenomena being described. Knowing the detail of another person's experiences may "bring us closer to the significant aspects of a shared humanity" (Smith, 2004, p. 43), and consequently tell more about "the universal" than the study of a single case might initially suggest.

A further advantage of IPA is that its focus on individual meaning-making does not preclude it from identifying social discourses and considering how subject positioning can shape experience (Smith, 1996; Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, IPA is compatible with a "discourse dynamic" approach to studying subjectivity, because it

examines how language is related to practice (i.e., what can be experienced by an individual: see Parker, 1992 and Willig 2000). IPA and FDA – where a discourse dynamic approach are appropriate – therefore both share an interest in how contexts influence experience (Smith et al., 2009). In the papers that arose from Study 3, it was possible to identify how reflexive positioning in discourses of masculinity was associated with the meaning-making of the experiences that were bound by those discourses. There exist a small number of other studies that have combined IPA and FDA approaches (e.g., Johnson, Burrows & Williamson, 2004), although as Smith et al. (2009) observe, a clarification of their complementary relationship would be warranted.

### ***2-D-3: Data collection: Semi-structured interviews***

As is true for the majority of IPA studies (Brocki & Wearden, 2006), one-to-one semi-structured interviews were employed for data collection in Study 3. This method has been identified as exemplary for a number of reasons. The interviewer is able to tailor the questions in response to unexpected and/or interesting accounts produced by the participant. Having this flexibility supports the researcher's aim of "seeing" the world from the participant's perspective (Flowers, Hart, & Marriott, 1999). Thus, the participant is framed as the "experiential expert", and has the opportunity to guide the content of the interview and provide as much detail about their experiences as possible (Alexander & Clare, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2003). One-to-one semi-structured interviews also promote rapport between the researcher and participant, facilitating the disclosure of information from the latter (Flowers et al., 1997; Smith et al., 2009), particularly when they are asked about details of sexual relationships, as they were in Study 3.

Smith et al. (1999) suggest that other methods, such as autobiographical diary entries, could be used as the basis of an IPA study. A small number of IPA studies have



used focus groups (Brocki & Wearden, 2006), although the compatibility of this method with IPA has been questioned, given the focus of the latter on gathering detailed data on personal experience, and the suitability of the former for identifying social discourses (Palmer, Larkin, de Visser & Fadden, 2010; Smith, 2004). It has been noted that the data collected from the use of focus groups may differ from that yielded from semi-structured interviews when the same topic is under study (e.g., Flowers, Duncan & Knusson, 2003). Focus groups were not appropriate for data collection for Study 3 for these reasons, and owing to the sensitive nature of the subject under investigation – it was assumed that gay men would feel less inhibited discussing their experiences of identity and sexuality with just one other person – a gay male interviewer.

## **2-E: Mixed methods research**

### ***2-E-1: Introduction***

This dissertation is comprised of three studies, two of which take a qualitative approach and one them of them quantitative. When researchers integrate quantitative and qualitative approaches to address a given research question – or, as in this case, as part of a programme of research – this is often referred to as “mixed methods research”, and is argued to represent a third “methodological paradigm” (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007). Mixed methods research is often associated with triangulation, the combination of multiple methods and perspectives to seek out convergence in research findings (Flick, Garms-Homolová, Herrmann, Kuck, & Röhsch, 2012; Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012). However, the mixed methods approach presented in this dissertation does not represent an attempt to triangulate because the object of enquiry is not the same between each study. (This has implications for the relevance of the philosophical conflicts associated with combining quantitative and qualitative research – *see section 2-E-2*).

When researchers decide on a method for collecting data, their decision reflects a number of paradigmatic assumptions about what defines reality (ontological assumptions), what knowledge of reality it is possible to have (epistemological assumptions), and how this knowledge might be uncovered (methodological assumptions: Sale, Lohfield & Brazil, 2002). Therefore, research methods are intrinsically linked with philosophical positions. The discussion of the feasibility of combining quantitative and qualitative methods in one or a series of complementary studies was historically centred on the “(in)compatibility thesis” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2012), the debate that questioned whether their opposing philosophical standpoints made mixing the two paradigms inappropriate.

Quantitative and qualitative approaches do not share the same ontological or epistemological philosophies and are therefore inherently unable to study the same phenomenon in the same way (Sale et al., 2002). The quantitative approach is positivist, meaning that there is an ontological assumption that an objective, external reality exists and can be studied in a value-free manner, independent of the researcher. On the other hand, the qualitative approach is based on the ontological assumption that reality is socially constructed, open to interpretation, and therefore labile and contestable (Sale et al., 2002). Qualitative research can never be value-free because the researcher is situated within the object of study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Despite their philosophical differences, many accept that quantitative and qualitative approaches can be successfully combined (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). The “paradigm war” that positions them in opposition has given way to a more inclusive perspective which appreciates the value of both in addressing certain research questions (e.g., Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Some have even questioned the assumption that quantitative and qualitative approaches are as

philosophically opposed as they may appear. For example, although quantitative research is framed as “scientific” and value-free, thereby giving access “universal truths”, it is argued that researchers engaged in quantitative enquiry nevertheless make subjective design decisions (i.e., what to measure, how to measure it, which font to use on questionnaires, how to interpret data) that are influenced by the beliefs and attitudes of the social groups to which they belong (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). From this perspective, it could be argued that quantitative research is also “interpretative”, and therefore to make rigid distinctions between quantitative and qualitative approaches may be questionable (Schwandt, 2000).

One solution for fitting together different methodological paradigms and their respective philosophies is to adopt a pragmatic approach, where decisions as to whether quantitative or qualitative approaches are more appropriate are made against an assessment of the possible outcomes of choosing either. As Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004, p. 16) argue, “research approaches should be mixed in ways that offer the best opportunities for answering important research questions.” Pragmatism rejects traditional philosophical dualism (e.g., realism versus relativism) and instead advocates a common-sense approach to selecting methods and approaches that are likely to best address a research question (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). A pragmatic approach is not about doing “whatever works” to fulfil a given aim, rather it is an attempt by the researcher to consider multiple perspectives: Researchers engaged in mixed research should honour both the “universal truths” assumption and the “multiple/relative truths” position (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007; Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012; Morse, 2003).

## ***2-E-2: Mixed methods in this dissertation***

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Study 1 was an exploratory, discursive study that came from a social constructionist perspective; Study 2 was a cross-sectional quantitative survey study, rooted in social cognition and with a positivist ontology; and Study 3 was an experiential, IPA study, supporting a “softer” version of ontological constructionism. All three studies came from a critical realist epistemology because it was recognised that social structures mediated the “truth” that the research could access.

The programme of study presented in this dissertation adopts a pragmatic approach to combining methodological paradigms, because they are recognised as complementary rather than intended to find convergence (Sale et al., 2002). For example, Study 2 (quantitative) was intended to complement Study 1 (discursive), by measuring more precisely and objectively the contribution of certain masculine attributes to perceptions of gay men’s masculinity. Study 3 (experiential) was intended to complement Study 2 by examining the lived experiences of men who may be affected by others’ perceptions of their masculinity. As Sale et al. (2002) argue, the purpose of mixed methods research can go beyond a desire to compensate for the weaknesses of one methodological approach via the strengths of the other: employing both can instead be conceived in terms of the additive benefits they bring.

Therefore, the most important reason for choosing a mixed methods design was because it was most appropriate for addressing the broad research questions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). For example, only an experiential, qualitative approach could examine gay men’s subjective experiences of masculinity (including in relation to sexual behaviour) and describe/interpret the meaning they attached to factors like sexual self-labelling. Taking a qualitative approach for Study 3 added “experiential ‘flesh’ to the statistical ‘bones’” of Study 2 (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013, p. 621).

An additional benefit of using a mixed methods design is that it presented an opportunity to undertake both exploratory and confirmatory research (Lund, 2012). In this dissertation, Study 1 identified variables that may be related to gay men's masculinity. The decision to examine the importance of sexual self-labelling for gay men's identities through Studies 2 and 3 was influenced substantially by the ubiquity with which the gay participants in Study 1 constructed gay masculinities with reference to sexual self-labels. Utilising both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research may give rise to epistemological and ontological conflict (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), but this should not be an obstacle for producing research that, owing to its use of mixed methods, provides a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under interrogation (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Lund, 2012)

For this programme of study, there was an intention to identify local discourses of gay masculinities; to establish the extent to which certain attributes were more widely associated with perceptions of gay men's masculinities; and to examine the implications of this for how gay men constructed and experienced their masculine and gay identities. Each study had a unique focus, and therefore epistemological/ontological conflict between the methodological approaches employed need not be conceived as obstructive (Sale et al., 2002). Most importantly, to have taken a purist or "incompatibilist" approach would have precluded the opportunity examine these multiple perspectives. As Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007, p.129) opined:

[Mixed methods research] recognises the importance of traditional quantitative and qualitative research but also offers a powerful third paradigm choice that often will provide the most informative, complete, balanced, and useful research results.

## **2-F: Quality in qualitative research**

### ***2-F-1: Criteria for assessing quality***

Quality concerns associated with *quantitative* research are less frequently raised than those associated with qualitative research, owing to the assumption of researcher neutrality and independence, and the clear rules regarding the selection of statistical approaches and interpretations of statistical analyses (Bryman, 2016). It has been argued that the well-established set of criteria for evaluating quality in quantitative research (e.g., controls employed, statistical tests selected, sample representativeness etc.), are inappropriate for assessing the quality of qualitative studies (Smith et al., 2009).

However, attempting to establish a set of quality criteria for qualitative research may be problematic, because qualitative enquiry is so procedurally and philosophically diverse (Reicher, 2000; Willig, 2013; Yardley, 2000). For example, if underlying cognitive structures guide experience as experiential approaches like IPA maintain, then it would be expected that the same structures would be evident on multiple occasions – hence IPA studies might be assessed with reference to reliability. However, if cognitions are constructed at the point of talk, as discursive psychology maintains, then reliability is an inappropriate criterion on which to evaluate research excellence, and therefore a “one size fits all” approach to assessing quality might be rejected (Reicher, 2000).

Another problem with quality criteria for qualitative studies is that they risk reifying “truth”, “knowledge” and “reality” when qualitative enquiry often rejects such positivism – it is debated whether a qualitative study can be evaluated in terms of how well it establishes “truth”, when its philosophical position holds that “truth” is provisional (Yardley, 2000). However, Yardley (2000) warns that without explicitly outlined procedures for assessing quality, qualitative research that satisfies the traditional criteria for quality in *quantitative* research will be favoured in psychology

above those with more radical methodologies, which may offer novel perspectives.

Ironically, a lack of quality standards may affect the quality of qualitative research.

A number of efforts to establish a set of quality criteria have been made (e.g., Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992; Stiles, 1993); the research presented in this dissertation is assessed against Yardley's (2000) criteria, given that it is favoured in terms of its breadth and clarity (Smith et al., 2009). According to Yardley (2000), qualitative research should be evaluated with reference to: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; impact and importance. Table 2.1 below provides a brief summary of each criterion.

Table 2.1:

*Criteria for assessing quality in qualitative research (Yardley, 2000)*

Sensitivity to context	Awareness of existing literature, the context of data collection and participants' personal contexts
Commitment and rigour	Commitment to the comfort / experiences / accounts of participants; Skill in the methods used; Immersion in the data; Appropriateness of the sample; Quality of the data collection method; Completeness of the analysis
Transparency and coherence	Clarity of research process; Persuasiveness of the argument as produced from the analysis; Fit between philosophical stance and research method
Impact and importance	Theoretical and practical worth; Interest and importance to readers

## ***2-F-2: Quality in Studies 1 and 3***

2-F-2-1: Sensitivity to context: I was cognisant of existing literature regarding the objects of enquiry (masculinity, homosexuality). For example, in Study 1, when participants referred to the "compensatory value" of muscularity to gay men, this was interpreted in terms of masculine capital, which is discussed in the extant literature. Therefore, participants' talk was connected with existing masculinity theory. In Study 3, sensitivity was shown to the participants' personal contexts because interpretation of their accounts was conducted with attention to what had previously been described

(Smith et al., 2009). In both studies, sensitivity was demonstrated towards the data itself – numerous verbatim extracts were provided in the papers produced from the studies, so that the reader could check the extent to which the arguments made were supported.

2-F-2-2: Commitment and rigour: In both qualitative studies, I paid close attention to what the participants were saying, taking brief notes to help frame subsequent questions. The authors were fully immersed in the data, reading and re-reading transcripts against original recordings, and revisiting the themes (or in Study 1, discourses) identified to ensure that they captured a collection of utterances successfully. The interviewer became increasingly skilled in conducting the group and individual interviews as more were undertaken. For example, in Study 3, the interviewer became more adept at framing spontaneous questions that were open and invited participants to elaborate on their stories.

The samples for both studies were appropriate given the research questions. In Study 1, interviews were held with groups homogenous in terms of their self-identified sex and sexuality – either gay men, heterosexual women or heterosexual men. The groups were arranged this way to increase the likelihood that a full range of social discourses would be accessed across the three groups. For example, gay men may have been less apt to access discourses of sexual positioning in anal intercourse if they were in a minority among heterosexual people. A number of the heterosexual participants in Study 1 commented that had members of a different sex been present, they would have expected their discussions to have taken a different course owing to social desirability pressures.



2-F-2-3: Transparency and coherence: The data analysis process was made explicitly clear in the write-up of both studies. In Study 3, “Participant Profiles” were included as supplementary information for the papers produced from the study. These profiles, created for each of the 17 participants, are summaries of the participants’ descriptions of their experiences – with quotations and line references included – and they contain interpretative comments, many of which were included in the Results/Analysis sections of the papers. With the aim of evidencing transparency, they were included as supplementary material in their original, unedited form.

The inclusion of verbatim quotations from participants to evidence the themes / discourses identified serves to increase the persuasiveness of the arguments presented in the papers. Coherence is evidenced in the papers from Study 3 because in each there is a clear focus on both the phenomenological aspect of the analysis, and also the interpretative element. It is acknowledged in all three papers that IPA is inherently interpretative and influenced by the authors’ experiences, and therefore any attempts at drawing generalised conclusions are tentative. Both studies are coherent in terms of their research methods and philosophical standpoints. For example, there is fit in Study 1 between the qualitative approach (FDA), the research method (group interviews where social discourses are deployed), and the philosophical standpoint (masculinity and homosexuality are constructed in discursive interactions).

2-F-2-4: Impact and importance: The research discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation demonstrates that masculinity, and how it relates to sexual behaviour, is highly salient to many gay men. Articles concerning masculinity are commonplace in popular gay media, especially with reference to the apparent trend for explicit anti-effeminate sentiment to be vocalised in some domains of gay culture (e.g., Cash, 2016).

The qualitative studies presented in this dissertation contribute to a body of literature that examines how gay men are constrained by masculinity discourses, and how they make sense of their identities while negotiating cultural messages regarding masculinity and homosexuality (Study 3). Prior research has demonstrated that beliefs about masculinity can influence behavioural practices, especially those related to health, so it is important to social psychology that gay men's interpretations and responses to masculinity discourses are understood.

## **2-G: Reflexivity: Reflections on the research experience**

The term “reflexivity” has many interpretations (e.g., Lynch, 2000), and the qualitative researcher's approach to it will depend greatly on their philosophical positioning (Gough, 2003). For the purposes of discussing my approach to reflexivity, the following definition is assumed:

Reflexivity facilitates a critical attitude towards locating the impact of research(er) context and subjectivity on project design, data collection, data analysis, and presentation of findings (Gough, 2003, p.22)

Reflexivity does not (solely) intend to identify sources of bias in qualitative research, but to examine how the researcher's individuality contributed to the research process and outcome (Gough, 2003). Whereas a positivist approach would maintain that the researcher and the object of research remain separate, the postpositivist / critical realist position adopted for this programme of study acknowledges that value-free research cannot be undertaken, because any research decision is influenced by the prior experiences, pre-existing knowledge, expectations, emotions, and cultural context of the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Maso, 2003). It is

therefore important to report on how my influences may have affected the outcome of the studies reported in this dissertation.

Maso (2003) suggests that researchers should “come clean” about how their subjectivity affected the research undertaken, and that this should start with a reflexive analysis of the reasons for asking the research question. It is by asking “why?” that pre-existing expectations can reveal themselves. For example, if I ask myself, “What has gay men’s masculinity got to do with me?”, in my reply I would refer to my sexual identity as a gay man; my childhood socialisation experiences associated with masculinity (for example, finding it difficult to relate to boys at school because I did not share their masculine interests); my experiences as an adult of feeling different to many heterosexual men, in terms of masculinity; my “masculine consciousness” – the introspective self-monitoring I engage in, in many social contexts; my use of camp irreverence in certain social contexts; my belief that issues of masculinity are extremely important to many (or most) gay men; and the list could go on.

Consequently, it is evident that before I started this programme of research, I had some firm expectations – based on my own experiences – of how gay men experience masculinity and may be constrained by masculinity discourses (though this is not how I would have referred to them). Throughout the research process, I have asked myself the “why” question and I have always produced the same answers. Being cognisant of these expectations and presuppositions, and acknowledging my strong emotional attachment to and personal investment in the topic has meant that I have been able to engage in continuous reflexive introspection throughout the research process.

### ***2-G-1: Questioning in interviews***

My personal influences may have affected the outcome of the group and individual interviews. Although I attempted to produce open, non-leading questions that

in the groups would encourage discussion, and in the individual interviews would invite story-telling, this was not always easy when I was pursuing a particular line of enquiry, especially if it were one with which I empathised. Further, I noted several times in the individual interview transcripts where I attempted to clarify a participant's utterance and in doing so, imposed the meaning that *I* had gained from their account, based on my beliefs and experiences. This is not in keeping with IPA's commitment to adopting the participants' world view and giving them voice: Smith et al. (2009) advise that explicit interpretation should occur *after* rather than during the interview.

In conducting the interviews, it was important to consider how the participants and I were positioned in the research discourse, and to consider how this positioning may have influenced the research outcome (Ballinger, 2003). Participants' reflexive positioning as "research participants", and their interactive positioning of me as "researcher", may have constrained what was produced by the group interviews. For example, if researchers are positioned as more knowledgeable, then it is particularly important that questions are non-directive, lest they construct a reality that participants are unable to contest.

I became more proficient at conducting the group and individual interviews as time progressed and I had the opportunity to listen back to interview recordings to identify examples of poor interview practice. For example, I became more aware of the need to give participants longer to produce a response to a question; to ask more open, exploratory questions (e.g., "How do you feel about that?"); to avoid interrupting participants' talk with assenting utterances; and to be confident to return to an issue where I felt that there may be more to be said. Nevertheless, I found conducting interviews one of the most challenging aspects of this research experience. As I completed each interview and reflected on how well I thought it had gone, I asked

myself why I found holding them so difficult. The answer, I realised, lay in my anxieties with regard to how I related to the participants.

### ***2-G-2: Relating to participants***

Smith et al. (2009) maintain that establishing a good rapport with participants is essential for producing high quality interviews. In all of the group interviews, and the majority of the individual interviews, I experienced a good relationship with the participants, evidenced by their commitment to answering my questions and, in the individual interviews in particular, telling their stories. However, my eagerness to put participants at ease at times had undesirable consequences. For example, there were a number of occasions when I told participants that I understood / could empathise with their perspective (“I know what you mean”). My intention was to reassure participants that their stories / explanations / rationalisations were welcome and that I was a non-judgemental listener. In my reflection notes, I recorded that I was perhaps too keen to please the participants, so thankful I was that they were participating in my study and speaking with such candour. It is possible that such reassurance persuaded participants that their discourse / belief / attitude was one worth pursuing in the interview, a desirable contribution, and this may have obstructed alternatives being vocalised.

The most important decision I faced when relating to participants – and the one which caused most concern – was whether to disclose my own sexual identity. My decision was not to disclose this information, except under two conditions: if I were explicitly asked; or if I felt that an assumption about my sexual identity was obstructing a particular discourse from being accessed, or a particular belief being expressed. The decision to avoid telling the participants that I am gay was mostly owing to my concern that making that declaration would reify the term “gay”, when “gay” is a labile and contestable term (Walby, 2010). My assumption was that most of the participants across

both qualitative studies believed that I was gay (owing to my own self-concept and in light of the subject of the interviews), but very few of them asked. (A number of gay participants knew my sexual identity before the interviews were conducted, having been told by people who had referred them to the study.) At times, my undisclosed sexual identity felt like an elephant in the room, at which point, on reflection, it might have been wise to disclose it. I acknowledge that participants' impressions of my sexual identity are likely to have shaped both the discourses accessed in Study 1, and the experiences described (and how they were described) in Study 3. The following extract, from a group interview for Study 1, illustrates this point:

*Ciaran* [heterosexual man]: But I think, generally, people associate [being gay] with more of a feminine thing, mainly because, I don't know, I... I wish I could answer that, yeah. That's just my sort of....

*Interviewer*: *You don't want to finish that? "Mainly because...?"*

*Ciaran*: Because I don't know. I feel like I don't want to be wrong, that's the thing. I don't want to say, "All gay people are, like, really feminine."

Ciaran's resistance to state that gay men were feminine may have been owing to a genuine discomfort with engaging in a stereotypic gay effeminacy discourse. On the other hand, Ciaran's hesitancy may have been attributable to his belief that I was a gay man – it is possible that he was concerned about offending me.

In the individual interviews conducted for Study 3, the fact that I am gay most likely facilitated the participants' openness. For example, as reported in the case study presented in this dissertation (see Chapter 7), participants often used the word "we" to report on the experiences of gay men, which I often interpreted as an inclusive term – I was categorised as a member of their group. Participants also used language or referred

to aspects of gay culture in a way that suggested that my sexual identity was taken for granted. At times, I challenged this by asking the men to define the terms they were talking in. In one interview, when I asked a participant to explain what he meant when he told me that he “can death drop like no one’s business,” he exclaimed, “Oh my God! Can I confirm that you are a gay man?!” Participants had expectations of me, and I was obliged to tread carefully so that it was their stories and not “ours” that were told.

I empathised and agreed with a great deal of what the gay participants spoke about, particularly in the individual interviews. This posed some significant issues: on a small number of occasions, I found myself disclosing one of my stories, which may have affected the terms by which participants shared theirs (Smith et al., 2009). I also became aware that there were emotional consequences to listening to detailed accounts of men’s experiences of being gay and their experiences of sexual practices. Their accounts often led me to revisit and re-evaluate my own experiences. At times, I was too engaged with the material. As McKay, Ryan and Sumsion (2003) point out, it is important to be immersed in the research process, but not so immersed that it is not possible to step away and consider what is occurring.

### ***2-G-3: Analysing data and producing papers***

In being reflexive, it is important to acknowledge that the analysis of the data for all three studies was completed with reference to existing theory. For example, I could not assume that a construction of masculinity was made in relation to a discourse of hegemonic masculinity without connecting the participants’ talk with masculinity theories. When analysing the data from Study 3, I endeavoured to treat each interview transcript as a separate case, and avoided transferring analytic observations made about one case to any others. This was intended to honour the idiographic nature of IPA (Smith et al., 2009). It was not until the point of producing the Participant Profiles that I

began making connections between cases and identifying areas of convergence and divergence.

The double hermeneutic of the IPA approach inevitably produces an account that is the researcher's interpretation of the participant's sense-making. Consequently, all IPA analysis is subjective and contingent on the subjectivity of the researcher (Smith et al., 2009): This is an acceptable, in fact necessary and inevitable, aspect of a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach. Working closely with my supervisor, particularly in the early stages of the analysis process of both qualitative studies, helped to ensure that the analyses were a sound reflection of the data gathered, and that my own pre-suppositions – and motivations to tell a particular story – did not obscure important emergent themes.

Qualitative research may be evaluated in terms of its transparency (Yardley, 2000), but transparency can be hard to achieve when producing papers for publication, in light of word limits: Interview extracts must often be shortened, and the author must decide which selection of themes and supporting extracts will be included (Gough, 2003). The editing process requires a reflexive approach, because authors may avoid including information that disrupts a certain narrative (Gough, 2003). For example, in the analysis of Study 1, findings were identified that were confirmatory of existing research – for example, discourses of alternative, or hybridised, masculinities wherein some heterosexual men were positioned. These analyses were written up, but were not selected for inclusion in an academic paper, because my focus was on identifying constructions of and positions for gay men. As the person who set the research questions, it was me who shaped what could be found, as it was shared in a public domain.



***2-G-4: Conclusion***

To be reflexive assumes that it is possible to uncover latent, pre-existing personal influences that could affect the research process. However, this approach to subjective awareness becomes problematic when a social constructionist perspective is adopted – the “self” is not an essential, stable entity, but is constructed in relation to social contexts (Denzin, 2001; Gough, 2003). Therefore, it might be argued that it is not possible for a researcher to be truly open about their influence on the research, because their openness is contingent on current, local conditions. Nevertheless, by acknowledging in this chapter how my experiences as a gay man, and the expectations that arise from my positioning, may have influenced the outcome of the research studies in this dissertation, readers are invited to evaluate the studies with the same critical eye that I have employed throughout the research process.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Study 1**

**“There are too many gay categories now”:**

**Discursive constructions of gay masculinity**

Chapter 3 is published in *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* as:

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#### **Key responsibilities**

Conceptualisation:	James Ravenhill & Dr Richard de Visser
Data collection:	James Ravenhill
Data analysis:	James Ravenhill
Drafting:	James Ravenhill
Reviewing and editing:	James Ravenhill & Dr Richard de Visser

### **3-A: Abstract**

“Masculine capital” refers to the social power afforded by the display of traits and behaviours that are associated with orthodox, stereotypical masculinity. Men who are concerned with their masculine identity may utilise these traits and behaviours to increase their overall masculine capital, and to mitigate “failures” in other domains of masculinity. However, their success at accruing and trading masculine capital may be limited, because different traits and behaviours are not equal in the capital they convey, and their value may vary depending on the social context in which they are deployed. Research suggests that heterosexuality contributes more to masculine capital than other stereotypically masculine characteristics: The possibilities for gay men to accrue and trade masculine capital may therefore be particularly limited, especially in heteronormative contexts.

Focus groups were undertaken with gay men, straight women, and straight men living in a coastal city in the south of England to explore discursive constructions of gay masculinity, and to examine gay men’s possibilities for accruing and trading masculine capital. Discourse analysis identified constructions of gay masculinity in reference to hegemonic masculinity, where gay men may acquire masculine capital in similar ways to straight men. However, the meaning and value of this capital may also vary, because certain characteristics and behaviours may have different value for and between gay men than they do for straight men, and in heteronormative contexts. The analysis also identified discourses of gay masculinity where it was not constructed as a singular entity, but rather as complex, multiple, and diverse.

*Key words: Gay men; Masculinity; Masculine capital; Qualitative; Discourse analysis*

### **3-B: Introduction**

Contemporary theories of masculinity contend that there is a multiplicity of ways of “being a man” and therefore offer pluralistic interpretations of masculinity. Connell’s (1995) theory of hegemonic masculinity has been particularly influential, maintaining that masculinities are hierarchically structured, with gay men occupying the lowest rung of the masculinities ladder. Recent research has examined how some men use certain behaviours that are associated with stereotypical, orthodox masculinity in order to construct and maintain a viable masculine identity (e.g., de Visser & McDonnell, 2013; de Visser & Smith, 2007; Dempster, 2011). However, such research has assumed the heterosexuality of the participants concerned, and has not examined the possibilities that gay men have for constructing a masculine identity that is valued in heteronormative, Western culture. Therefore, the aim of this qualitative study was to explore current discursive constructions of gay masculinity and to consider their implications for the masculine subjectivities of gay men.

#### ***3-B-1: Hegemonic masculinity***

Hegemonic masculinity refers to the current and locally dominant masculine ideology, which, in Western societies, defines “real men” as powerful, competitive, physically strong, invulnerable, and, crucially, heterosexual (Connell, 1995). Behaviours that do not contribute to the realization of these principles are considered inherently nonmasculine at best, feminine at worst. The concept of hegemonic masculinity is not intended to describe an archetype of masculinity, nor a category of man who embodies the characteristics that render him inherently masculine. Rather, masculinity is a social process, something that is “accomplished in social action” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.837). Connell (1995) maintains that hegemonic masculinity represents an idealised masculinity that does not necessarily correspond to

the real lives of most men, but is nevertheless the object of aspiration for the majority of them. Men who do not exemplify hegemonic masculinity must inevitably embody alternative, less valued masculine identities.

Men are not expected to embody all of the principles of hegemonic masculinity in order to be considered masculine: they can even display stereotypically feminine behaviours while maintaining their masculine integrity (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013; de Visser, Smith & McDonnell, 2009). The extent to which a man is perceived as masculine depends on the combination of behaviours he enacts or traits he embodies, each weighted differently in terms of the masculine “credit” it affords (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013; de Visser et al., 2009). Borrowing from Bourdieu’s (1984) notion of “symbolic capital,” which refers to the social power afforded by an individual’s credentials, Anderson (2009) and de Visser et al. (2009) refer to the relative contribution to masculinity of different behaviours and characteristics in terms of “masculine capital.” The value of the capital afforded by various behaviours and characteristics varies according to the “field” or social context in which they are produced and deployed (Bourdieu, 1977).

In a field of heterosexual, hegemonic masculinity, competence at stereotypically masculine team sports like rugby, working out to achieve muscularity, being able to consume large volumes of alcohol, and overt, “successful” heterosexuality have been identified as important sources of masculine capital. Furthermore, such behaviours can mitigate feminine behaviours and traits, or inoculate against “failures” in a given domain of masculinity. (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013; de Visser & Smith, 2007; de Visser et al., 2009). The concept of masculine capital can explain the emergence of “new masculinities,” such as the “metrosexual man,” who combines traditional markers

of hegemonic masculinity like financial dominance with a more feminine concern for appearance (Simpson, 2002).

### ***3-B-2: Hegemonic masculinity and gay masculinities***

Heterosexuality and homophobia are at the core of hegemonic masculinity (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985). Within a hierarchical structure of masculinities, gay masculinities are subordinated because homosexuality is considered counterhegemonic (Connell, 1995). Gay men represent a threat to patriarchy because their sexual attraction to the bodies of other men is considered inherently feminine, which explains the stereotype of the feminine gay man (Connell, 1995). Heterosexuality is closely policed by those who endorse hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and men who display feminine behaviours or who fail in a given domain of masculinity, irrespective of their sexual identity, risk being symbolically relegated down the masculinity hierarchy, by suspicions and accusations of homosexuality (Anderson, 2005; de Visser & Smith, 2007; de Visser et al., 2009; Emslie, Hunt, & Lyons, 2013). Heterosexuality, therefore, can be thought of as a very important contributor to masculine capital.

However, critics of Connell's theory argue that in contemporary Western society, masculinities need not be conceived as hierarchically arranged. Anderson's (2009) theory of inclusive masculinity asserts that masculinities can exist in a horizontal structure, without subordinating and marginalizing their alternatives. Anderson (2009) argues that the demise of "homophobia," or culturally entrenched homophobia, means that not all straight<sup>2</sup> men position themselves in opposition to gay men, and consequently have less need to prove their heterosexuality through the avoidance of

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<sup>2</sup> The terms "straight" and "gay" have been used in place of "heterosexual" and "homosexual" in order to describe sexual identity rather than sexual behaviour.

feminine (or at least, nonmasculine) behaviours. From Anderson's (2009) perspective, gay men would not need to aspire to a masculinity valued in a heteronormative culture because gay masculinities would be equally viable.

Despite this optimistic view of changing masculinities, Eguchi (2009) argues that gay men negotiate their masculine identities in response to the pressure imposed on them by a heterosexist culture, where heterosexual masculinities are most valued. A physique which conveys physical strength is one way that heterosexual, hegemonic masculinity may be embodied: Muscular bodies may therefore afford gay men a masculinity that is valued within a heteronormative culture (Drummond, 2005b). Consequently, an athletic or muscular physique has been identified as an important aspect of some gay men's masculine identities (e.g., Barron & Bradford, 2007; Drummond, 2005b; Kimmel & Mahalik, 2005).

Research findings suggest that being gay reduces a man's perceived masculinity more than other nonmasculine traits and behaviours, like abstinence from alcohol and lack of athleticism (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013; de Visser et al., 2009). However, it is not known if or how gay men are able to use certain behaviours in order to increase their overall masculine capital and ameliorate the threat to their masculinity posed by their homosexuality. Straight men are able to accrue masculine capital via their heterosexuality (de Visser et al., 2009): It is important to consider the possibilities that gay men have for accruing masculine capital, when they are inherently unable to pursue it in the same domain.

### **3-C: Method**

#### ***3-C-1: Data collection***

Data were collected from February to May 2015, via focus group interviews. Nine focus groups, each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes, were held with groups homogenous in terms of their sexual identity, being either gay men, straight women, or straight men. The inclusion of straight men and women in the sample was deemed important for achieving a gender-relational perspective, assuming that masculinities exist in relation to each other and to femininities (Connell, 1995). Furthermore, to include straight men and women was fitting for the discourse-dynamic approach taken for studying the subjectivity of gay masculinity: how available discursive constructions of gender are implicated in how gay men experience masculinity (Willig, 2000).

Each group consisted of between three and six people. They were run in classrooms at the host university, and at a local college. Participants were asked to discuss how they would define a masculine man and a gay man. They were asked how gay and straight men might use certain behaviours in order to increase how masculine they are perceived by others. Using a technique employed previously (de Visser & Smith, 2007), images of well-known gay and straight male celebrities were shown to participants to prompt discussion of what it means to be masculine and what it means to be a gay man. The researcher who facilitated the focus groups kept their input to a minimum and was mindful to avoid sharing their position on the topics discussed. Discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were read multiple times for familiarization and to acquire an initial impression of the discourses emerging.

The focus group method was deemed appropriate as it is compatible with one of the assumptions of a social constructionist approach, that “when people talk to each



other, the world gets constructed” (Burr, 2003, p. 8). Social constructionism allows researchers to focus on the processes that lead to knowledge being achieved, rather than seeking out structures of knowledge that are assumed to be embedded in reality. Data that arises from studies that are positioned within social constructionism identify culturally and historically bound constructions of knowledge that are produced in the context of relations with others (Burr, 2003). Social constructionism views language as central to how the world is constructed and how it is experienced, and assumes that identity is constructed by the deployment of discourses that are culturally and temporally available (Burr, 2003). The use of discourse analysis in this study was appropriate because it allowed for examination of how masculinity and gay masculinity were represented in different ways, via the deployment of various discourses by different speakers.

### ***3-C-2: Data analysis***

Potter and Wetherell (1995) distinguished between two broad types of discourse analysis, one that focuses on discursive “practices” and the other, influenced by post-structuralism and the work of Foucault, on discursive “resources.” The former is concerned with how language is used to accomplish particular objectives in interpersonal interaction (Willig, 2013). The latter allows us to identify how people use the discursive resources available to them in order to construct objects and subjects and to define subjectivities. An important concept associated with this type of discourse analysis is subject positioning. Discourses function to make available positions for people which structure subjective experience because they demarcate the possibilities for “being”: what can be thought, felt, said, and done by individuals are bound by where they are positioned (Burr, 2003; Hollway, 1989; Willig, 2000). The present study was situated within this Foucaultian discourse analytic framework.

Willig's (2013) six-stage approach was applied. The first stage was to code the data by reading the transcripts and identifying categories of references to the discursive objects: masculinity, femininity, and masculine capital for gay men.

One transcript was read separately by two researchers, who recorded their observations on the transcript and then discussed consistencies and differences in their remarks.

Category labels and their descriptions were amended in an iterative process of finding the best description for capturing the theme of a collection of references. Once a standard approach for coding the data was agreed upon between the two researchers, the first author continued to code the remaining transcripts and proceeded to undertake Stage 2 of the analysis.

For Stage 2, the language used to construct the discursive objects was examined, and new categories created to record where it was used. Annotating the transcripts and making notes by hand accomplished the third stage, which was to examine the functions of the discourses, a precursor for establishing the opportunities made available by the discourses for the objects and subjects constructed. During this stage, the two researchers met to discuss the emerging discourses and their implications.

Stages 4, 5, and 6 involved identifying subject positions opened up by the discourses and then considering how the discourses limited and made available possibilities for lived experience (action and feelings) for those who occupied them. The first author took principal responsibility for accomplishing this, using mind maps generated with reference to the categories identified earlier. Throughout Stages 4, 5, and 6, checks for quality were made between the two researchers, who met frequently to discuss the coherence of the analysis.

### ***3-C-3: Participants***

There were 38 participants: 12 gay men, 14 straight men, 11 straight women, and one bisexual woman. They all lived in and around a coastal city in the South East of England, and most were students. Participants were recruited through various means: advertisements placed on the host university's research participant database, the researcher's contacts at a local college and a YMCA group, and advertisements placed on social media sites. Some gay men were recruited via word-of-mouth. Recruitment advertisements appealed for participants to take part in a study about "Gender and Identity."

The aim was to recruit people aged 18 to 30 years, but in the opportunity samples, three participants were aged over 30. The data from these participants were retained: they were part of the discursive dynamics within their respective groups.

The age range 18–30 was chosen as these years of emerging/young adulthood are when concerns about establishing identity may be particularly important (Arnett, 2000). The ethnic breakdown (32 White participants, 3 Asian, 2 Black, and 1 mixed-ethnicity) reflected the ethnic composition of the study location (Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion, 2015).

In three focus groups, participants were not known to each other, another three groups combined some participants who were known to each other and some who were not, and in the remaining three groups, participants were classmates known to each other. Most of the groups of straight men and straight women comprised undergraduate students, or students following an "Access" program, which provides a high school-level qualification for people aged 19 and over to enable them to progress to university study. Groups of gay men were mixed, consisting of university students and

nonstudents with high school qualifications. No incentive or reward for taking part was offered to participants.

Participants gave written informed consent. They wore name badges that displayed their real names or a self-chosen pseudonym. In the transcripts, participants' names and references to other people were replaced with pseudonyms.

### **3-D: Results**

Three main discourses relating to masculinity and masculine capital for gay men were identified. Each is described and illustrated with verbatim quotes.

#### ***3-D-1: Gay men accruing masculine capital***

The discourse surrounding gay men's accrual of masculine capital was embedded in a broader discourse of orthodox, hegemonic masculinity, wherein gay men, like straight men, could accrue masculine capital in available domains when or if it was lost in others. Some participants suggested that for gay men the stakes were higher than for straight men, because, as Marcus asserted, "Gays feel they have something to prove more than straight guys":

Marcus [gay man]: Since you're gay, you need to give, if you want to project an image of yourself that is masculine then you feel more obliged to go to gym and look . . . particularly masculine. More than a straight guy who's just straight and goes to the gym because he wants to pull when he goes out, whatever. I think for gay men it might be more deep than that. So they feel the need to some extent to kind of compensate.

Marcus's use of the word "compensate" is revealing. The gay man constructed by Marcus's discourse was obligated to develop a muscular physique because he wanted to be perceived as masculine *in spite of* his homosexuality. Richard expressed

his view on why gay men enact masculine behaviours to compensate for their gay identity:

Richard [gay man]: Guys who are feminine would still engage, perhaps, in traditionally masculine activities and that, you know, redeem themselves in that way . . . I guess it comes to, like, a power dynamic in society where women are still perceived as inferior, and as long as men can somehow show that they are still masculine or male, they then are part of the dominant social group. Whereas if they're more effeminate then they lose that social power.

Richard suggested that engaging in activities that are stereotypically masculine offered redemption for the feminine gay man, who was disadvantaged by the conflation between gay femininity and being a woman. Accruing masculine capital through the enactment of masculine behaviours therefore served to promote gay men's position in the gender order. There was, however, a consensus among participants that not every gay man enacted masculine behaviours in order to accrue masculine capital: It was proposed that some gay men were not concerned about their masculinity and consequently were less likely to engage in the behaviours considered to be stereotypically masculine:

Antony [gay man]: I'm not trying to live up to anybody. I'm just doing what makes me happy, and, you know, so, I, you know, I don't like exercising . . .

Dylan [gay man]: I guess just how comfortable you are in yourself.

Antony: Yeah, I don't feel like I've needed to prove anything to anybody.

In this exchange, Antony and Dylan implied that for some men, accruing masculine capital was performative: demonstrating masculinity to others. In a different

focus group, Fiona framed the display of masculinity by some gay men in terms of insecurity regarding their sexual identity:

Fiona [straight woman]: Some other guys are very much insecure about the fact that they're gay, and they don't want to be. They try to have a girlfriend, they try to look at girls, they try to hide the fact that they're gay and that's when they will try to make it more inverted. They don't want to be seen as gay, so they can try and be as masculine as they possibly can be, and just hide that fact as much as they can. So it's just like that inner conflict within them.

Positioning gay as incommensurate with masculinity, Fiona suggested that insecure gay men pursued masculine capital in the domain of a false heterosexuality, thus establishing the intrinsic relationship between heterosexuality and perceived masculinity. As suggested by Fiona and the men in the following extract, the motivation to enact masculine behaviours might be, for some gay men, to conceal their sexual identity:

Darren [straight man]: Justin Fashanu, he was another one [gay sportsperson].  
He was gay.

...

Darren: And, and, you know, in a man's, man's world. So he, he probably tried to be more, more kind of macho the more-, 'cause he had to put on that.

Mike [straight man]: Overcompensate.

Darren: Yeah, to promote his masculinity because-, in order not to look as though he was gay.

Darren and Mike interpreted Fashanu's attempts to realise the ideals of hegemonic masculinity as a means of making up for the loss of masculine capital associated with being gay, in a social context dominated by straight men (sport). Being "macho" by enacting an exaggerated stereotypical masculinity not enacted by most straight men was conceptualised as inauthentic, a conscious performance of masculinity that served a specific purpose for gay men in certain contexts. Gay man Dylan, from a different focus group, concluded, ". . . if you saw somebody and they were more masculine, then you wouldn't think they were gay." However, Dylan also suggested that looking masculine did not necessarily afford sufficient masculine capital to avoid being perceived as gay:

Interviewer: Do you think [Tom Daley<sup>3</sup>] is a masculine guy?

Dylan: I wouldn't say he's a feminine guy, I wouldn't say obv-, like, mega masculine, but well, he's in good shape, competes for our country. I'd say he's mildly masculine. I guess when he opens his mouth then it goes a bit . . .

[Laughter]

Dylan: . . . when he talks, but . . . yeah. 'Cause a lot of people would say, "Ah, Tom Daley, he's obviously gay," before he came out, just because of the way he spoke I think. Whereas any other-, if he didn't speak I don't think you'd be able to guess that much.

According to Dylan, although Daley's physique and professional athleticism lent him a degree of masculinity, it was not sufficient to belie the gay identity conveyed via his voice. Dylan's comment about Daley's voice resonated with other participants: one of whom, straight man Tyler, suggested that a higher pitched voice with a "soft tone"

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<sup>3</sup> Tom Daley is a well-known British Olympic diver. He identified himself publicly as gay in 2014.

was an important identifying characteristic of gay men. From Jean-Paul's [gay man] perspective, this may irrevocably render gay men nonmasculine, notwithstanding the masculine capital they have accrued in other domains: "[A man] who has a high-pitched voice . . . this will never be masculine for me, even though he's very aggressive or very confident, I would not see him as masculine." A masculine voice can therefore be seen as an important component of masculinity for any man; and its absence one of the key threats to overall masculine capital for a gay man.

### ***3-D-2: Masculine capital and sex between men***

During an instance of anal intercourse between men, the insertive partner is often referred to as "the top" and the receptive partner as "the bottom." Furthermore, men who have a general preference for being the insertive partner often self-label and are referred to by others as "tops," those who are typically the receptive partner are known as "bottoms," and men who do not have a clear proclivity for one particular role are known to be "versatile" (Hart, Wolitski, Purcell, Gomez, & Halkitis, 2003). In the data collected for this study, there was consensus between gay male participants that the sexual roles available in anal intercourse between men had strong gender connotations. Discourses of heterosexual masculinity and femininity delineated gay men who were anally receptive and those who were anally penetrative, such that the top was considered "always" to enact a masculine role, and the bottom was considered "always" to enact a feminine role:

Jack [gay man]: With this whole top, bottom kind of thing, you have to fall into one of those discrete roles, or versatile I guess . . . And, like, the top is always masculine, the bottom is always feminine . . . and like, if you do not fall into that you have to, like, change yourself

. . .



Tim [gay man]: That's definitely true. I've . . . I think I've seen that around.

I've, 'cause, like, I've, I do not think I've seen . . . a feminine, feminine person who describes himself as a top.

In this discussion, Jack established how the dominant discourse constructed tops as masculine and bottoms as feminine. His use of the word "always" indicated that the gender stereotypes associated with sexual role were deeply entrenched. Tim's assertion that he had not seen a "feminine person who describes himself as a top" established two important things: first, that men self-identified as top or bottom (or versatile); and second, that being feminine was incongruent with identifying as a top and with being a top in a specific sexual encounter. Consequently, from Tim's perspective, top, bottom, and versatile described sexual role behaviours and secondary gay identities that were constructed with reference to self-perceived masculinity and femininity. Self-perceived masculinity and femininity could have a direct influence on a gay man's sexual behaviour: "It's that you're masculine and then sometimes you just go, 'Oh, I'm masculine so I should be a top,' and, 'Because I'm a top, therefore I'm even more masculine.'"

Masculinity and being a top were therefore considered mutually reinforcing: Self-perceived masculinity influenced the sexual role adopted, and men who identified as tops interpreted this as evidence of their masculinity. These associations were so powerful that a gay man's sexual self-label was predicted on the basis of how masculine or feminine they were perceived, as Jack described: "As in, like, I'm not masculine at all, and they're like, 'Oh, you're clearly a bottom.'" Jack also reported that some gay men went "off the charts to not look like a bottom," suggesting that, among gay men at least, bottoms were discernible by their appearance, that being identified as a bottom

was not favourable, and that some gay men would go to great lengths to avoid being perceived as such. He described how more masculine men viewed being a bottom: “If you get, like, bisexual guys who are, like, more masculine than gay guys, they always seem to be tops, like, they’re like, ‘Oh no, that’s one step too far,’ like, ‘I’m not *that* gay,’ you know.”

Jack’s discourse implied that while being a bottom was gay, being a top was closer to being straight. The gay men expressed the view that equating top with masculinity and bottom with femininity stemmed from a heteronormative understanding of sexual roles:

Dylan: If you’re a top, you’re penetrating the other person . . . which is more of a male role in a straight sexual relationship, I would think.

Marcus: Yeah, boys ask the question, “Who’s the man in your couple?”

Pete: Yeah, yeah.

Marcus: . . . I mean, they do not say, but the true question is, “Who’s the bottom, who’s the top?” . . . I think it, behind the question there is the idea that being a top is better . . .

Marcus suggested that there was an implicit understanding that being the top was preferable from the point of view of other men, as it is reminiscent of the heterosexual act of penetration of a woman by a straight man. Later in this discussion, Dylan suggested that the heteronormative discourse used for constructing sex between men made “one person the male and one person the female,” which also resonated with Richard, who employed the concept of masculine capital to offer his perspective on how some gay men managed the conflation between being a bottom and being a woman:

Richard: There is a lot of pressure in this, in, in the gay culture or community or whatever . . . to not be perceived as womanly, and to be a bottom is to be like a woman, and so they really buff up and become really visibly masculine as a way to offset the fact that they are bottoms . . . I've found a lot of guys who are really ripped and really gym-goers and enjoy outdoor stuff, or whatever traditional masculine things, but identify as hard-core power bottoms.

As a gay man, Richard positioned himself as someone with knowledge of gay culture, and who therefore understood the inauspicious connotations of being known as anally receptive within it. As a result, within discourses surrounding gay culture, men who were known as bottoms attempted to mitigate the threat to their masculine subjectivities posed by being anally receptive by seeking masculine capital in other domains, like muscularity. Richard also used his position to identify another secondary gay identity, which he associated with exaggerated muscularity and an interest in stereotypically masculine pursuits: the "power bottom." Some gay participants constructed the power bottom as a masculine gay man who wielded power and dominance over his sexual partner, despite assuming the anally receptive role:

Jean-Paul: You're just reversing the trend and you actually, no, you're supposed to be actually, no, sort of topping the tops . . .

Tim: So it's . . .

Jean-Paul: . . . so, then you're bottom, so . . .

Tim: . . . so it's about the power that makes you masculine. . .

Jean-Paul: Yeah.

Tim: . . . in that case, not about being penetrated.

Tim's perspective was that being penetrated did not inevitably equate to being feminine, if the power in the exchange belonged to the bottom, something that Jean-Paul described as "topping the tops." The hegemonic masculinity discourse functioned to subvert the stereotypes of the dominant, masculine top and the submissive, feminine bottom and revealed the complexity of the gender dynamics in sex between men, as shown in the extract below:

Alan [gay man]: Sometimes the bottom can be more dominant than the man-, than the top, because it's sort of, in that sort of role, it's only happening because he wants it to, if that makes sense? So he's in, he's in control . . . Often, quite often, particularly in porn, tops can be . . . sort of dehumanised, it's more the bottom sort of using a, a dildo as it were. But the person attached to the penis isn't important, it's just the penis itself.

The bottom's potential for masculinity was established in the discourse because he maintained control over the sexual encounter and exploited the penis for his own gains. The fact that Alan referred to "the top" initially as "the man" might suggest that the discourse he deployed was in conflict with the stereotypes he held of the masculine top and the feminine bottom.

### ***3-D-4: Masculine capital, gay masculinity, and alternative gay identities***

Some straight participants suggested that the intragroup competition and hierarchy essential to the hegemonic masculinity structure would not be found between gay men:

Joe [straight man]: I think gay people will have the most freedom in that respect. Like, they're not expected to be masculine.

James [straight man]: You kind of get taken out of that whole thing of trying to, getting lad points, I guess, if you're gay you're kind of withdrawn from that . . .

. . .

James: I guess it would be quite good coming out of that for a bit. [Laughs]

Bobby [straight man]: They can kind of escape, escape the sort of pressure.

. . .

James: Yeah, I guess 'cause they're on, all on the same level, I guess, they're all gay, so they've kind of got that in common, so they're all, like, "Well there's no need for me to establish myself more 'cause we're all the same," I guess. So I guess they almost think they've got equality. More, like, all on the same level.

Luke [straight man]: I can imagine it being, like . . . a group of girls, if that makes sense?

Luke's comparison between gay men and "girls" in terms of their relationship dynamics implied that gay men, like women, were not expected to be masculine because they did not function in a power hierarchy. Consequently, the pursuit of "lad points" (or masculine capital) by gay men was deemed unnecessary: they were relieved of the pressure to be masculine, something that James (who was bound by his heterosexuality to pursue masculine capital) envied. Laura also suggested that relationships between gay men were reminiscent of relationships between women:

Laura [straight woman]: With gay men, they kind of feel like they're on the same boat anyway, so they're, they're a bit more like, it's more like, if you have girls, and they do not really care, like, who's at the top . . .

Like James, Laura offered the view that gay men were not concerned with hierarchy, because they felt more equal to each other. The participants who were gay men, on the contrary, gave the perspective that dynamics of masculinity applied between some gay men, and suggested a hierarchical arrangement of different gay-and-masculine subidentities. One such subidentity was the “gay lad”.

Harry [gay man]: I know groups of laddy gay men, yeah. They go out to [Gay Nightclub<sup>4</sup>] and, together in London, or, yeah. But then it’s not quite the same kind of, like, complete lack of taste as straight lad culture . . . They still, like, eat at good restaurants and do not go and have a doner kebab, but there’s this kind of, like, sort of team mentality . . . to going out and pulling and yeah.

The gay lad constructed by Harry embodied some of the stereotypically masculine aspects of “laddy” behaviour—an affiliation to the “team” and overt promiscuity—while rejecting others. There was a distinct contrast between the discourse used by Harry to construct the gay lad and that used by the straight men to construct the straight lad. Whereas, from straight man James’ perspective, straight lads experienced a “pressure” to behave in a laddy way, Harry’s position, which he gave later in the discussion, was that gay lads actively *chose* to enact the aspects of lad culture they found “fun” and “sexy.” Laddy behaviour by gay men might therefore be seen as distinct from the pursuit of masculine capital by straight men, who engage in the same behaviours. As well as the gay lad, several other gay subidentities were named:

Max [gay man]: There’s too many gay categories now. Too many types of gay to keep up with.

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<sup>4</sup> The nightclub referenced by Harry is a men-only gay nightclub which is intended to appeal to men who identify as bears.

[Laughter]

Interviewer: Go on, name some of them Max! [Laughs]

Max: There's, like, twink and bear, and . . . well those are pretty much the only two, but then there's variations of those . . .

Harry: No, there's more, it's like, otter . . .

Max: . . . there's like, cub and otter-. Yeah, but that's like a type of bear.

Harry: Is it? No, an otter's different.

Max: Is it?

Harry: bears are big and burly, otters are svelte . . .

The participants used the terms “bear” and “twink” to refer to gay subidentities that were gendered in polar opposition, the former described in terms of their stereotypically masculine appearance (hirsuteness and a large, but not muscular, physique), the latter in terms of their youth and stereotypically feminine appearance (hairlessness and a slim frame). In hegemonic masculinity terms, bears were afforded masculine capital owing to their appearance, but they also were described as having the potential for femininity, which afforded them an alternative gay-and-masculine identity:

Richard: Although I'm not part of a bear . . . group, the masculinity I would associate with it is larger, hairier, but also friendlier and far more, far more generous and, and, and kind of emotional than mainstream gay ice cold masculinity . . .

Interviewer: So there's not just one type of gay masculinity?

Richard: No I think they're mul-, I mean, I think there are multiple types of masculinities in society and the same is true for gay culture, or gay community.

Richard's juxtaposition of characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity ("larger, hairier") with stereotypically feminine traits ("emotional") afforded bears an alternative—and for Richard, favourable—masculinity to the dominant gay masculinity. His discourse opened up positions for multiple gay masculinities, and the gay bear was an embodiment of one of them. From Pete's perspective, the bear's stereotypically masculine appearance did not necessarily provide the masculine capital to afford an overall masculine identity:

Pete [gay man]: My friends that are bears or whatever, like . . . To, if you look at them and you do not know them, you're like, "Oh yeah, perhaps they do look a bit manly," but I've found that they tend to be some of the campest people out there.

. . .

Pete: I don't think they'd see themselves as particularly manly, to be honest.

Interviewer: Really?

Pete: . . . it's just that's a, their look, and I think they've got the label slapped on them but I do not think they're really bothered about, like, what that label should technically imply.

Accessing his understanding of stereotypical masculinity, Pete's perspective was that bear was a label bestowed on certain gay men based on their stereotypically masculine appearance, but that these men did not necessarily embody traditional masculinity in other domains. Bears were, however, still perceived by some participants as more masculine than other gay subidentities. In the context of a hegemonic masculinity discourse, Pete noted that "twink and bear obviously have different . . .



masculinity ratings,” because bears were large and hairy, and therefore closer to traditionally masculine physiques.

Alan suggested that however masculine the bear’s appearance may be, no gay identity would supersede the identity at the very top of the hierarchy: “the mainstream identity of a guy,” which Harry categorised as the “jock.”

Alan [gay man]: A lot of gay guys say that to me, like, especially, I do not know, people, they do not necessarily feel like they fit to sort of kind of ideal, they say, “Oh I’ve always felt like I’m kind of at the bottom of . . . the ladder,” if that makes, sort of makes sense, and then they’d be, “Oh there’d be, like, a twink or a bear above me, and then . . .” Do you get what I mean? Yeah, then, like, there, there’d be the sort of kind of really muscular, sort of, kind of . . .

Harry: Jock.

. . .

Interviewer: What about the jock gay guy and the straight guy: where . . .? Are they the same in terms of their masculinity?

Max: I would say the straight guy is probably slightly more masculine, I’d say.

Harry: But then the jock has the foil of all the other gay guys below him in masculinity rating, and he’s like, you know, the, the, the straight guy doesn’t have that, and like you’re from this “stock”, you know.

In this exchange, Alan, Harry, and Max unequivocally positioned the gay man who embodied the characteristics of orthodox, hegemonic masculinity—with the exception of heterosexuality—at the top of the “ladder,” or hierarchy, of gay masculinities. Alan’s hegemonic masculinity discourse provided no space for femininity, hence the bear, with his friendly demeanour and emotionality, was relegated

to a lower rung of the ladder. Max's positioning of the "straight guy" as more masculine than the gay jock demonstrated how, notwithstanding their masculine credentials, the discourses available constructed gay men as fundamentally less masculine than their straight contemporaries.

### **3-E: Discussion**

The discourse analytic approach taken in this study provided the opportunity to examine discursive constructions of gay men and how they delineate the possibilities for gay men's masculine subjectivities, as articulated and understood by the gay men, straight women, and straight men who took part. Previous research has established that the extent to which a man is considered masculine depends on the behaviours and traits he exhibits, and that competencies in given domains of masculinity can compensate for limitations in other domains by ameliorating a man's overall masculine capital (e.g., de Visser & McDonnell, 2013; de Visser et al., 2009). This study adds to the current understanding of masculinities, finding that gay men may accrue and trade masculine capital in similar ways to straight men. They may also have possibilities for acquiring capital in realms, or fields (Bourdieu, 1977), that might only have value in relations between gay men. When gay men display the characteristics and behaviours that may afford masculine capital to straight men, the value of and power afforded by these characteristics may vary depending on whether masculinity is assessed with reference to heterosexual, hegemonic masculinity or outside of this context. The study has also identified discourses that do not construct gay masculinity as a singular entity: there is diversity in the masculine possibilities for gay men, just as there is a multiplicity of masculinities available to straight men.

### ***3-E-1: Summary of findings***

Positioned within a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, gay men who are concerned with being perceived as traditionally masculine may engage in at least some stereotypically masculine behaviours in order to acquire masculine capital. Both gay and straight participants suggested that gay men may accrue masculine capital in traditionally masculine domains, such as athleticism and muscularity, to overcome—or “compensate” for—being gay. It was also proposed that gay men’s success at achieving a viable masculine identity within a discourse of heterosexual, hegemonic masculinity depends on the absence of characteristics and behaviours associated with the stereotype of gay femininity—such as a feminine voice—notwithstanding the masculine capital they may have accrued elsewhere. This accords with previous findings that sexuality has a more profound impact on perceived masculinity than other behaviours and traits, such as physique (e.g., de Visser & McDonnell, 2013; de Visser et al., 2009)

The gay men in this study identified sexual role in anal intercourse as an important component of gay and gender identity, and identified sex between men as a domain where gay men have possibilities for accruing and trading masculine capital. The significance of sexual role in anal intercourse for gay men has been the subject of previous research. Kippax and Smith (2001), for example, found that most gay men described gay anal intercourse in terms of masculine-feminine and dominance-submission binaries, associating the insertive role with masculine dominance and the receptive role with feminine submission. However, as in the present study, some of the gay men in Kippax and Smith’s (2001) study also contested these binary descriptions, constructing bottoms as powerful, and having “strength in submission” (p. 430). In this study, the power bottom was identified as a sexual role and a secondary gay identity that has the potential to be more masculine (in hegemonic masculinity terms) than the

top, despite being an anally receptive role. Consequently, gay men may achieve a masculinity that is accordant with hegemonic masculinity ideology in fields of gay culture, if they are known to be power bottoms.

In the present study, gay men suggested that it is within a heteronormative sexual discourse that the masculine top and feminine bottom are constructed: Being anally receptive was positioned in opposition to masculinity owing to its symbolic resemblance to the receptivity of a woman in heterosexual vaginal intercourse. As Kippax and Smith (2001) observed, for a man with a masculine subjectivity to be a bottom might threaten their masculine identity. The participants in this study suggested that some bottoms seek masculine capital in other domains—for example, by exercising to achieve muscularity—in an attempt to overcome the feminine connotations of being a bottom, and thus to ameliorate this threat to their masculinity.

However, Bourdieu (1977) proposes that the value of capital varies in the different fields where it is produced and deployed: Credentials that afford power in one field (i.e., in a heteronormative context) may have a different meaning and afford power differently in another (i.e., between gay men). In the field of gay sexual dynamics, the value of muscularity for men who identify as a bottom or power bottom might not be related to masculine capital; rather it is suggested that muscularity may afford capital in sexual relations between men in a different way. Adams, Braun, and McCreanor (2014), for example, found that beauty, which included having a good body, was valued in relationships between gay men, and Lanzieri and Hildebrandt (2011) also discussed the appeal of muscularity for some gay men in terms of their sexual attraction to other similarly built men.

The ubiquity with which gay men referred to sexual role in anal intercourse, unprompted, in discussions about masculinity, warrants further investigation. Research

suggests that although sexual self-labels are predictive of actual role adopted in the majority of sexual encounters (Moskowitz, Rieger, & Roloff, 2008), some gay men who identify as either top or bottom may, on occasion, adopt the contrary role (Kippax & Smith, 2001; Moskowitz & Hart, 2011). Additionally, Grulich et al. (2014) found that only approximately one in five gay men had engaged in either receptive or insertive anal intercourse in their most recent sexual encounter, within the preceding 12 months. Future research may therefore examine whether the capital associated with identifying, or being perceived, as a top or a bottom within a given field of gay culture is related to the role adopted in actuality, and to actual engagement in anal intercourse.

In line with Connell's (1995) theory, the hegemonic masculinity discourse deployed across all groups of participants constructed homosexuality as incommensurate with traditional, orthodox masculinity. The central position of heterosexuality to masculinity was affirmed by participants who suggested that although gay men can be masculine, a masculine man will not be perceived as gay. Consequently, gay men can utilise masculine behaviours—and avoid feminine behaviours—in order to conceal their gay identity; and this can depend on geographic and social context (Pachankis, Westmaas, & Dougherty, 2011). Embodying a masculine identity that mirrors heterosexual masculinity may have particular value for gay men in contexts dominated by straight men, such as the domain of sport (Messner, 1995). However, the masculinity that gay men may convey in these contexts was identified by the participants in this study as inauthentic, an exaggerated masculinity that straight men may not be equally concerned with achieving. Whether a gay man is successful at accruing masculine capital may therefore depend on how their endeavours are perceived by others: If the masculinity is perceived as performative, then it may not be perceived as convincing.

The degree to which gay men are concerned with accruing masculine capital to mitigate being gay is likely to vary across time and between social fields (Bourdieu, 1977). As one gay participant in this study observed, there are occasions when appearing more feminine (or “camp”) might help to realise a particular, favourable outcome, such as attracting a sexual partner who prefers men with those characteristics. This accords with Drummond’s (2005b) finding regarding masculine fluidity: gay men may construct and maintain a masculine identity that is acceptable within a straight culture and simultaneously manage an alternative masculinity that is valued in gay culture.

The dominant discourse produced by gay and straight participants constructed masculinities in a hierarchical arrangement, positioning gay men as subordinate because of the association between homosexuality and femininity. This discourse provided gay men with two possibilities: to attempt to ameliorate their position in the gender order by pursuing masculine capital in traditionally masculine domains; or to reject masculinity in its orthodox, hegemonic form. As previous research has found to be true of some straight men (e.g., de Visser, 2009), this study identified discourses wherein gay men are unconcerned with accomplishing a particular “version” of masculinity. These men are therefore “relieved” of the pressure to acquire masculine capital because, comfortable with their sexual identity, they have no need to “compensate” for any losses: If masculinity is of no concern, then homosexuality does not render anything lost.

Because the hegemonic masculinity discourse positioned homosexuality in opposition to masculinity, some straight men and women proposed that gay men are not expected to be masculine. Therefore, gay men are afforded the flexibility not to aspire to hegemonic masculinity—and to dominate and subordinate other men in doing so—but

rather to function side-by-side with other men in a more inclusive arrangement, an observation that resonates with both Anderson's (2009) theory of inclusive masculinity and Connell's (1995) assumption that gay men maintain reciprocal rather than hierarchical relationships.

Some of the gay and straight participants in this study suggested a pluralistic interpretation of gay masculinity, reflecting what was also identified by Adams et al. (2014): The diversity in gay men's perspectives on what it means to be gay indicates that gay identity is "not a singular and uncomplicated category" (p. 465). In this study, gay men, but not straight participants, deployed discourses that constructed gay masculinities in a hierarchical arrangement, at least when masculinity was assessed with reference to hegemonic masculinity. This discordance between the perspectives of gay and straight people demonstrates the importance of involving straight men and women in the sample: The possibilities for gay men's subjectivities differ depending on the discourses deployed, which vary depending on the identity of those who deploy them.

Among gay men, a discourse of gay masculinities operated in parallel to the hegemonic masculinity discourse and opened up positions for various subidentities, including the gay lad, the twink, the bear, and a host of other "animal" subidentities, who varied in masculinity. Masculinity was conferred chiefly on the basis of the subidentities' display of stereotypically masculine physical characteristics: Bears were described as more masculine owing to their larger physical form and hirsuteness; twinks the least masculine, owing to their slimness and hairlessness. It was suggested, however, that bears also convey a feminine or camp identity, despite their masculine appearance. Within a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, capital is afforded to bears on account of their stereotypically masculine physical characteristics which, from a "trading capital" perspective, may provide them with the flexibility to also behave in

feminine ways (Anderson, 2005; de Visser & McDonnell, 2013; de Visser et al., 2009). However, the value of this capital outside of a hegemonic masculinity discourse is less clear: within a discourse of gay masculinities, the bear's masculine appearance and feminine qualities may convey social power, but the nature of that social power is unknown.

In this study, the gay lad was described as an appropriator of orthodox masculinity, but in the field of gay culture— or at least, in relations between gay men—the value attached to their behaviour was not interpreted in terms of the accrual of masculine capital, but had a unique meaning. It is therefore suggested that the twink's stereotypically feminine appearance—which for straight men would not be a source of masculine capital—may have value in a particular field of gay culture and therefore afford capital in a way that it may not do elsewhere. For example, Barron and Bradford (2007) found that thinness—a characteristic of a twink—was valued in some fields of gay culture, whereas it would not be a source of capital in the context of heterosexual, hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, an interesting direction for future research may be to examine how capital is afforded by the traits and behaviours associated with gay subidentities in various fields of gay culture. This may be particularly important in the context of gay men's health, as Lyons and Hosking (2014) found behavioural health disparities between men who identified as twinks and those who identified as bears, with the former more likely than the latter to smoke, drink alcohol, and be the receptive partner in anal sex.

The jock was constructed as the most masculine gay subidentity of them all, a result of his “mainstream” (i.e., straight) appearance, although the gay men in this study offered the view that he was not as masculine as a straight man with the same credentials. Some gay men, then, may achieve masculine dominance that is reminiscent



of hegemonic masculinity, but only within a structure of gay masculinities, only within fields of gay culture, and only when gay masculinities are assessed with reference to heterosexual, hegemonic masculinity ideology.

### ***3-E-2: Limitations***

Although this study makes an important contribution to the small body of literature regarding gay men and masculinity, it is not without its limitations. The sample was drawn from a city in the United Kingdom that is known for the liberal values of its inhabitants and their progressive stance on issues relating to sexuality and gender. The results may not reflect the attitudes toward gender and sexual identity held by people in the United Kingdom as a whole. There was a degree of reluctance among some participants, particularly those who identified as straight, to discuss differences between gay and straight men in terms of their masculinity.

Recruitment advertisements for this study appealed for participants to take part in a focus group study about “Gender and Identity.” It is possible, even likely, that some participants held particularly strong and established views about issues surrounding gender and identity, especially given the local context. The aim of this study was to identify the discourses that are available in constructing gay men and their possibilities for masculine subjectivity, which, it is acknowledged, are locally and temporally bound.

### ***3-E-3: Conclusion***

This exploratory study identified positions for gay men in a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, where gay men who are concerned about being perceived as masculine may acquire masculine capital in certain domains, to mitigate perceived “shortcomings” in others. Gay and straight participants both identified lack of heterosexuality as the greatest threat to a gay man’s masculinity and masculine subjectivity: This study has illustrated how some gay men are able to attempt to

surmount this through their display of stereotypically masculine traits and behaviours, such as athleticism and muscularity. These may enable men to achieve a masculinity that mirrors heterosexual masculinity, and therefore represents a viable masculinity to present within straight culture, so long as feminine traits and behaviours stereotypically associated with gay men are not present. However, gay men utilised alternative discourses to frame gay masculinities in different terms: not in terms of aspirations to a masculinity that fits and necessarily has value in heteronormative culture, but rather masculinities that are valued in fields occupied by gay men. Importantly, and in line with what has been suggested previously, this study has identified discourses that convey the complexity, plurality, and diversity of gay masculinity.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Study 2**

#### **Perceptions of gay men's masculinity are associated with their sexual self-label, voice quality and physique**

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#### **Key responsibilities**

Conceptualisation:	James Ravenhill & Dr Richard de Visser
Data collection:	James Ravenhill
Data analysis:	James Ravenhill
Drafting:	James Ravenhill
Reviewing and editing:	James Ravenhill & Dr Richard de Visser

#### **4-A: Abstract**

Like all other men, gay men may utilise stereotypically masculine attributes and behaviours in an attempt to accrue ‘masculine capital’, a term referring to the social power afforded by the display of traits and behaviours associated with orthodox, ‘hegemonic’ masculinity. Previous research findings suggest that gay sexual self-labels – conveying position preferences in anal intercourse between men – voice quality and muscularity may contribute to gay men’s masculine capital. This study examined the relative contribution to gay men’s masculine capital made by sexual self-labels, voice quality (deep/high-pitched) and physique (muscularity/thinness). It also assessed the beliefs gay men and straight people hold regarding the gendered nature of gay sexual self-labels in anal intercourse. Results from a survey of 538 participants showed that gay and straight people perceived the anally-insertive sexual self-label as the most masculine and the anally receptive self-label the least masculine. The findings also revealed that voice quality and physique were more strongly associated with perceptions of gay men’s masculinity than their sexual self-label, although gay men who had masculine attributes and were anally receptive were perceived as less masculine than those who had the same attributes and were anally-insertive.

*Key words: Gay men; Anal intercourse; Masculinity; Masculine capital*

#### **4-B: Introduction**

Perceptions of gay men's masculinity may be influenced by the position they typically adopt in anal intercourse with other men. Anally insertive men ('tops') are often defined as stereotypically masculine (powerful, dominant and physically strong), whereas receptive men ('bottoms') are typically ascribed the feminine characteristics of passivity and submission (Carballo-Diéguez et al., 2004; Johns, Pingel, Eisenberg, Santana, & Bauermeister, 2012; Kippax & Smith, 2001; Wilson et al., 2010). However, what is currently unknown is the extent to which sexual self-labels are associated with perceptions of gay men's masculinity compared with other gendered attributes.

The expectation that gay men have feminine vocal characteristics is a strong component of the culturally dominant stereotype of gay femininity (Madon, 1997), and muscularity has been identified as strongly associated with perceptions of men's masculinity (de Visser, Smith, & McDonnell, 2009; Drummond, 2005b; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017b). Therefore, this study examined the relative contribution to perceptions of gay men's masculinity made by sexual self-labels compared with voice quality and physique.

##### ***4-B-1: Cultural ideals of masculinity***

Perceptions and subjective experiences of masculinity may be associated with the extent to which men enact and endorse socially constructed expectations of what makes a 'real man' (Thompson, Pleck, & Ferrera, 1992). According to Connell (1995), manhood is most successfully enacted by men who embody 'hegemonic masculinity', a dominant form of masculinity that subordinates its alternatives. Hegemonic masculinity does not describe an archetype of man, although it may be embodied via the display of attributes associated with traditional, orthodox masculinity, including physical strength

(de Visser et al., 2009), financial power (Edley & Wetherell, 1999) and overt heterosexuality (Connell, 1995).

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) concept of 'symbolic capital', Anderson (2009) and de Visser et al. (2009) suggest that certain gendered characteristics and behaviours afford social power in the different 'fields', or social contexts, where they are produced. The power conveyed by the display of these characteristics and behaviours can be conceived in terms of 'masculine capital', which, like other forms of symbolic capital, can be lost, invested and traded (de Visser et al., 2009). Therefore, when men 'fail' in a given domain of masculinity, they can ameliorate their overall masculinity by acquiring masculine capital in alternative (masculine) domains. The concept of masculine capital can help to explain why some men incorporate stereotypically feminine behaviours into their gender performance and are still able to maintain a viable masculine identity (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013; de Visser et al., 2009).

Gay men may be disadvantaged in terms of accruing masculine capital because homosexuality has a particularly profound negative influence on perceived masculinity (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013). Heterosexuality maintains cultural patriarchy and gay men are culturally subordinated because their homosexuality is a threat to the ideology that it is women, not other men, who are the objects of sex for men (Donaldson, 1993). Homophobia and the stereotyping of gay men as feminine are at the core of hegemonic masculinity ideology (Connell, 1995; Donaldson, 1993), so gay men must negotiate their masculine identities in a cultural context where heterosexual masculinities are more valued (Eguchi, 2009).

#### ***4-B-2: Muscularity and voice quality***

Although some gay men contest hegemonic (and therefore, anti-feminine) masculinity and value more balanced expressions of gender (Wilson et al., 2010), internalised scripts of hegemonic masculinity may guide some gay men's behaviour: Characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity are valued over expressions of femininity in gay culture (Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeier, 1997; Borgeson & Valeri, 2015; Eguchi, 2009; Taywaditep, 2001). In particular, muscularity (i.e. physical strength) has been identified as an important component of some gay men's masculine identities (Barron & Bradford, 2007; Drummond, 2005b). Alignment with hegemonic masculinity ideology may explain some gay men's attraction to more muscular, and therefore more masculine, men (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). Muscular bodies have also been identified as means by which gay men may enact a heteromasculine identity: A gay man's muscular body is 'straight-acting' (Filiault & Drummond, 2008, p. 327). Muscularity may therefore afford gay men masculine capital, although it may not compensate for the possession of a feminine or 'gay-sounding' voice (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017b). Gay men's voices are stereotyped as feminine, characterised by a high pitch and a soft tone (Madon, 1997; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017b). Voice quality influences sexual orientation judgements of unknown people, based on how masculine or feminine their voice is perceived to be (e.g. Valentova & Havlíček, 2013). Gaudio (1994) found that participants consistently judged short sections of speech as either 'gay and effeminate', or as 'straight and masculine'; and Mack and Munson (2012) found that participants rated speech as more gay-sounding when the speaker produced hyperarticulated /s/sounds, which have a higher peak frequency, similar to the /s/produced by women. Voice quality is therefore likely to be associated with gay men's masculine capital.

#### ***4-B-3: Masculinity and sexual positioning in anal intercourse***

The sexual position that gay men typically adopt in anal intercourse may influence others' perceptions of their masculinity. Men who self-label as anally insertive 'tops' are commonly defined (and may identify) in hegemonic masculine terms – powerful, dominant and physically strong – whereas self-labelled, anally receptive 'bottoms' are often described and identify as passive and effeminate (Johns et al., 2012; Moskowitz, Rieger, & Roloff, 2008; Wilson et al., 2010; Zheng, Hart, & Zheng, 2012). Furthermore, men who are perceived as stereotypically masculine – i.e. are muscular and have stereotypically masculine facial characteristics – are more likely to be perceived as tops than bottoms, whereas more feminine gay men are assumed to be bottoms (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017b; Tskhay & Rule, 2013).

The endorsement of gender stereotypes may be related to the adoption of a particular sexual self-label. For example, bottoms are more likely than tops to have been gender nonconforming (i.e. more feminine) in childhood (Weinrich, Grant, Jacobson, Robinson, & McCutchan, 1992). Further, Moskowitz and Roloff (2017) found that identification as a bottom was related to the desire for a gender typical (i.e. masculine) partner, when men were concerned about their partners' physical strength and psychological dominance. Tellingly, partner gender typicality was negatively related to identification as a top. Having a larger penis is related to self-labelling as a top, which may reflect gay men's beliefs conflating penis size with masculinity (Drummond & Filiault, 2007; Grov, Parsons, & Bimbi, 2010; Moskowitz & Hart, 2011).

Research has revealed intersections between sexual self-label, masculinity and other aspects of identity. For example, Lick and Johnson (2015) found that black men, who were perceived as more masculine than Asian and white men, were more likely to show a preference for the top position. Black men are also more likely to engage in



insertive anal intercourse than men of other ethnicities (Groß, Rendina, Ventuneac, & Parsons, 2016). Additionally, ‘bears’ (gay men characterised by large physiques and hirsute bodies) are less likely to report receptive intercourse than those who identify as younger and more feminine ‘twinks’ (Lyons & Hosking, 2014).

Gay men who may adopt either position in a given occasion of anal intercourse often self-label as ‘versatile’ (Moskowitz & Hart, 2011). Versatility may offer some gay men the opportunity to eschew the gender stereotypes associated with sexual self-labels: Some studies have identified interpretations of versatility as a more egalitarian arrangement between sexual partners (Carballo-Diéguez et al., 2004; Johns et al., 2012). Versatile men fall in between tops and bottoms in self-reported measures of masculinity (Moskowitz & Hart, 2011), and it has been suggested that versatility may reflect some men’s desire to balance both masculinity and femininity as part of an alternative gender expression (Johns et al., 2012; Wilson et al., 2010). Studies have reported that some gay men contest the validity and relevance of the gender stereotypes of sexual self-labels. Although the sexual positioning of the gay men in their study was often guided by beliefs about gender, Carballo-Diéguez et al. (2004) noted that some participants conceptualised the masculine-top, feminine-bottom dichotomy as a heterosexist construct. Further, gay men do not always conceptualise bottoming as inherently feminine. Being anally penetrated may be perceived as masculine if it occurs without the use of a condom (Dowsett, Williams, Ventuneac, & Carballo-Diéguez, 2008; Wheldon, Tilley, & Klein, 2014), and bottoms can acquire masculinity in hegemonic masculine terms by controlling the top’s pleasure and determining how much power he is afforded (Hoppe, 2011; Kiguwa, 2015; Kippax & Smith, 2001). Furthermore, some predominantly anally receptive men self-label as ‘power bottoms’ and experience intercourse as masculine because they dominate their sexual partner during intercourse,

and/or because they can endure prolonged and intense anal penetration (Johns et al., 2012; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017b). The gender stereotypes associated with sexual self-labels might therefore fail to capture the complex dynamics involved in anal intercourse between men.

#### ***4-B-4: The present study***

The association between sexual self-labels and gender may reflect gay men's sense-making of the positions in anal intercourse in a cultural context of hegemonic, heteromasculine normativity. One aim of this study was to assess how gay men perceive the masculinity of different gay sexual self-labels, and to establish whether straight people also perceive these self-labels as gendered.

Hypothesis 1: The top sexual self-label will be perceived by gay men as more masculine than any other and the bottom sexual self-label will be perceived as less masculine than any other. The versatile label will be perceived as less masculine than the top label, but more masculine than the bottom label. The power bottom label will be perceived as more masculine than the bottom self-label.

If sexual self-labelling by gay men is associated with perceptions of their masculinity, then the self-labels they convey may be related to their engagement in other masculine behaviours, as they negotiate and attempt to maintain culturally endorsed masculine identities (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013). Therefore, a second aim of this study was to identify the relative contribution to perceptions of gay men's masculinity of sexual self-labels compared to voice quality and physique. The attribute that is most strongly associated with perceptions of masculinity might be seen as contributing the most to gay men's masculine capital. Although it has been found

previously that voice quality is one of the strongest components of the gay male femininity stereotype, it is unknown how strongly it is associated with perceptions of gay men's masculinity compared to physique and sexual self-label. Nor is it known whether straight people would perceive sexual self-labels as gendered. Therefore, no further hypothesis is appropriate.

#### **4-C: Method**

Sample demographics are displayed in Table 4.1. The sample comprised 538 respondents aged 18–67 years, who lived in the United Kingdom. Of these, 202 were gay men, 88 were straight men and 248 were straight women. Participants were recruited from across the UK. Data from participants who were not located in the UK were excluded from the analysis.

Participants were recruited through an advertisement placed on the host university's participant database, advertisements placed on social media sites, advertisements placed in gay venues in the city local to the host university, and word of mouth. Advertisements promoting the study appealed for participants for an "Online Questionnaire about Identity and Lifestyle".

Sixty-six per cent of participants who started the questionnaire answered all questions. The majority of those who withdrew from the questionnaire before completing it did so before responding to the first key measure. Duplicate responding to the questionnaire was not possible.

The questionnaire was hosted online, on a secure server. The welcome page contained details of consent procedures, data protection and assurances of anonymity. Participants could opt into a draw to win one of two prizes of £25, and students of Psychology at the host institution could instead choose to receive research participation

credits. All data were kept in password-protected files accessible only to the researchers. Ethical approval was acquired from the host institution.

#### ***4-C-2: Measures***

Participants rated on two separate scales of 0–10 (anchors: ‘not at all’; ‘extremely’) the masculinity and femininity of four gay sexual self-labels: bottom, top, versatile and power bottom, which were defined as follows:

In penetrative (anal) sex between men, a man who penetrates his sexual partner is often referred to as a ‘top’. A man who is penetrated is often referred to as a ‘bottom’. A man who adopts either sexual role is often known as ‘versatile’. A man who is a bottom and who directs high-intensity, prolonged anal penetration with his sexual partner is often referred to as a ‘power bottom’.

Order of exposure to the ‘How masculine. . .?’ and ‘How feminine. . .?’ questions was randomised to control for order effects. Femininity scores were subtracted from masculinity scores for each sexual self-label to generate an overall relative gender score: positive scores indicated that the self-label was perceived as more masculine than feminine, and negative scores the reverse. Consequently, scores indicated masculinity ratings relative to femininity ratings. Scores of zero indicated that the self-label was considered gender-neutral (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013).

Adapting a measure used previously by de Visser and McDonnell (2013), participants rated on a scale of 0–10 (anchors: ‘not at all’; ‘extremely’) the masculinity of eight men who were identified as either top or bottom, muscular or thin and who had either a deep or high-pitched voice. In this  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  design, the men were described as ‘A [top/bottom] who has a [large, muscular/small, thin] physique and a [deep/high-

pitched] voice'. An additional description of a straight man was added, who was muscular, had a deep voice and received 'insertive anal stimulation from a female sexual partner'. Ratings of the four bottoms were subtracted from the ratings of the four tops to assess the contribution sexual self-labels made to perceptions of masculinity. The same calculation was performed with ratings from the four muscular men and four thin men, and the four deep-voiced men and four high-voiced men. These 'Masculine Difference Scores' indicated the masculine capital accredited to self-label, voice quality and physique (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013).

Gay men were asked the following questions: (1) 'In a perfect world, if it were only up to you, which sexual role would you consistently adopt in sex with another man?' and (2) 'In reality, with actual male sexual partners, which role do you consistently adopt?' For both questions, the response options were 'bottom'/'versatile'/'top'/'I do not have anal sex or do not have anal sex consistently enough to answer'. The answers to these questions reflected the participants' position preferences and the positions they adopted most frequently in actuality (Moskowitz & Hart, 2011).

#### ***4-C-3: Data analysis***

The analyses explored within-subject differences in relative masculinity ratings of the four sexual self-labels and masculinity ratings of the nine hypothetical men. Within-subject analyses are presented for the responses of gay men, straight men and straight women, respectively. Between-subject analyses were performed to identify differences in relative masculinity ratings of the sexual self-labels and in masculinity ratings of the nine hypothetical men, between gay men, straight men and straight women.

Owing to differences in the mean age of the gay men, straight men and straight women ( $F(2, 277.98) = 75.10, p < .001$ ) and the disproportionate number of straight women who were current undergraduates, between-subject analyses were based on group means adjusted for age and status as a student/non-student.

Robust methods were used for the analyses. Robust repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVA) and corresponding post hoc tests were conducted in R i3.2.3 (R Core Team, 2013) using the WRS2 package for robust methods (Mair, Schoenbrodt, & Wilcox, 2015). A significance level of  $p < .001$  was applied. Both the main test and post hoc tests were based on 2000 bootstrapped samples and 20% trimmed means, which are suitable for data that violate the assumption of normality and which can control the probability of a type 1 error (Wilcox, 2012). Post hoc tests used the default alpha of  $p = .05$ , which cannot be altered in functions from the WRS2 package.

Robust multiple regression and robust analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) were conducted in SPSS 22.00 (IBM Corp, 2013). Robust analyses were based on 1000 bootstrapped samples to compute bias-corrected and accelerated 95% confidence intervals (CI) (Efron & Tibshirani, 1993). ANCOVA post hoc tests used the Bonferroni correction.

#### **4-D: Results**

##### ***4-D-1: Sample***

Participant demographic information is provided in Table 4.1. The majority (61.2%) of participants were aged 18–30 years. Most were white (88.7% of n). A total of 154 participants (28.6%) were current undergraduate students.

Table 4.1:

*Description of the sample*

	Gay men (n=202)	Straight men (n=88)	Straight women (n=248)
Mean age ( <i>SD</i> )	36.25 (10.41)	24.76 (7.36)	25.67 (10.77)
Ethnicity (%):			
White	90	91	87
Black	1.5	0	2
Chinese or Other Asian	2	6	6
Mixed	5.5	2	4
Other	<1	1	1
Education (%)			
No formal qualifications	2	1	1.6
High School qualifications	26.7	33	25.8
Current undergraduate	7.4	25	47.2
Completed undergraduate	33.7	20.5	13.3
Postgraduate qualifications	30.2	20.5	12.1
Ideal position (%):			
Top	16.8	-	-
Versatile	52.5	-	-
Bottom	19.8	-	-
No anal intercourse	10.9	-	-
Actual position (%):			
Top	30.2	-	-
Versatile	28.7	-	-
Bottom	29.7	-	-
No anal intercourse	11.4	-	-

*Note:* Ideal Position = the position in anal intercourse that the participant would ideally adopt consistently (either top, versatile, bottom, power bottom, or no anal intercourse). Actual Position = the position in anal intercourse most frequently adopted (either top, versatile, bottom, power bottom, or no anal intercourse). Ideal and Actual Position measures taken for gay men only. High School qualifications include GCSE qualifications (normally taken at age 16) and A-Level qualifications (normally taken at age 18).

#### ***4-D-2: The masculinity of gay sexual self-labels***

Table 4.2 shows the group means, adjusted for participant age and student status, of the masculinity ratings of the four sexual self-labels. Robust ANCOVA were conducted to identify the effect of group (sexual identity) on beliefs regarding the masculinity of gay sexual self-labels. Age was significantly related to masculinity ratings for bottom ( $F(1, 533) = 9.20, p = .003$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ ). The main effects of group on relative masculinity ratings of the four sexual self-labels are shown in Table 4.2: Gay men gave significantly higher ratings of relative masculinity than straight men for all of the sexual self-labels, and significantly higher relative masculinity ratings than straight women for all but power bottom. Straight women gave significantly higher relative masculinity ratings than straight men for all but bottom.

Robust repeated measures ANOVA were conducted to examine within-subject differences in the relative masculinity ratings between the four sexual self-labels. Significant within-subject differences were found in relative masculinity ratings given by gay men ( $F(1.86, 225.57) = 62.12, p < .001, F_{\text{crit}} = 3.13, \eta^2 = 0.55$ ), straight men ( $F(2.21, 117.03) = 22.09, p < .001, F_{\text{crit}} = 2.83, \eta^2 = 0.60$ ) and straight women ( $F(1.83, 272.23) = 74.55, p < .001, F_{\text{crit}} = 3.33, \eta^2 = 0.59$ ). The results of post hoc tests that identified within-subject differences are given in Table 4.3. Gay men, straight men and straight women rated top significantly higher in relative masculinity than the other self-labels. Bottom was rated the lowest in relative masculinity by straight participants; gay men rated bottom lower in relative masculinity than versatile, but there was no difference in gay men's relative masculinity ratings between bottom and power bottom. There were no significant differences in gay men's, straight men's or straight women's relative masculinity ratings between versatile and power bottom.



Table 4.2

*Between-subject differences in beliefs regarding the relative masculinity of gay sexual self-labels*

	Adjusted Mean (SE)			
	Gay Men ( <i>n</i> = 202)	Straight Men ( <i>n</i> = 88)	Straight Women ( <i>n</i> = 248)	
Top	4.67 <sup>a</sup> (0.30)	0.80 <sup>b</sup> (0.41)	2.35 <sup>c</sup> (0.24)	$F_{(2, 533)} = 34.07, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.11$
Versatile	2.37 <sup>a</sup> (0.28)	-0.52 <sup>b</sup> (0.39)	0.66 <sup>c</sup> (0.22)	$F_{(2, 533)} = 21.46, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.08$
Power Bottom	1.09 <sup>a</sup> (0.35)	-0.73 <sup>b</sup> (0.47)	1.21 <sup>a</sup> (0.27)	$F_{(2, 533)} = 7.34, p = .001, \eta^2 = 0.03$
Bottom	0.49 <sup>a</sup> (0.35)	-2.02 <sup>b</sup> (0.48)	-1.08 <sup>b</sup> (0.28)	$F_{(2, 533)} = 10.74, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.04$

*Note.* Response scales 0-10 (anchors: “not at all masculine/feminine”; “extremely masculine/feminine”). Scores from femininity scale subtracted from scores from masculinity scale. Positive scores indicate that the self-label was perceived as more masculine than feminine, negative scores the reverse. Range of possible scores -10 to 10.

Top is anally-insertive; bottom is anally-receptive; versatile has no proclivity for a particular position and be either anally-insertive or receptive; power bottom is anally-receptive and directs high intensity, prolonged anal penetration. Partial  $\eta^2$  effect sizes reported.

<sup>a, b, c</sup>denote significant between-subject differences

Table 4.3:

*Within-subject differences in relative masculinity ratings of sexual self-labels in anal intercourse between men*

	Gay Men ( <i>n</i> = 202)			Straight Men ( <i>n</i> = 88)			Straight Women ( <i>n</i> = 248)		
	$\hat{\Psi}$	95% CI	<i>d</i>	$\hat{\Psi}$	95% CI	<i>d</i>	$\hat{\Psi}$	95% CI	<i>d</i>
Top vs Versatile	3.01	[2.27, 3.74]	0.61	1.28	[0.41, 2.15]	0.36	1.71	[1.18, 2.23]	0.54
Top vs Power bottom	3.49	[2.56, 4.42]	0.80	1.67	[0.52, 2.81]	0.41	1.25	[0.71, 1.79]	0.37
Top vs Bottom	4.04	[2.95, 5.13]	0.90	2.94	[1.70, 4.19]	0.77	3.33	[2.47, 4.19]	0.99
Versatile vs Power bottom	0.48	[-0.12, 1.09]	-	0.39	[-0.50, 1.27]	-	-0.45	[-0.91, 0.01]	-
Versatile vs Bottom	1.03	[0.47, 1.60]	0.37	1.67	[0.83, 2.50]	0.44	1.63	[1.16, 2.09]	0.58
Power bottom vs Bottom	0.55	[-0.07, 1.17]	-	1.28	[0.53, 2.02]	0.33	2.08	[1.41, 2.75]	0.65

Note.  $\hat{\Psi}$  = psihat; CI = bootstrapped confidence interval. Effect sizes given for significant results only.

For gay men, multiple regressions were run to establish whether masculinity ratings for sexual self-labels were associated with the participants' own self-labels or positioning behaviour in actuality. Neither Ideal Position (self-label) nor Actual Position were significantly related to gay men's ratings of the self-labels (see Table 4.6).

***4-D-3: The masculinity of top/bottom, muscular/thin and deep/high-voiced men***

Figure 1 and Table 4.4 display the adjusted mean masculinity ratings of the nine hypothetical men who possessed different characteristics. One-way ANCOVA were conducted to identify between-subject differences in beliefs regarding the masculinity of the nine hypothetical men. Analyses were conducted on means adjusted for age and for participant student/non-student status. Age was significantly related to the masculinity ratings of the hypothetical men described as top, muscular, deep voiced ( $F(1, 533) = 4.15, p = .04, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .01$ ) and top, muscular, high voiced ( $F(1, 533) = 7.03, p = .008, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .01$ ). Table 4 shows the between subject differences in masculinity ratings of the nine hypothetical men.

Robust repeated measures ANOVA revealed significant within-subject differences in masculinity ratings between the hypothetical men, given by gay men ( $F(3.50, 423.94) = 77.13, F_{\text{crit}} = 2.48, p < .001, \eta^2 = .86$ ), straight men ( $F(4.21, 223.03) = 23.04, F_{\text{crit}} = 2.25, p < .001, \eta^2 = .69$ ) and straight women ( $F(3.19, 475.90) = 79.72, F_{\text{crit}} = 2.59, p < .001, \eta^2 = .72$ ). Post hoc tests were conducted to identify significant differences in the masculinity ratings between the hypothetical man rated as the most masculine and other, less masculine men, and significant differences between the hypothetical man rated as the least masculine and other, more masculine men.

Results from the post hoc tests revealed that gay men rated the top, muscular, deep-voiced man significantly higher in masculinity than the bottom, muscular, deep-voiced man ( $\hat{\Psi} = 1.23, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.68, 1.79], d = 0.35$ ). The top, muscular, deep-voiced

man was therefore rated by gay men as significantly more masculine than every other hypothetical man. The hypothetical man described as bottom, thin, high-voiced was rated by gay men as significantly less masculine than the man described as top, thin, high-voiced ( $\Psi = -0.66$ , 95% CI  $[-1.11, -0.20]$ ,  $d = 0.22$ ). Gay men therefore rated the bottom, thin, high-voiced man as the least masculine hypothetical man.

Straight men's masculinity ratings of the top, muscular, deep-voiced man were not significantly higher than their ratings of the bottom, muscular, deep-voiced man ( $\Psi = 0.69$ , 95% CI  $[-0.06, 1.43]$ ) or the hypothetical man described as straight and anally receptive to a female partner, muscular and deep-voiced ( $\Psi = 0.41$ , 95% CI  $[-0.38, 1.20]$ ). Straight men rated the hypothetical men described as top, muscular, deep-voiced and straight, muscular, deep-voiced as significantly more masculine than the top, thin, deep-voiced man ( $\Psi = 1.31$ , 95% CI  $[0.55, 2.08]$ ,  $d = 0.60$ ;  $\Psi = 0.91$ , CI  $[0.08, 1.73]$ ,  $d = 0.46$ ). There was no significant difference in straight men's masculinity ratings of the bottom, thin, high-voiced man and the top, thin, high-voiced man ( $\Psi = -0.33$ , 95% CI  $[-0.80, 0.13]$ ), but the former was rated by straight men as less masculine than the hypothetical man described as bottom, muscular, high-voiced ( $\Psi = -0.76$ , 95% CI  $[-1.46, -0.05]$ ,  $d = 0.53$ ).

Straight women rated the top, muscular, deep-voiced man significantly higher in masculinity than the bottom, muscular, deep-voiced man ( $\Psi = 0.75$ , 95% CI  $[0.47, 1.02]$ ,  $d = 0.28$ ), and therefore significantly more masculine than any other hypothetical man. The bottom, thin, high-voiced man was rated by straight women as significantly lower in masculinity than the top, thin, high-voiced ( $\Psi = -0.42$ , 95% CI  $[-0.67, -0.17]$ ,  $d = 0.19$ ) and therefore was rated as the least masculine hypothetical man.

Figure 4.1:

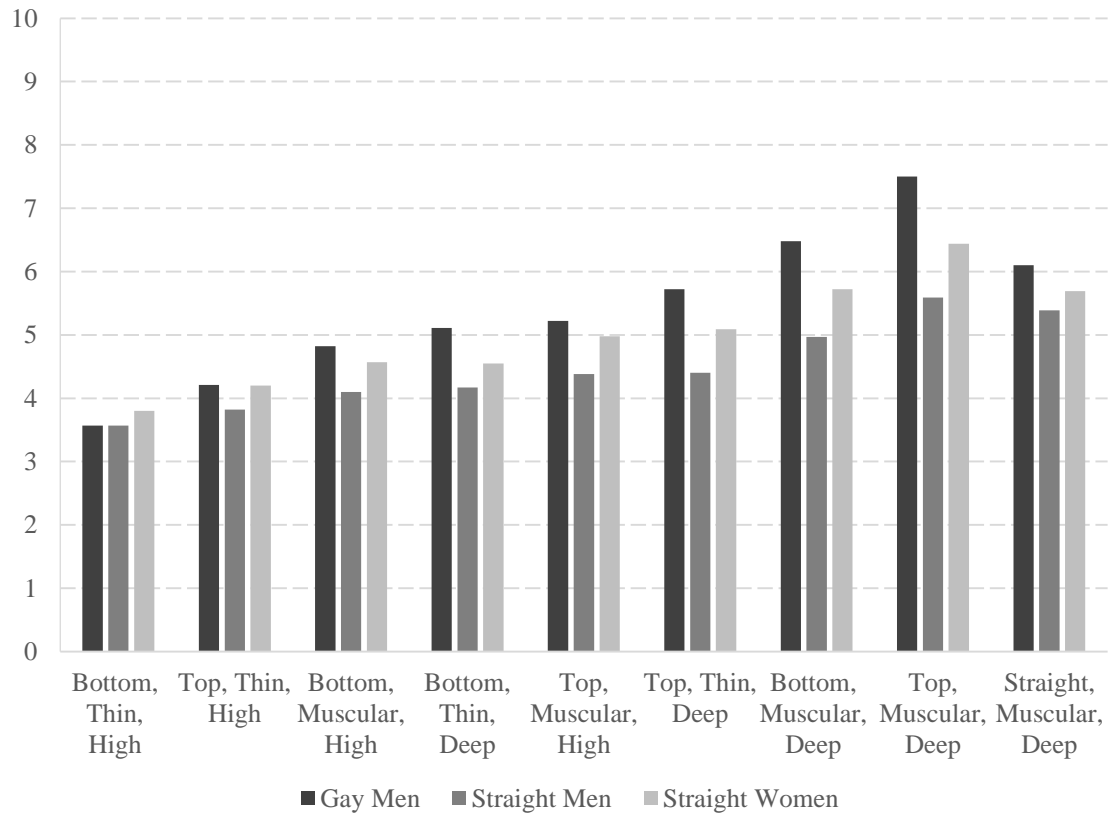
*Masculinity ratings of nine hypothetical men*

Table 4.4

*Differences in beliefs regarding the masculinity of gay sexual self-labels, physique and voice quality*

	Adjusted Mean (SE)			
	Gay Men ( <i>n</i> = 202)	Straight Men ( <i>n</i> = 88)	Straight Women ( <i>n</i> = 248)	
Top, Muscular, Deep voice	7.50 (0.20) <sup>a</sup>	5.59 (0.28) <sup>b</sup>	6.44 (0.16) <sup>c</sup>	$F_{(2, 533)} = 18.07, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$
Bottom, Muscular, Deep voice	6.48 (0.20) <sup>a</sup>	4.97 (0.28) <sup>b</sup>	5.72 (0.16) <sup>c</sup>	$F_{(2, 533)} = 10.89, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$
Top, Thin, Deep voice	5.72 (0.19) <sup>a</sup>	4.40 (0.25) <sup>b</sup>	5.09 (0.15) <sup>c</sup>	$F_{(2, 533)} = 9.77, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$
Top, Muscular, High voice	5.22 (0.19) <sup>a</sup>	4.38 (0.25) <sup>b</sup>	4.98 (0.15) <sup>a</sup>	$F_{(2, 533)} = 3.96, p = .02, \eta^2 = .02$
Bottom, Thin, Deep voice	5.11 (0.19) <sup>a</sup>	4.17 (0.26) <sup>b</sup>	4.55 (0.15) <sup>b</sup>	$F_{(2, 533)} = 5.02, p = .00, \eta^2 = .02$
Bottom, Muscular, High voice	4.82 (0.19)	4.10 (0.26)	4.57 (0.15)	$F_{(2, 533)} = 2.71, p = .07$
Top, Thin, High voice	4.21 (0.19)	3.82 (0.26)	4.20 (0.15)	$F_{(2, 533)} = 1.00, p = .37$
Bottom, Thin, High voice	3.57 (0.20)	3.57 (0.27)	3.80 (0.16)	$F_{(2, 533)} = 0.56, p = .57$
Straight, Muscular, Deep voice	6.10 (0.21)	5.39 (0.29)	5.69 (0.17)	$F_{(2, 533)} = 2.23, p = .11$
Masculinity Rating Range	3.93 (0.26) <sup>a</sup>	2.02 (0.35) <sup>b</sup>	2.64 (0.20) <sup>b</sup>	$F_{(2, 533)} = 12.47, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05$
Masculinity Difference Score:				
Sexual role (Top-Bottom)	0.67 (0.09)	0.34 (0.12)	0.52 (0.07)	$F_{(2, 533)} = 2.68, p = .07$
Voice quality (Deep-High)	1.74 (0.13) <sup>a</sup>	0.82 (0.17) <sup>b</sup>	1.06 (0.10) <sup>b</sup>	$F_{(2, 533)} = 13.08, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05$
Physique (Muscular-Thin)	1.35 (0.12) <sup>a</sup>	0.77 (0.16) <sup>b</sup>	1.02 (0.09) <sup>b</sup>	$F_{(2, 533)} = 4.89, p = .008, \eta^2 = .02$

*Note.* Possible range of masculinity scores for hypothetical men: 0 to 10. Masculinity Rating Range = the difference between ratings for men with the most and fewest masculine attributes. Possible range of Masculinity Rating Range: 0 to 10. Masculinity Difference Scores = calculated by subtracting masculinity ratings for the men with the least masculine attribute (bottom; thin; high voice) from those for the men with the most (top; muscular; deep voice). Possible range of Masculinity Difference Scores: -10 to 10. Data from the hypothetical straight man are omitted from the Masculinity Difference Score calculation. <sup>a, b, c</sup>denote significant between-subject differences

As shown in Table 4.4, the Masculinity Rating Range – representing the difference between ratings for the man with the most masculine credentials and the man with the fewest – was significantly greater for gay men than it was for straight men ( $M_{diff} = 1.96, p < .001$ , BCa 95% CI [0.72, 3.19],  $d = 0.51$ ) and straight women ( $M_{diff} = 1.44, p < .001$ , CI [0.48, 2.39],  $d = 0.37$ ). There was no significant difference in the Masculinity Rating Range between straight men and straight women ( $M_{diff} = -0.52, p = .51$ , CI [-1.64, 0.60]).

***4-D-4: Masculinity Difference Scores for sexual self-label, voice quality and physique***

Robust ANCOVA were conducted on Masculinity Difference Scores, adjusting for age and student/non-student status. Age was related to Masculinity Difference Scores for physique ( $F(1, 533) = 18.22, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ ). Table 4.4 conveys between-subject differences in Masculinity Difference Scores.

Robust repeated measures ANOVA were undertaken on Masculinity Difference Scores, which convey the extent to which perceptions of masculinity were associated with sexual self-label (top-bottom), physique (muscular-thin) and voice quality (deep-high). Results revealed significant within-subject differences in gay men's Masculinity Difference Scores ( $F(1.87, 226.40) = 43.51, p < .001, F_{crit} = 3.23, \eta^2 = .50$ ); those of straight men ( $F(1.76, 93.39) = 9.07, p < .001, F_{crit} = 3.41, \eta^2 = .48$ ); and those of straight women ( $F(1.91, 285.01) = 312.55, p < .001, F_{crit} = 2.98, \eta^2 = .47$ ). As shown in Table 4.5, post hoc tests showed that gay men's Masculinity Difference Scores were significantly greater for voice quality and physique than they were for sexual self-label. The same was found for the Masculinity Difference Scores of straight men and straight women. Gay men's Masculinity Difference Scores for voice quality were significantly greater than they were for physique. This difference was not found in the straight participants' Masculinity Difference Scores.

Table 4.5:

*Within-subject differences in masculinity difference scores for sexual self-label, voice quality and physique*

	Gay Men ( <i>n</i> = 202)			Straight Men ( <i>n</i> = 88)			Straight Women ( <i>n</i> = 248)		
	$\hat{\Psi}$	95% CI	<i>d</i>	$\hat{\Psi}$	95% CI	<i>d</i>	$\hat{\Psi}$	95% CI	<i>d</i>
Sexual role vs Voice quality	-1.06	[-1.36, -0.77]	-0.71	-0.31	[-0.55, -0.07]	-0.41	-0.48	[-0.63, -0.32]	-0.42
Sexual role vs Physique	-0.51	[-0.74, -0.27]	-0.51	-0.44	[-0.76, -0.12]	-0.43	-0.53	[-0.71, -0.35]	-0.42
Voice quality vs Physique	0.56	[0.26, 0.85]	0.17	-0.13	[-0.37, 0.12]	-	-0.06	[-0.24, 0.12]	-

*Note.* Masculinity Difference Scores = calculated by subtracting masculinity ratings for the men with the least masculine attribute (bottom; high voice; thin) from those for the men with the most (top; deep voice; muscular). Ratings for the hypothetical straight man are omitted from the Masculinity Difference Score calculation.  $\hat{\Psi}$  = psihat; CI = bootstrapped confidence interval. Effect sizes given for significant results only.



Multiple regression on gay men's Masculinity Difference Scores with Ideal and Actual Position produced non-significant results: Masculinity Difference Scores were not significantly related to gay men's own sexual self-labels or sexual positioning in practice (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6:

*Multiple regression on gay men's masculinity ratings and masculinity difference scores*

		<i>B</i>	<i>S.E. B</i>	$\beta$
Top	Constant	4.96	0.73	
	Ideal position	0.19	0.38	.05, $p=.61$
	Actual position	-0.22	0.33	-.06, $p=.51$
Versatile	Constant	3.38	0.81	
	Ideal position	-0.25	0.38	-.06, $p=.52$
	Actual position	-0.07	0.32	-.02, $p=.82$
Power Bottom	Constant	2.76	1.03	
	Ideal position	-0.38	0.51	-.07, $p=.47$
	Actual position	-0.20	0.40	-.04, $p=.60$
Bottom	Constant	1.45	1.02	
	Ideal position	-0.17	0.51	.03, $p=.74$
	Actual position	0.01	0.42	.00, $p=.99$
MDS: Top-bottom	Constant	0.58	0.32	
	Ideal position	0.20	0.13	.14, $p=.13$
	Actual position	-0.18	0.10	-.15, $p=.06$
MDS: Muscular-thin	Constant	1.59	0.30	
	Ideal position	-0.12	0.15	-.07, $p=.41$
	Actual position	-0.06	0.13	-.04, $p=.62$
MDS: Deep-high	Constant	1.61	0.38	
	Ideal position	0.06	0.20	.03, $p=.78$
	Actual position	0.03	0.16	.02, $p=.85$

*Note:* MDS = Masculinity Difference Score, calculated by subtracting masculinity ratings for the men with the least masculine attribute (bottom; high voice; thin) from those for the men with the most (top; deep voice; muscular). Ratings for the hypothetical straight man are omitted from the Masculinity Difference Score calculation. Ideal Position = the position in anal intercourse that the participant would ideally adopt consistently (either top, versatile, bottom, power bottom, or no anal intercourse). Actual Position = the position in anal intercourse most frequently adopted (either top, versatile, bottom, power bottom, or no anal intercourse).

#### **4-E: Discussion**

The study contributes to the literature on gay sexual self-labels by providing quantitative evidence for what has been identified previously in qualitative research using gay men only: sexual self-labels are gendered identities (Johns et al., 2012; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017b). Further, this study has demonstrated that straight people also perceive gay sexual self-labels as gendered, but have different perceptions to gay men. It has also shown that voice quality and physique make a greater contribution to perceptions of gay men's masculinity than sexual self-labels. However, gay men's known sexual self-labels can impact on their perceived masculinity notwithstanding their display of other masculine attributes.

##### ***4-E-1: The masculinity of gay sexual roles***

In accordance with previous research findings (Johns et al., 2012; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017b) and as hypothesised, the top label was perceived as the most masculine sexual self-label and the bottom the least masculine. Gay men tended to view gay sexual self-labels as higher in masculinity than did straight men and straight women.

The insertive and receptive positions in anal sex between men may have symbolic similarity to the penetrative and penetrated roles taken, respectively, by men and women in vaginal intercourse. Being anally insertive rather than receptive may therefore be perceived as accordant with heterosexual masculinity, and endorsed as a more masculine behaviour for (and by) gay men (Johns et al., 2012; Pachankis, Battenwieser, Bernstein, & Bayles, 2013; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017b). The findings suggest that scripts of hegemonic masculinity are pervasive in gay sexual relations (Bartholome, Tewskbury & Bruzzzone, 2000; Dowsett et al., 2008; Taywaditep, 2001).

Connell (1995) opined that insertive anal stimulation is inextricably associated with homosexuality, which is positioned in opposition to hegemonic masculinity. This might explain why the straight men in this study rated all but the top label as more feminine than masculine: behaviours that do not accord with hegemonic masculine ideology are perceived as nonmasculine or feminine (de Visser et al., 2009).

Gay men (alone) rated the bottom label as more masculine than feminine, supporting findings from qualitative research that being anally receptive can be perceived as masculine (e.g. Dowsett et al., 2008; Johns et al., 2012; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017b). Gay men who identify as masculine may be less willing to consider the potential femininity of being anally receptive if they are bottom at least on occasion (Kippax & Smith, 2001). However, in this study, neither gay men's sexual self-labels nor the position they adopted most frequently were associated with their masculinity ratings of sexual self-labels. This might be because over half of the gay participants reported to be 'ideally versatile', and versatile men may exist outside of the gender stereotypes associated with sexual self-labels (Johns et al., 2012). It may also suggest that there is a separation between gay men's gender-stereotyped understanding of positions in anal intercourse and their experiences of, and identification with, a particular position. Future qualitative research might determine whether this speculative explanation is valid.

#### ***4-E-2: The masculine capital provided by self-label, voice quality and physique***

Research has found that the more masculine characteristics a man possesses, the more masculine he is perceived (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013; de Visser et al., 2009). The results from the gay men and straight women in this study reflect what has been found previously: The hypothetical man who embodied all three masculine characteristics (top, muscular and deep-voiced) was rated as the most masculine by gay

men and straight women, and the hypothetical man who conveyed all three feminine characteristics (bottom, thin, high voiced) was rated as the least masculine. There was lower statistical power to identify significant within-subject differences in straight men's ratings of the hypothetical men because there were fewer heterosexual men, and because their Masculinity Rating Range scores (ratings for the bottom, thin, high-voiced man subtracted from ratings for the top, muscular, deep voiced man) were significantly smaller.

The relative contribution of different characteristics to perceptions of men's masculinity can be conceived in terms of masculine capital. This study's findings accord with those from previous research, suggesting that different characteristics are not equal in the masculine capital they afford (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013; de Visser et al., 2009). Both gay men's and straight people's perceptions of gay men's overall masculinity were associated to a greater extent with their voice quality and their physique than with their sexual self-label. Therefore, having a deep voice and/or a muscular body may afford more masculine capital to gay men than being known as a top, and may provide sufficient masculine capital to compensate for being known as a bottom. In line with previous research, the findings suggest that from the perspective of gay men, muscularity may not provide gay men with sufficient masculine capital to compensate for having a high-pitched voice (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017b).

Being known as a bottom reduces others' perceptions of gay men's masculinity. Therefore, the sexual self-labels that gay men convey might influence their engagement in other masculine behaviours, if they were sufficiently concerned about their masculine identities to seek compensatory masculine capital in alternative domains. This idea has some support from past research: muscularity is a potential source of compensatory masculinity for gay men who are concerned with maintaining a masculine identity and

are receptive in anal intercourse (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017b). Affecting a deeper voice may also provide masculine capital in compensation for behaviour that might be perceived as feminine (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013). This could be explored further in future research.

#### ***4-E-3: Limitations***

This study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample is limited by the irregular distribution of gay men and straight women to straight men, by the disproportionate number of current undergraduate students in the sample of straight women, and by the higher mean age of the gay participants. However, analyses conducted on means adjusted for age and student status found no significant differences between students and non-students, and identified age as a significant covariate in only a small minority of the analyses.

A second limitation is the likelihood that straight people do not consider gay men's sexual self-labels when appraising their masculinity in the real world, using instead more readily available, directly observable behaviour (Johnson, Gill, Reichman, & Tassinary, 2007; Rule & Ambady, 2008). Similarly, it is acknowledged that the relationships identified in this study are reversible: It is only when a gay man's sexual self-label is known that it can influence others' perceptions of his masculinity. Otherwise, people may infer a gay man's likely sexual self-label by appraising his overall masculinity, using attributes such as voice quality and physique as indicators (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017b).

A third limitation is that the perceived masculinity of other, more nuanced categories – such as vers-top and vers-bottom, describing men who identify as versatile with a particular preference for one position – was not assessed. Further, for clarity, 'top' and 'bottom' were treated as discrete and unitary categories, when research has

shown that self-labels are in reality fluid and internally diverse (Moskowitz & Roloff, 2017; Pachankis et al., 2013; Wei & Raymond, 2011). Similarly, to allow for more straightforward analysis, binary options were provided for physique and voice when in reality, there is considerable variety and nuance in these characteristics. Future research may be directed towards measuring perceptions of a broader range of sexual self-labels, and examining more precisely which masculine behaviours afford gay men masculine capital where it is lost owing to being anally receptive, or owing to any other aspect of being gay.

Finally, although gay men's position preferences and typical positions were measured, this study did not measure the homosexual experience of the straight participants. Identifying as heterosexual does not preclude the possibility of engaging in same-sex sexual relations (Smith, Rissel, Richters, Grulich, & de Visser, 2003). This should be addressed in future research, as straight people's perceptions of the masculinity of gay sexual labels may be influenced by their own homosexual experiences.

#### ***4-E-4: Conclusion***

The findings reported here support existing evidence from qualitative research that gay sexual self-labels are steeped in gender stereotypes. The study extends the literature by showing that straight people also perceive gay sexual self-labels as gendered. Although the pattern of masculinity ratings between gay and straight participants was similar, there was one notable difference: For gay men, all sexual self-labels were perceived as more masculine than feminine, whereas for straight men, only the top conveyed masculinity. Therefore, from the perspective of straight men, gay men may only be considered masculine if their sexual self-label is known to be top. Straight women may consider gay men less masculine if their sexual self-label is known to be

bottom. From the perspective of gay men, there may be possibilities for gay men to be perceived as masculine irrespective of which sexual self-label they convey.

In a cultural context where hegemonic masculinity is the aspiration for most men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), gay men may use certain masculine behaviours to accrue masculine capital and avoid the stereotype of gay femininity (Drummond, 2005b; Filiault & Drummond, 2008; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017b). However, this study has shown that gay men's capacity to accrue and trade masculine capital may depend on the combination of characteristics and behaviours they exhibit. A deep voice and a muscular physique may provide more potential for masculinity than being known as a top (alone), and being a bottom may reduce perceived masculinity notwithstanding the possession of a deep voice and muscular physique. Therefore, it is suggested that sexual self-labels may be related to some gay men's engagement in gendered behaviours both within and outside the field of sex between men, as they attempt to manage and maintain their masculine identities.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Study 3(A)**

**“It takes a man to put me on the bottom”:**

### **Gay men’s experiences of masculinity and anal intercourse**

Chapter 5 has been accepted for publishing in the Journal of Sex Research, subject to minor amendments

#### **Key responsibilities**

Conceptualisation:	James Ravenhill & Dr Richard de Visser
Data collection:	James Ravenhill
Data analysis:	James Ravenhill
Drafting:	James Ravenhill
Reviewing and editing:	James Ravenhill & Dr Richard de Visser



### **5-A: Abstract**

In anal intercourse between gay men, men who are typically insertive ('tops') are often perceived as, and may identify as, more masculine than those who are typically receptive ('bottoms'). 'Versatile' men, who may adopt either position, may be perceived as more gender-balanced and may transcend the gender-role stereotypes associated with self-labelling as top or bottom. The aim of this study was to explore how gay men's beliefs about masculinity were associated with their beliefs about the gendered nature of sexual self-labels, and their behaviour in anal intercourse. Individual semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 17, UK-based gay men. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis identified that perceptions of tops and bottoms as gendered social identities varied depending on the extent to which gay men subscribed to the mandates of "hegemonic masculinity", the dominant masculinity in Western society. The findings also suggested that some gay men differentiated between top and bottom as social identities and topping and bottoming as gendered behaviours. This had implications for gay men's behaviours in anal intercourse. It is suggested that future efforts to engage with gay men about their sexual behaviour should account for their beliefs regarding the gender role stereotypes associated with gay sexual self-labels.

*Key words: Gay men; Masculinity; Anal intercourse; Sexual self-labels; Qualitative; IPA*

## **5-B: Introduction**

The sexual positions available in anal intercourse between men are steeped in gender role stereotypes: men who are insertive in anal intercourse ('tops') may identify as and be perceived as more masculine than their anally-receptive sexual partners ('bottoms': Carballo-Diéguez et al., 2004; Kippax & Smith, 2001; Moskowitz & Hart, 2011; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017a). The influence of any variable on sexual positioning in anal intercourse warrants research attention, because anal intercourse may carry a risk of HIV transmission, especially for the anally-receptive partner (Patel et al., 2014). Masculinity is one such variable that may influence positioning practices in anal intercourse between men. However, a literature review undertaken by Dangerfield, Smith, Williams, Unger and Bluthenthal (2017) identified only eight peer-reviewed articles measuring gay men's sexual positioning identities and behaviours that focused on the gender stereotypes associated with them. The purpose of the present study is to contribute to this small body of literature by examining how gay men's beliefs about the sexual positions available in anal intercourse, and their own behaviour, are related to their beliefs about and subjective experiences of masculinity.

### ***5-B-1: Gay men and masculinity***

Whether men experience themselves as or are perceived as masculine may depend on the extent to which they endorse and embody socially-constructed expectations of what a 'real man' should be like (Thompson, Pleck & Ferrara, 1992). In contemporary Western societies, the most valued way of 'being a man' is to embody what Connell (1995) refers to as 'hegemonic masculinity', a particular value system where men acquire hegemonic status through their authority over women and other men. Hegemonic masculinity is linked to the display of attributes that are associated with normative masculinity, including physical prowess (de Visser, Smith & McConnell, 2009); economic power (Edley & Wetherell, 1999), and heterosexuality

(Connell, 1995). Hegemonic masculinity is a culturally-exalted expression of manhood that resides at the top of the gender hierarchy (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). All men in Western societies such as the United Kingdom are positioned in relation to hegemonic masculinity: men who do not – or cannot – embody it inevitably occupy alternative, culturally-subordinated masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). According to Connell (1995), gay masculinities are subordinated because homosexual pleasure is conflated with femininity, and hegemonic masculinity is positioned in polar opposition to all that is feminine. Consequently, anti-femininity and homophobia are the lynchpins of heteronormative masculinity.

On one hand, research has identified that some gay men are content with incorporating both masculine and feminine characteristics into an alternative, more balanced expression of gender (Wilson et al., 2010). However, other work has demonstrated how the behavioural experiences and practices of some gay men are associated with endorsement of hegemonic masculinity. For example, in certain fields of gay culture there is a ubiquity of anti-effeminacy that mirrors the homophobia characteristic of hegemonic masculinity, and may reflect some gay men's endorsement of the superiority of men and masculinity over women and femininity (Borgeson & Valeri, 2015; Clarkson, 2006; Eguchi, 2009; Taywaditep, 2001). Gay men's beliefs about what it takes to be a 'real man' may be associated with their sexual behaviour. For example, men who more strongly endorse hegemonic masculine ideals are more likely to engage in condomless anal intercourse (Wheldon, Tilley & Klein, 2014). Consequently, some gay men may construct their sexual identities and adapt their sexual behaviours as a function of the extent to which they endorse hegemonic masculinity, and therefore define masculinity in terms of its heteronormative form.

## ***5-B-2: Existing research on gay sexual positioning***

### **5-B-2-1: Gay sexual self-labels and position preference**

To communicate a preference for one position in anal intercourse, gay men often self-label as ‘top’ (insertive) or ‘bottom’ (receptive) (Hart, Wolitski, Purcell, Gomez & Halkitis, 2003; Moskowitz, Rieger & Roloff, 2008; Wegesin & Meyer-Bahlberg, 2000). Men who are inclined to take either position in a given occasion of anal intercourse often self-label as ‘versatile’ (Hart et al., 2003; Wegesin & Meyer-Bahlberg, 2000), although not all versatile men have an equal proclivity for being insertive and receptive (Lyon, Pitts & Grierson, 2013).

Research has pointed to the importance of not conceiving sexual self-labels as static, exclusive categories. Top and bottom self-labels may reflect position preferences, but they do not necessarily determine the position adopted in every occasion of anal intercourse (Carballo-Diéguez et al., 2004; Wei & Raymond, 2011). Self-labels are liable to change with time: gay men ‘learn’ their ideal self-label over several years (Moskowitz & Roloff, 2016) and may orient further towards top as they age (Pachankis, Bittenwieser, Bernstein & Bayles, 2013). Furthermore, there may be diversity in psychological and behavioural practices within the categories: for example, Moskowitz and Roloff (2016) distinguished between different types of bottoms, who have an array of reasons for identifying as and being a bottom.

### **5-B-2-2: Tops, bottoms, gender and power**

The meanings of sexual self-labels are embedded in discourses of gender and power. Men who label as tops are commonly ascribed characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity – power, dominance and physical strength – whereas bottoms are often defined as passive and effeminate (Johns, Pingel, Eisenberg, Santana & Bauermeister, 2012; Kippax & Smith, 2001). Gender role stereotypes may influence assumptions regarding other men’s sexual self-labels such that men who possess

physical characteristics associated with normative masculinity are more likely to be perceived as tops than bottoms, whereas more feminine gay men are assumed to be bottoms (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017b; Tskay & Rule, 2013). Furthermore, when other men's self-labels are known, gender role stereotypes may influence perceptions of their masculinity irrespective of any other masculine attributes the men may display – bottoms are perceived as less masculine than tops who possess the same stereotypically masculine characteristics (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017a).

However, research into the association between gender and sexual positioning in anal intercourse has yielded inconsistent findings. Some studies have highlighted the potential for bottoms to have power in anal intercourse because as the receptive partners, they control both the physical pleasure experienced by tops (Kiguwa, 2015), and the degree of power tops are afforded during the sexual encounter (Hoppe, 2011). Further, it has been found that some gay men reject the notion that sexual positioning in anal intercourse is a gendered experience, viewing the gender role stereotypes associated with sexual self-labels as heterosexist constructions of man-as-penetrator and woman-as-penetrated (Carballo-Diéguez et al., 2004)

Nevertheless, traditional discourses of gender and power influence some gay men's experiences of anal intercourse: tops tend to report feeling more dominant and controlling during intercourse and may have stronger masculine identities than bottoms, and bottoms often claim to feel more submissive and vulnerable during intercourse, show a preference for more masculine sexual partners, and are more likely than tops to have displayed feminine traits in childhood (Gil, 2007; Moskowitz & Hart, 2011; Moskowitz & Roloff, 2016; Weinrich et al., 1992). Furthermore, gay men who identify as 'bears' – who typically have large physiques and hirsute bodies and are therefore more closely aligned to hegemonic masculinity ideals – are less likely to report

receptive intercourse than those who identify as ‘twinks’, gay men characterised by youthful looks and slim and hairless bodies (Lyons & Hosking, 2014).

#### 5-B-2-3: Versatility in sexual positioning

Versatility in sexual positioning may offer some men the opportunity to eschew the gender role stereotypes associated with sexual self-labels. Kippax and Smith (2001) identified the power-sharing possibilities associated with versatility, especially for gay men in long-term relationships, and others have identified interpretations of versatility as a more egalitarian, turn-taking arrangement between sexual partners (Carballo-Diéguez et al., 2004; Johns et al., 2012). For some, versatility may reflect a desire to balance both masculinity and femininity as part of an alternative gender expression (Johns et al., 2012; Wilson et al., 2010).

However, other work has identified how for men who identify as versatile, sexual position negotiations are strongly influenced by gender role stereotypes, and may be guided by the comparative masculinity of the sexual partner. In casual sexual encounters particularly, the relatively more masculine partner – i.e., the partner who is more ‘macho’, more aggressive, more muscular or who has a comparatively larger penis – is more likely to be insertive, and the partner who is perceived as comparatively more feminine – as indicated by a smaller physical frame, a less aggressive demeanour and a smaller penis – is more likely to be receptive (Carballo-Diéguez et al., 2004; Johns et al., 2012; Moskowitz & Hart, 2011). Importantly, perceptions of comparative masculinity have been shown to influence sexual positioning decision making even among men who self-label as either top or bottom (Carballo-Diéguez et al., 2004; Wei & Raymond). Gendered scripts of behaviour in anal intercourse may therefore influence some gay men’s position selection in a given sexual encounter and override their position preferences. This finding may have sexual health implications, since HIV

transmission risk is greater in receptive than insertive anal intercourse (Patel et al., 2014), and men who bottom are more likely than tops to be HIV-seropositive (Wegesin & Meyer-Bahlburg, 2000; Wei & Raymond, 2011).

### ***5-B-3: The present study***

The purpose of this study was to bridge a gap in the research on gay sexual positioning by investigating how gay men's subjective experiences of masculinity, against the dominance of hegemonic masculinity, are associated with their beliefs about the gendered nature of sexual self-labels, their experiences of identifying with a given self-label, and their experiences of engaging in insertive and receptive anal intercourse. To the authors' knowledge, the present study approaches these issues for the first time with a UK-based sample, which is relevant given that ideals of masculinity are culturally-defined (Thompson, Pleck & Ferrera, 1992). A greater understanding of the relationship between masculine identity, beliefs about masculinity and positioning in anal intercourse may contribute to efforts to reduce the HIV burden that disproportionately affects gay men.

## **5-C: Method**

### ***5-C-1: Data collection***

Twenty-one semi-structured, individual interviews were conducted between July and December 2016. Eighteen were held via Skype, either with or without video, according to the participant's preference. Three interviews were held face-to-face, one in the participant's home and two in a private room at the host institution. The duration of each interview was approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The key interview questions are presented as supplementary material (see Appendices, p.356). Each interview was tailored to the concerns of the individual participant: questions were not asked in a particular order nor necessarily phrased in the same way. Interviews were audio

recorded and transcribed verbatim. The first author was responsible for transcription and for checking the accuracy of the transcripts against the recordings.

### ***5-C-2: Analytic approach***

Data were analysed using a discourse-dynamic approach to subjectivity (Willig, 2000), operationalised according to the procedures for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA: Smith, 1996). At the core of IPA lie the philosophical traditions of phenomenology – how people experience the world – and symbolic interactionism, the perspective that subjective meaning-making is a consequence of interpretation, and of interaction with the social world (Smith, 1996). IPA is an idiographic approach, focused on the experience of specific individuals involved in specific situations (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). However, IPA researchers examining data from more than one participant also have the opportunity to examine commonalities between participants' verbal accounts, which identify shared understandings of the phenomenon under examination (Flowers, Hart & Marriott, 1999; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

IPA is distinguished from other phenomenological approaches because it goes beyond the description of experience. A key concept associated with IPA is the 'double hermeneutic' – the understanding that if people's sense-making is an interpretation of their own experiences, then the researcher's attempts to make sense of the participant's interpretation is also interpretative (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). For the IPA researcher engaged in analysis, the emphasis on both phenomenology and interpretation means 'giving voice' to the participants – describing how the phenomenon under examination is experienced – and also 'making sense' of the participants' experience, exploring *what it means* for that individual participant to experience the phenomenon in the way described (Larkin et al., 2006).



### ***5-C-3: Data analysis procedure***

The procedure for IPA outlined by Flowers, Hart and Marriott (1999) was used as a guide. Both authors were engaged in the first stage of the analysis, which was to read and reread each transcript, making brief notes of initial impressions, until a high degree of familiarity with the transcripts was reached. They then proceeded with the next step of the analysis, which involved examining the descriptive content and the use of language in one transcript, paying particular attention to the presence of contradiction, justification, explanation, repetition, changes in voice and unusual phrasing. Each observation made was given a label summarising its content, and was treated as an emergent theme. Identifying descriptions of experience represented the process of phenomenological analysis and reading between the lines, establishing why and how something was reported in the wider context of the transcript, fulfilled the interpretative aspect of the analysis.

After the authors had met to identify areas of agreement and divergence in their analysis of the first transcript, the first author continued to identify emergent themes in the remaining transcripts. Once all transcripts had been coded into emergent themes, the first author produced a detailed ‘participant profile’ (see Appendices, p.361) for each participant, which incorporated both descriptive and interpretative comments. The participant profiles were used alongside the lists of emergent themes to identify themes that recurred between participants. These recurring themes were grouped together into overarching themes, in an iterative process of finding theme labels which best captured a collection of emergent themes that were shared between participants.

At each stage of the analysis, the authors attempted to disregard their own preconceptions, expectations and experiences of the phenomenon in question in order to ‘see’ the world from the perspectives of the participants, although it is acknowledged

that the interpretation of others' accounts is necessarily influenced by the standpoint of the person interpreting (Flowers, Hart & Marriott, 2009).

#### ***5-C-4: Participants***

Twenty-one self-identified gay men who were based in the UK were interviewed. Participant demographic information is provided in Table 5.1. The data from interviews with four men were excluded from the analysis. In three cases, this was because participants did not provide sufficient detail about their experiences for an IPA approach to be employed, and in one case, because the audio recording was not of a high enough quality to permit accurate transcription – a consequence of poor Skype connectivity. The 17 men whose data were retained were aged between 20 and 42 years (median = 32). Although Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) recommend a sample size ranging from four to 10 for an IPA study, a larger sample was selected in order to capture the diversity of gay men's experiences relating to identity and sex, including age-related and generational differences in early gay experiences (Dunlap, 2016).

Some participants were recruited purposively from the sample of a previous questionnaire study (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017a). Other participants self-selected in response to recruitment advertisements placed on gay community pages on social media sites. A number of participants were recruited via snowball sampling, where men who had already been interviewed provided the researchers with the contact details of other men who had expressed an interest in taking part. Recruitment materials and all pre-interview correspondence with potential participants referred to a study about 'Experiences as a gay man', and stated that interviewees would be asked about their experiences of sex with other men.

All participants completed a short pre-interview questionnaire which asked the questions: 1) 'In a perfect world, if it were only up to you, which sexual role would you

consistently adopt in sex with another man?’ 2) ‘In reality, with actual male sexual partners, which role do you consistently adopt?’ The answers to these questions reflected the participants’ position preferences and the positions they adopted most frequently in actuality (Moskowitz & Hart, 2011). The response options were ‘bottom’ / ‘versatile’ / ‘top’ for both questions. The option ‘I do not have anal sex / do not have anal sex frequently enough to answer’ was also provided. No participants selected this response option. All participants who completed the pre-interview questionnaire were interviewed. Participants’ responses to these two questions are provided in the Results section of this paper: for example, ‘Reza (23; top/vers)’ indicates that 23-year-old participant Reza stated in his pre-interview questionnaire that he was ideally top and versatile in actuality.

Ethics approval was obtained from the authors’ employing university. Participants gave written informed consent. A £10 gift voucher was offered to acknowledge the time they had given. Each participant was reminded at the start of his interview that he could choose to not answer any given question, could withdraw from the interview at any time, and could ask for his data to be withdrawn, without penalty, at any point within one month following their interview. Names and references to other people and places were changed to pseudonyms at the point of transcription. In the extracts of the transcripts presented in this paper, three spaced full stops indicate that some of the interview content has been omitted for brevity and clarity. Words and phrases in brackets were added by the authors.

Table 5.1:

*Participant demographic information*

	Age	Relationship status	Highest academic attainment	Ideal position in anal intercourse	Typical position in anal intercourse
Sahib	20	Single	Undergraduate	Bottom	Bottom
Craig	33	Partnered (M)	High school	Bottom	Bottom
Geoff	36	Single	High school	Bottom	Versatile
Ben	24	Single	High school	Versatile	Bottom
Ross	32	Partnered (M)	Postgraduate	Versatile	Versatile
Adam	33	Partnered (M)	Postgraduate	Versatile	Versatile
Ryan	22	Single	Postgraduate	Versatile	Versatile
Jack	22	Single	Undergraduate	Versatile	Versatile (Top)
Arman	35	Partnered (M)	Postgraduate	Versatile	Versatile (Top)
Rob	35	Single	Postgraduate	Versatile	Versatile (Top)
Andy	23	Partnered (M)	High school	Versatile	Versatile (Top)
Pete	30	Single	Postgraduate	Versatile	Top
Evan	39	Single	Undergraduate	Versatile	Top
Carl	42	Partnered (NM)	Undergraduate	Versatile	Top
Reza	23	Partnered (M)	Postgraduate	Top	Versatile
Dale	31	Single	Postgraduate	Top	Top
Mike	38	Partnered (NM)	Postgraduate	Top	Top

*Note:* M = monogamous / closed relationship; NM = non-monogamous / open relationship. Ideal and typical positions reflect participants' responses in a pre-interview survey. Bottom = anally-receptive; Versatile = receptive or insertive; Top = insertive. (Top) = Participants reported being typically top in their interviews

## 5-D: Results

The analysis identified two overarching themes relating to how beliefs and experiences of masculinity were associated with identities and behaviour in anal intercourse among gay men: Beliefs about masculinity and sexual positions as gendered identities; and beliefs about masculinity and sexual positions as gendered behaviours. Both themes are described below and supported with illustrative quotations.

### *5-D-1: Masculinity and sexual positions as gendered identities*

All participants acknowledged the stereotypic gender role discourse wherein tops and bottoms were constructed as contrasting identities: tops had more of the attributes associated with hegemonic masculinity – dominance, confidence and physical strength indicated by muscularity – whereas bottoms were more passive by nature, ‘camp’ in their behaviour, and had slimmer, less muscular physiques, and were therefore more feminine. Several participants suggested that other people determined men’s likely sexual self-label based on perceptions of their masculinity and femininity – masculine men were tops and feminine men were bottoms – although not all participants agreed that the gender role stereotypes were valid. Gay men who had more essentialist interpretations of masculinity, were more likely to endorse the stereotypes, as illustrated by Ross (32; vers/vers):

I've met people on Grindr [a gay dating app] and been very surprised to see that they're a bottom, they're kind of muscular, very masculine in appearance, but are, ‘Yeah, no, I'm 100% bottom.’ And it just, in my mind there's this kind of mismatch between appearance and preference . . . And you just think to yourself, ‘Oh, OK. Right. That, that isn't what I expected.’ And you just kind of do that immediate stereotyping of people, of ‘You're muscular, you go to the gym, you

run, you're very masculine in appearance, therefore you're likely to be in control, the man, top.'

With his traditional beliefs about masculinity – defined by muscularity, gym patronage and sporting prowess – Ross was incredulous that men who fit his profile of masculinity could identify as committed bottoms. Ross' conflation of 'top' with 'the man' implied that his understanding of the penetrative and penetrated roles in sexual intercourse was constructed within a discourse of heterosexual intercourse: If the top is 'the man' who, in accordance with hegemonic masculinity, has control over women in sexual relations, then the bottom must be the woman. From Ross' perspective, it was surprising that a man who was the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity in terms of his appearance aligned himself with a sexual position he associated with women. Like other participants, Ross knew that appearances do not always reflect reality (a 'mismatch'), but within the stereotypic discourse, men who were counter-stereotypic were a source of incredulity.

To self-labelled versatile Ross, being perceived by other men as a top himself was paramount. He feared being perceived as a 'screaming queen' should his desire to bottom on occasion be known, and therefore described himself in heteronormative masculine terms when using gay dating apps ('I would present myself as a top who was quite masculine, who could hold a conversation about football'). Therefore, some participants' beliefs about top and bottom as gendered identities – and/or their expectations that these were beliefs held widely by others – were strong enough to guide aspects of behaviour outside the domain of anal intercourse. Geoff (36; bottom/vers) – who defined masculinity by its heteronormative form, but was mostly unconcerned about being perceived as masculine himself ('that's not the kind of journey

I'm on') – explained how context-dependent displays of femininity served to attract compatible sexual partners:

I think if it was a choice, I'd like to be perceived as a bottom. Which I guess links back to what we were saying earlier, about when the campness comes out. Late at night in a gay bar is probably the height of my campness, 'cause it's always last ditch, 'Ok, right, let's get it out and shake the booty!' [Laughs] . . . If per chance Mr Right was in the bar, I wouldn't want him getting the wrong impression!

It was important to Geoff that he communicated his self-label effectively in gay spaces, where there was the possibility of meeting a sexual partner: Drawing on his belief that other people perceived effeminate men as bottoms, he utilised 'campness' to convey his bottom identity, lest there be any 'wrong impressions' (i.e., he were perceived as a top) if he behaved in a masculine way. Campness was, in certain contexts, an important aspect of Geoff's repertoire of being gay. On the other hand, for Andy (23, vers/vers), who had strong, traditional beliefs about masculinity and aligned himself closely to its heteronormative form, being perceived as a top was paramount, notwithstanding his versatile label and inclination to bottom on occasion:

I would feel worse if I was perceived as a bottom . . . I guess it would be important for me to be perceived as a top, I don't want to be seen as just, as just a bottom.

*I: Right. Can you explain why you, you wouldn't like that as much?*

So I think that if I was perceived as a bottom, that's seen as a more effeminate thing I guess. And obviously as we've discussed prior, it's quite important for me to come across as masculine. In [city] there's always a shortage of tops, I

feel, there's a lot of bottoms there, so I don't want to be just put aside as saying, 'Oh, that guy is definitely a bottom,' I think that's quite a bad thing.

The pervasiveness of the top/bottom gender role discourse meant that should Andy be perceived as a bottom, this would preclude him from being perceived as masculine, which would threaten his strong masculine subjectivity. Being assumed a top would be favourable to Andy, not only because it would accord with his masculine identity, but also because it would distinguish him from other gay men, who he believed were most commonly bottoms. Andy's concern that he might be 'put aside' if he were perceived as 'just' a bottom implied that from his perspective, bottom was an unfavourable and/or stigmatised identity, an observation echoed by other participants, including Ryan (22, vers/vers):

Them saying, 'You're a bottom' is kind of the same thing as saying 'Oh, you're camp as hell as no way are you butch enough to top.' I think overly camp people are put down a lot in the gay world and seen as less of a status.

From Ryan's perspective, effeminate gay men faced prejudice in the gay community, where 'butch' – or traditionally masculine men – had higher status. The gender role discourse surrounding top/bottom identities was so pervasive that the label 'bottom', with its connotations of femininity, could be used as an insult and a means to subordinate: a script of hegemonic masculinity at play between gay men. Ryan claimed that he embodied an 'alternative masculinity' to 'society's definition' and did not endorse the notion that tops and bottoms could be identified on the basis of their degree of masculinity or femininity. Like other participants who had less traditional, less



essentialist interpretations of masculinity, he rejected the gender role stereotypes and drew attention to their inadequacy for defining top and bottom identities:

I don't come across as butch and, like, that masculine and people just assume, 'Oh God! OK, so you're camp and slim, you must be a bottom.' People are a bit stupid like that. . . . I just think it's a bit, it's a bit weird really. Like, it's got nothing in common, your personality and way you look and your sexual desire.

Ryan's critique came from an informed position: as he explained later, he was 'camp as Christmas', and was perceived invariably by other men as a bottom, when in actuality he had an equal proclivity for being a top. With his insider knowledge, Ryan distanced himself from the 'stupid' people who thought that sexual self-labels could be predicted on the basis of masculinity and femininity. Unlike them, he knew that appearances could be deceptive, that the feminine-is-bottom stereotype was not valid, because sexual position preferences were unrelated to observable gendered characteristics. It was not only men who self-labelled as versatile who dismissed the relevance of the gender role stereotypes associated with top/bottom identities:

Dale (31; top/top) – You do, like, all the voguing<sup>5</sup>, and then, like, do a death drop<sup>6</sup>. So that's, that's, yeah. So, like, that isn't the most masculine thing in the world at all. But like, I don't give a shit. It's kind of me, and it's fun. So being a top doesn't define or play to masculinity, really.

. . .

I've always felt masculine during sex, even if I, I think the last time I bottomed was maybe, like, six years, even then I still felt quite masculine and comfortable in myself.

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<sup>5</sup> Dancing in a manner that imitates the movements of fashion models

<sup>6</sup> A dance move characterised by a sudden backwards descent to the ground

As he revealed elsewhere in the interview, Dale's masculine subjectivity was associated with his history of working in masculinised contexts ('I think a lot of the careers I've done have shaped my masculinity'), and he embraced feminine behaviours ('I want to bust out a slut drop<sup>7</sup> or, like, vogue down the street') as part of an alternative masculinity that was not related to his top self-label. Dale felt masculine irrespective of whether he was a top or a bottom, because not even voguing, death dropping or slut-dropping were obstacles to his subjective feelings of masculinity. Dale disrupted the hegemonic masculinity script of gay anal intercourse through his claim to a masculine subjectivity in general terms, which he experienced in defiance of heteronormative ways of doing masculinity. Being a top was not a gendered social identity to Dale because his gay masculinity was achieved outside of traditional gender discourses.

Craig (33; bottom/bottom), reconciled the stereotypic gender role discourse surrounding being a bottom, his alignment with heteronormative masculinity, and his bottom self-label, by differentiating himself from other, 'lazy' bottom men:

I'd probably use 'active bottom' [to describe myself] for example, 'cause I'm quite keen on portraying myself as not just being a lying-on-your-back kind of bottom.

...

It doesn't affect my masculinity, because I'm not the kind of person to just lie there.

With his strong masculine subjectivity, it was particularly important to Craig that he presented himself in the interview and beyond – for example, in his presence on gay dating apps – as an 'active bottom', lest his bottom self-label detract from his

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<sup>7</sup> A dance move involving a sudden squat to the ground followed by an immediate return to a standing position

alignment with heteronormative masculinity in both how he perceived himself and in how he hoped others, including the interviewer, would perceive him. Craig made seven references to ‘not just lying there’ during the interview – a discursive strategy that enabled him to navigate the dominance of the hegemonic masculinity discourse that in other domains of his life was so influential. (Earlier in the interview, Craig described himself as an ‘Average Joe’, and located his masculinity in terms of whether he passed as heterosexual.) In the discourse of top/bottom as gendered identities, Craig offered an alternative position for himself, as a bottom who subverted the hegemonic masculinity discourse by being ‘active’ in sex, which he explained later meant positioning himself physically on top of the insertive partner. From the perspective of some gay men like Craig, tops and bottoms were gendered identities, but not in the way constructed by the stereotypic gender role discourse: gender scripts of anal intercourse could be contested and reconfigured.

### ***5-D-2: Masculinity and sexual positions as gendered behaviours***

#### **5-D-2-1: Topping and experiences of masculinity**

Even if they did not endorse the gender role stereotypes of *being* a top and bottom, many participants embraced the connotations of masculinity and femininity associated with *topping* and *bottoming* as behaviours. The *act* of topping was often constructed in a discourse of hegemonic masculinity as active, dominant and controlling, irrespective of whether tops themselves were regarded in gendered terms. Further, engaging in the act of topping influenced the subjective experience of masculinity for some participants. For example, Adam (33, vers/vers), who did not endorse ‘hard gender lines’ and did not have a strong masculine identity (‘my gender identity is me’), nevertheless experienced an increased sense of masculinity when he engaged in topping:

I guess it's not what I want to be saying, but it [topping] probably does make me feel more masculine. [Laughs] Yeah, sort of in charge of the situation I guess . . . That's not the way I'd like to feel, or describe it, it's just kind of the way it seems to be.

*I: Where do you think that feeling comes from then?*

Well, the act of penetration... it seems to be a dominant act, doesn't it?

Adam was conflicted because, as he stated during the interview, he did not believe sexual self-labels could be predicted reliably on the basis of gender role stereotypes, and he did not endorse hegemonic masculine, yet he experienced the act of topping as a masculine behaviour. Dowsett (1996, p. 9) suggested that the word 'penetration' is bound up in heterosexual constructions of sex, and obscures the 'radically different intentions, sensations, and contexts associated with that sexual activity for men'. It might therefore be unsurprising that Adam used the phrase 'act of penetration' in his rhetorical question that intended to rationalise his discordant feelings about topping and his beliefs about masculinity. The discourse was irresistible: 'penetration' was something done by heterosexual men, and to experience it as masculinising was inevitable

For Reza (23, top/vers) the extent to which topping contributed to a 'general feeling' of masculinity was associated with the number of sexual partners he had at a given time:

[Topping] does kind of make me feel more masculine just 'cause you're, like, more dominating and stuff. 'Cause, like, obviously to me, the more masculine you are, the more, like, dominating or, like, controlling or, like, in charge, like that sort of thing. It does make a difference, like, being in a relationship, how,

like, masculine or, like, dominating you feel sort of thing, 'cause you're only, like, to me it would be, 'I'm dominating one person,' whereas if you're single and you're sleeping around and stuff, you're more masculine to more people.

With an interpretation of masculinity anchored in a hegemonic masculinity discourse, feeling masculine was for Reza contingent on dominating other men, even though (as he explained elsewhere) his top self-label was associated with pleasure and comfort rather than masculine identity. For Adam, Reza and other gay men who did not experience themselves as particularly masculine in other domains, feeling masculine was relational and context-dependent, contingent on the subordination of other men in the domain of anal intercourse. Topping provided temporary subjective experiences of masculinity for men who did not normally feel particularly masculine.

The masculinising effects of topping were also felt by men who already experienced a strong masculine subjectivity. For example, Craig experienced a 'surge of dominance' when he topped, which would 'reassert' his strong sense of masculinity – an example of what Connell (1995) refers to as 'body-reflexive practice', where masculine subjectivity and bodily practices are reinforced reciprocally. It was Andy's heteronormative interpretation of being in the anally-insertive role that influenced his experiences of masculinity:

I definitely feel the stronger I can be and the most dominant I can be, the most manly I'd feel [when topping]. 'Cause I guess it would be the closest thing to, I guess, having sex with a woman.

Committed to the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, which was irrevocably heterosexual, Andy identified topping as the vehicle through which it may be most

successfully appropriated. Andy experienced himself at his most masculine when he was topping because topping emulated the sexual behaviour of a heterosexual man, and therefore allowed Andy to emulate hegemonic masculinity.

Not all participants framed the masculinising effects of topping in terms of the hegemonic masculine ideals of dominance and subordination. Experiences of masculinity were for some participants related to the experience of facilitating the pleasure and comfort of the receptive partner, as illustrated by Rob (35; vers/vers):

I want to make sure the bottom's having a really good time [when I top]. And if that means going slower, then it's kind of like being a bit more responsible for, like, how you're, kind of, so I suppose that's the kind of the, the increase in masculinity there, is you kind of, you should give a shit about the person that, that's, you know, on the bottom.

Rob experienced topping as masculine because he had control over the pace of the sex, and therefore the enjoyment and comfort of the bottom. Although still positioned within a hegemonic masculinity discourse, it was Rob's concern for (rather than control of) the receptive partner that was masculinising. His sense of responsibility for the more vulnerable bottom was in keeping with his interpretation of masculinity in hegemonic masculinity terms, and his identity as a hegemonically masculine man ('alpha male').

However, it might be argued that Rob's account, and those of the other participants described above, was influenced by the availability of a heteronormative discourse of penetrative sex, in an interview that had encouraged participants to reflect on their masculinity. Bersani (2010, p.28) argued against assuming that sexual inequalities are influenced inevitably by social inequalities (i.e., those between men and

women, reproduced by hegemonic masculinity), suggesting instead that power dynamics are inherent in human bodies, which are not ‘belatedly contaminated by power from elsewhere’. In other words, the experiential inequalities between the top and the bottom in anal intercourse between men (i.e., the dominant top and the vulnerable bottom) might be influenced by the power dynamics inherent in the relations between the penis and the anus, which participants may have made sense of by referring to experiences of masculinity. Rob framed the bottom as someone who should be ‘given a shit about’ because he believed that as the top, he had the ‘responsibility’; Andy felt ‘stronger’ when he topped, and Craig more ‘dominant’. As the participants knew, these terms are associated with masculinity, but the experiences of topping that provoked these feelings may have been embodied *power* experiences, rather than experiences of masculinity *per se*. This might help to explain why Adam described topping as ‘masculine’, when he had already rejected the relevance of masculinity as a concept.

#### 5-D-2-2: Bottoming and experiences of femininity and masculinity

Whereas topping was associated with only masculine perceptions and experiences, there was greater diversity in both perceptions of bottoming and the gendered experiences of bottoming, irrespective of whether the stereotype of bottom femininity was endorsed. Several participants related the feminising effects of bottoming to the lack of power the bottom had during anal intercourse. However, the relationship between bottoming and power was complex, and interpreted in different ways. For Sahib (20; bottom/bottom), it was associated with the bottom’s vulnerability:

When I bottom, I automatically feel, like, very submissive to whoever I’m doing it [with] . . . ‘cause he’s in me, I’m like, ‘He can hurt me.’

Sahib described a power relationship between the top and the bottom. An awareness of the top's position of power to cause pain to the bottom subordinated Sahib when he bottomed, and this happened 'automatically': the inevitability of psychological submission when control over his body was relinquished. Sahib's discourse adds further weight to the suggestion that experiences in anal intercourse are influenced strongly by embodied experiences relating to power. Some participants framed the powerlessness associated with bottoming in positive terms, as Ben (24; vers/bottom) illustrated:

Most of the time I'll be, like, 'Yeah, I want to bottom.' I just love the feeling.

Yeah, in a way it's kind of like I love the feeling that someone is in control, does that make sense?

...

I also know that I love doing it as well 'cause if I can hear and see that a guy is enjoying it, I know the fact that my body is making him feel like that, that's what makes the electricity come and just, my whole body starts to shake and tingle.

For Ben, powerlessness had value – it was eroticised, a source of sexual pleasure. There was a power hierarchy at play, but it was not fixed: Ben also *acquired* power as a bottom because it was *his* body that was responsible for affording pleasure to the top. The implications of bottoming in terms of both the loss and the acquisition of power were both embodied and psychological experiences.

Other participants also suggested that bottoming need not be associated with a loss of power and was not inevitably related to feelings of submission. Some had strategies for overcoming the physical vulnerability associated with bottoming that might lead to submission:



Craig: If I was to bottom, the first thing I'd want to do is be on top of that person . . . And obviously, I would then control, because yeah, ultimately someone's penetrating me in an intimate area, I don't want them to be just shoving it in and letting me think of England . . . So for me, that's an active side of it, to be an active bottom because I want to take control of it.

From Craig's perspective, it was 'obvious' that he would control the sex as a bottom-on-top, because it was he who was in the vulnerable physical position. It should also be 'obvious' to the interviewer, because being a bottom-on-top accorded with the heteronormative masculine identity he had constructed throughout the interview. The message was clear: bottoming was not feminine as long as it was 'active', and Craig was therefore masculine when bottoming. It might be argued that irrespective of whether it is a woman or another man who is 'on top' of a man during receptive intercourse, it is the insertive man who possesses the physical power, as expressed via the thrusting of the penis (Bersani, 2010). It seemed that this was not lost on Craig – after all, when he bottomed he was '*penetrated* in an intimate area' [emphasis added]. Describing himself as an 'active bottom' was a discursive strategy intended to quash any assumptions that the power during intercourse did not belong to him.

The potential for masculine experiences when bottoming was also identified by Pete (30; vers/top), who acknowledged the construction of bottoming as feminine within the stereotypic gender role discourse, but provided alternative interpretations:

When I'm on bottom, I feel like I, like, surrender almost. It's like I just want to be, like, be soft and hold and just kind of be passive.

. . .

I remember thinking this the last time I was getting fucked. I was, like, on my back, screaming, and I was like, ‘Oh my God, I’m taking it up the ass, this is fabulous!’

...

There seems to be this kind of societal thing, of, like, taking it up the bum is somehow less manly.

*I: What’s your opinion on that?*

Doesn’t get more manly does it, than getting fucked by a man?!

With little concern for his own masculine identity (‘I don’t feel particularly masculine, I feel like me most of the time’), Pete’s experiences of bottoming did not have a profound influence on his sense of masculinity, but he was eager to refute the widely held perception of bottoming as a less masculine behaviour. Although Pete associated bottoming with passivity (‘getting fucked’) and deployed a femininity discourse to describe his experiences (‘on my back, screaming’) he did not frame the behaviour as inevitably feminine. From his experience, bottoming was ‘taking it’ and being able to withstand anal penetration was masculine. The hegemonic masculinity discourse was disrupted by Pete because there was no inequality in anal intercourse, and being ‘fucked by a man’ was the epitome of a masculine behaviour. Pete’s discourse is reminiscent of Dowsett’s (1996, 2000) reference to the “active” or “desiring” anus. Although it is the penis which is typically ascribed agency in sexual intercourse, Dowsett (1996, 2000) suggested that the anus can be viewed as active in that it consumes the penis, demands pleasure and liberates men from heteronormative sexual scripts. If the anus has agency, then receptive anal intercourse can be constructed as ‘manly’, just as Pete described it.

### 5-D-2-3: Top/bottom choice and relative masculinity

There was a great deal of fluidity in the position adopted in a given instance of anal intercourse, including among the minority of men who self-labelled as top or bottom. Gendered scripts of topping and bottoming influenced many participants' position choices in a variety of different ways, and the extent to which these scripts influenced sexual behaviour varied between participants. Beliefs about others' perceptions of own masculinity often influenced the position taken, even among men who did not feel particularly gendered. For example, others' perceptions of Arman (35; vers/vers) as masculine often led to him topping in casual sexual encounters:

I used to get loads of messages from bottoms. So there. I must have being doing something that was masculine.

. . .

*I: How would the fact that they've assumed you're a top impact on how you actually have sex with that person, if at all?*

. . . If they wanted me to top then I think again, that whole persona comes out on my side as well . . . You adopt an ego don't you? An alter ego. And you become this, you become a top . . . You kind of find out what limits they have, if they say they've got no limits and they like it really rough, like slapping, choking, all that stuff, so it's like, 'Ok, I'll do that.'

With a versatile self-label and no particular preference for either position, Arman was happy to fulfil other men's expectations that he would top, recognising that they perceived him as masculine but, without a strong masculine identity, having only a tenuous understanding as to why. Topping was acting for Arman: others cast him in a

role and he responded appropriately to his positioning in the gender role discourse, temporarily embodying a dominating, masculine top identity.

Perceptions of others' masculinity relative to self-perceived masculinity guided the position choice for several participants. In the case of self-declared 'alpha male' Rob, position choice was strongly influenced by the masculinity of the sexual partner:

They can be the, like, the biggest, most muscular, kind of most manly guy, but if they're not man enough to put me on the bottom then I don't care what position they are, they're going on the bottom.

...

I went, 'No, I'm versatile. I'm fifty-fifty. You can literally drop me and I'll land on the, I'll land on the edge of the coin, not, you know, not on heads or tails.'

And that's when I say, 'It takes a man to put me on the bottom in fairness.'

From Rob's perspective, a sexual partner would need to convey a package of masculine attributes, beyond physical characteristics alone, in order to be deemed 'man enough' to bottom for. Although he had reported being typically versatile in his pre-interview questionnaire, it became clear during the interview that Rob was far from 'fifty-fifty'. Accustomed to being the alpha-male in other masculinised social contexts – 'even within the rugby group' – Rob reserved bottoming for men who were even more masculine than himself, who were powerful enough to control the sexual encounter and 'put' him on the bottom. Otherwise, and in most occasions of intercourse, it was Rob who controlled the allocation of positions, and he was sufficiently powerful to override others' position preferences: he would put his less masculine partner on the bottom.

Reza was one such man whose strict preference for one position – in his case, top – was disrupted by an understanding of the gender scripts associated with topping and bottoming and an awareness of his own masculinity in relation to others’:

There was this guy that I was sleeping with for a while . . . and I used to always bottom with him.

. . .

I always felt like he was more dominating, like, it would always be on his terms sort of thing. Like, I would only go round when he said so sort of thing, so I guess in that sense I felt like that I couldn’t really, do you know, be, like, dominating when we were having sex either.

For Reza, a subordinate position in a romantic relationship spilled over into the realm of anal intercourse. He had described previously a resolute preference for topping, but the combination of his stereotypic beliefs regarding tops and topping, bottom and bottoming, his endorsement of hegemonic masculinity, and his perception of himself as less masculine than his sexual partner, were sufficient for him to renege on this strong position preference.

Not all of the participants’ sexual behaviour was affected by perceptions of relative masculinity, even if they were able to locate their own masculinity in relation to others’. As a self-identified ‘camp’ gay man with a slim physique, Ryan acknowledged that if he were to top for a more masculine man it would appear as an incongruous arrangement, ‘like a Chihuahua fucking a husky’. To Ryan, sex could look ‘queered’, even absurd – his vivid and humorous imagery was intended to unravel the gender scripts in anal intercourse between men that might constrain other men’s behaviour. Gender was of no concern to Ryan, especially in the domain of anal intercourse. He

concluded, ‘I’ve had sex with really, really, butch men and I’ve topped them, and it’s fine’.

For Ben it was the sexual pleasure derived from subverting the power relationship between a top and a bottom, combined with his perceptions of his own and his partner’s masculinity, that guided his sexual positioning on occasion:

I just loved the feeling of a twink overpowering a bear instead of the other way round.

...

I think it’s a fetish personally. ‘Cause obviously bears, they’re masculine, they’re butch and very manly, very able to overpower a twink. But knowing a hairless twink who’s not butch is able to make a bear feel the way he feels when being bottomed, I don’t know, it just makes me want to do it even more.

As a self-identified ‘twink’ – young, slim, hairless and feminine – Ben was aware that in the gender stereotypic discourse of topping and bottoming, he was positioned as a bottom for the more stereotypically masculine ‘bear’, a gay man commonly characterised by a larger physique and more hirsute body (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017b). His belief that tops had masculine power afforded a ‘fetish’ quality to his experiences of topping a more masculine man than himself. Ben embraced the gender role stereotypes associated with tops and bottoms – tops should be more masculine and bottoms more feminine – but he nevertheless subverted the gender script that prescribed positions on the basis of relative masculinity. The dominance of the hegemonic masculinity discourse meant that hegemonic masculinity was Ben’s reference point for understanding what positioning practices *should look like*, but his own behaviour was not always guided by the gender scripts that it prescribed. Further,

fashioning sexual practices that contested these gender scripts was a source of sexual pleasure.

### **5-E: Discussion**

The IPA approach used in this study allowed for a discourse-dynamic approach to studying gender and sexual subjectivity (Willig, 2000). This permitted identification of social discourses relating to gay sexual self-labelling and detailed examination of how gay men's beliefs about masculinity and their identification with hegemonic masculinity were related to their understanding and experience of sexual positioning in anal intercourse. Many gay men use sexual self-labels as a means to position themselves in relation to other men within discourses of gender and power (Kippax & Smith, 2001; Hoppe, 2011; Moskowitz & Hart, 2011). In accordance with previous findings, the results from the present study suggest that these discourses influence some gay men's sexual positioning behaviours (Carballo-Diéguez et al., 2004; Johns et al., 2012). The findings presented here extend current understanding of gay sexual positioning in three key ways. First, the results suggest that gay men's expectations and experiences of positioning in anal intercourse are at least in part associated with how they define gender and the extent to which they identify with a heteronormative, hegemonic interpretation of masculinity. Second, some gay men may have strategies for challenging the gender scripts that are influenced by hegemonic masculinity, even if hegemonic masculinity is ostensibly endorsed. Third, gay men may distinguish between sexual positions as potentially gendered social identities (i.e., sexual self-labels) and sexual positions as potentially gendered behaviours.

As found in previous studies, some gay men contested the gender role stereotypes associated with top and bottom self-labels while others embraced them (Carballo-Diéguez et al., 2004). The extent to which the participants in this study

engaged with and positioned themselves within the stereotypic gender role discourse was related to their endorsement of and identification with heteronormative, hegemonic masculinity. As prior research has identified, the behaviour of some gay men is influenced by their aspirations to align with hegemonic masculinity (Taywaditep, 2001). However, some reject aspirations to hegemonic masculinity and incorporate both masculine and feminine behaviours and attributes into their gender expression (Wilson et al., 2010). In this study, participants who opposed essentialist interpretations of masculinity or who were less concerned with maintaining a masculine identity were more likely to challenge the gender role stereotypes and seek alternative constructions of tops and bottoms. These men often acknowledged the existence of gender stereotypic discourses of masculine tops and feminine bottoms but positioned themselves and others outside of them. From their perspective, sexual self-labels could not always be determined with reference to gender role stereotypes and self-labelling was not always associated with gender identity. Consequently, men who contest top and bottom gender role stereotypes may experience no need to present to others a self-label of top or bottom, nor to adopt a particular self-label in response to concerns regarding their masculine identity. Self-labelling for such men is likely to be influenced by other considerations, such as pleasure, comfort and sexual anxieties associated with adopting a given position (Hoppe, 2011; Moskowitz & Roloff, 2016; Pachankis, Battenwieser, Bernstein & Bayles, 2013).

On the other hand, men who defined masculinity in heteronormative terms and who identified and/or wanted to be perceived as stereotypically masculine, were more likely to apply a gender stereotypic understanding of tops as masculine and bottoms as feminine, irrespective of their own sexual self-labels. For these men, the belief that they and other gay men were positioned within a stereotypic gender role discourse influenced



both their sexual practices and non-sexual behaviours. In line with hegemonic masculinity, some were intent on avoiding femininity and presented a top self-label to other gay men. Therefore, a versatile or bottom man with a strong masculine identity might self-present as a top in order to maintain the appearance of masculinity and avoid the femininity associated with being a bottom. Concern for being perceived as either a top or a bottom, and utilising certain gendered behaviours to appear as one or the other, are predicated by the belief that tops and bottoms are discernible on the basis of gendered attributes. For some gay men, negotiating a sexual identity may be closely tied to maintaining a particular gender identity.

That some self-labelled versatile men were concerned with being perceived as tops to protect their masculine integrity refutes previous research findings that have represented versatile men as more gender-balanced, and versatility as an opportunity to escape gender stereotypes (Johns et al., 2012). It highlights the importance of accounting for masculine identity when examining position preferences, and of distinguishing between self-labels as sexual position identities and as positioning behaviours. Many participants in the present study made stark distinctions between self-labels as social identities and topping and bottoming as behavioural practices: top and bottom often represented notional stereotyped identities rather than descriptions of people who topped or bottomed. Self-labels may not only be longitudinally fluid identities (Moskowitz & Roloff, 2015; Pachankis et al., 2013), but also reflect short-term, context-dependent desires to be perceived in a particular way by others. This observation can help to explain why, as previous research has found, top and bottom self-labelling is not always concordant with sexual positioning in actuality (Wei & Raymond, 2011).

The study's findings indicate that to focus solely on the meaning to gay men of top and bottom self-identification is to obscure the complex psychosocial implications of engaging in the acts of insertive and receptive anal intercourse, in *doing* topping and bottoming and not only *being* a top or a bottom. It follows that men who engage in stereotypic gender role discourses to make sense of sexual dynamics between men might interpret their own experiences of anal intercourse in accordance with gender role stereotypes, as identified by the discourse-dynamic approach adopted in this study. However, for some, the act of engaging in topping and/or bottoming had implications for (albeit temporary) subjective experiences of gender, irrespective of whether the gender role stereotypes were endorsed, and regardless of masculine identity.

Many participants described the masculinising effects of topping in hegemonic masculinity terms: topping made some gay men feel dominant over and in control of other men, and mirrored the heterosexual intercourse that heterosexual men engage in, particularly in relation to the penetrating penis. Bottoming was associated with subjective experiences of both femininity (passivity; vulnerability) and masculinity. Bottoming could be experienced as masculine because it demonstrated that anal penetration could be withstood, because bottoms could be 'bottoms on top', and because they could acquire power by controlling the top's pleasure (Dowsett, Williams, Ventuneac & Carballo-Diéguez, 2008; Hoppe, 2011). Hegemonic masculinity may be at the centre of some gay men's interpretations of masculinity, and may define the gender scripts associated with anal intercourse, but the findings suggest that some gay men are active in deconstructing these gender scripts and challenging the dominance of the hegemonic masculinity discourse when it is applied to anal intercourse. Some participants' accounts suggested that bottoming was not intrinsically passive: It has been suggested previously that in anal intercourse, the anus demands pleasure from the

penis just as the penis requires the anus for its pleasure – the relationships are reciprocal, not necessarily hierarchical (Dowsett, 2000). Hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily the discourse that gay men engage in when making sense of the dynamics of anal intercourse, because neither partner necessarily experiences subjugation.

This queering of hegemonic masculinity was also observed when some participants discussed sexual position decision making, in relation to comparative masculinity. On the one hand, and in accordance with what has been found previously, sexual position decision making for versatile men was often related to the comparative masculinity of the sexual partners, such that the man who it was agreed was the more masculine would top on that occasion, whereas the less masculine man would bottom (Carballo-Diéguez, 2004; Johns et al., 2012). Such a negotiation necessitates reference to stereotypic gender scripts in order to appraise one's own masculinity and that of the sexual partner, and may suggest that heterosexist constructions of sexual intercourse guide some gay men's sexual behaviour (Carballo-Diéguez, 2004; Johns et al., 2012). On the other hand, some participants suggested that these gender scripts could also be unravelled, so that less masculine men could adopt the top position with a more masculine partner. Perceptions of comparative masculinity were not irrelevant – the participants' understanding that their sexual behaviour subverted hegemonic masculinity was an intrinsic part of the experience.

### ***5-E-1: Limitations***

Although the gay men who took part in this study were recruited from across the UK and the sample was fairly diverse in terms of age, the generalisability of the findings is questionable given the small opportunistic sample, and the possibility that the gay men who took part were uniquely interested in being interviewed about their experiences of sex. The purpose of IPA is to describe phenomena and interpret how

those phenomena are experienced and understood by a given population (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Although it cannot be concluded that the findings presented here represent the experiences of all UK gay men, due to the consistency of the accounts it may be tentatively suggested that many gay men understand and experience sexual positioning in anal intercourse in ways similar to those discussed in this paper.

A second limitation is that this study did not examine how top, bottom and versatile identities extend to encapsulate preferences for and engagement in other sexual behaviours between gay men. For example, Moskowitz et al. (2008) found that men who labelled as top were more likely than bottoms to report a willingness engage in other insertive sexual behaviours, such as insertive fisting, urination and sex-toy play, which may be associated with masculine dominance over a submissive partner. Future research might address how masculine identity is associated with preferences for being receptive or insertive across a broader range of sexual behaviours.

A third limitation is that bisexual men and other men who have sex with men without identifying as gay (MSM) were not recruited for the present study. IPA studies focus on small homogeneous groups who experience the same phenomena in a similar way (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) and in this study, only self-identified gay men were recruited. It has been found previously that sexual self-labels reflect degrees of 'gayness', to the extent that men who identify as top are considered less gay than those who identify as bottom (Johns et al., 2012). Further, bisexual men are less likely to bottom in anal intercourse than men who identify as gay (Agronick et al., 2004). Therefore, future studies might involve samples of bisexual men and/or MSM to examine how top and bottom and topping and bottoming are experienced in relation to masculine identity by these groups of men.

### ***5-E-2: Implications***

The study's findings may have some important sexual health implications. Efforts to engage with gay men in issues relating to their behaviour in anal intercourse might in future account for their beliefs about and subjective experiences of masculinity. Quantitative research has already demonstrated that men who aspire to be hegemonically masculine are more likely to engage in condomless anal intercourse, which is an HIV-risk behaviour (Brennan et al., 2015). Future qualitative research might be oriented to examining how beliefs about masculinity are associated with condom negotiations between gay men. Prior research has identified gender-related relationship power as a key variable in condom use within heterosexual relationships – heterosexual women with low relationship power are significantly less likely to report using condoms in intercourse than women with high relationship power (Pulerwitz, Amaro, de Jong, Gortmaker & Rudd, 2002). Further, it has been found that men who endorse the mandates of hegemonic masculinity are less likely to report a willingness to use condoms with regularity (Noar & Morokoff, 2002). Taken together, these findings suggest that it is often the men in heterosexual relationships who determine whether a condom is used in intercourse, and this is related to their masculine power over their female partner. If this observation were to be applied to relationships between gay men, it might be proposed that tops would be more likely than bottoms to guide condom use, and therefore that sexual health messages regarding condom use should be oriented to targeting men who are typically insertive in anal intercourse. However, the findings from this study imply that bottoms can also feel powerful (and masculine) in anal intercourse, meaning that condom use negotiations between gay men may be more complex. As the data in this study suggest, stereotypic gender scripts associated with anal intercourse are powerful, as much as they are also queered. Therefore, one practical

implication of the findings may be to design sexual health messages that draw attention to the bottom's possibilities for power, and therefore for being active in condom use decision making.

### ***5-E-3: Conclusion***

The results of this study suggest that beliefs about masculinity and masculine identity may be associated with sexual self-label presentation, self-label identification, position decision making and experiences during anal intercourse. Gay men who endorsed hegemonic masculinity and who valued their own heteronormative expressions of masculinity were more likely to view sexual self-labels as gendered in hegemonic masculinity terms. However, many of the participants in this study conceptualised sexual self-labels as distinct from positioning practices, which were often described as gendered experiences. Stereotypic gender scripts even guided the sexual positioning behaviour of gay men who were unconcerned with their own masculinity and who did not endorse hegemonic masculinity. However, the study identified many examples of where participants resisted the dominance of the hegemonic masculinity discourse, by queering the stereotypic gender scripts it prescribes. This suggests that some gay men may be active in producing novel configurations of gender in anal intercourse.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Study 3(B)**

**“I don’t want to be seen as a screaming queen”:**

### **An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of masculine identity in gay men**

Chapter 6 is under consideration for publishing in *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*,  
subject to revision

#### **Key responsibilities**

Conceptualisation:	James Ravenhill & Dr Richard de Visser
Data collection:	James Ravenhill
Data analysis:	James Ravenhill
Drafting:	James Ravenhill
Reviewing and editing:	James Ravenhill & Dr Richard de Visser

## 6-1: Abstract

It has been argued that gay masculinities are subordinated in Western society because homosexuality is an affront to the mandates of hegemonic masculinity, a discourse of masculinity that negates men as sexual objects. Gay men who are concerned with their masculine identities and with being perceived as masculine may therefore utilise certain gendered behaviours and attributes in order to embody a masculinity deemed viable. The purpose of this study was to use a discourse-dynamic approach to subjectivity to identify how gay men negotiated masculinity discourses to construct their masculine identities. One-to-one, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 17 gay men aged 20 to 42, where participants were asked to describe their subjective experiences of masculinity. The results of an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis indicated that the majority of participants engaged with a hegemonic masculinity discourse, emphasising their attributes associated with masculine dominance, including anti-effeminacy attitudes. Some participants resisted hegemonic masculinity by highlighting the value of “gayness” at times, particularly in gay spaces. Others dismissed the relevance of masculinity to their own identities, and reported having feminine subjectivities. The findings suggested that there was substantial diversity in the extent to which the participants engaged with and contested hegemonic masculinity, and in how they negotiated their identities against this and other discourses surrounding being masculine and being gay.

*Key words: Gay men; Masculinity; Qualitative; IPA*



## **6-B: Introduction**

The dominant discourse of masculinity in Western societies has heterosexuality at its core (Connell, 1995). Gay men must therefore negotiate who they are in a cultural context where homosexuality represents a failure to meet culturally-defined expectations of what makes a “real man”. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how a sample of gay men living in England and Wales defined masculinity and constructed their own masculine identities, in response to a discourse of masculinity in which gay masculinities are positioned as less desirable (Connell, 1995).

### ***6-B-1: Theories of masculinities***

Whether men identify and are perceived as masculine may be contingent on the extent to which they embody a masculinity that is sanctioned as the “ideal” way of being a man. In Western culture, the dominant masculinity discourse promotes a form of masculinity that contends that men should be powerful and independent, discrete from women and all that is feminine, and crucially, heterosexual (Connell, 1995). This masculinity discourse is often referred to as “hegemonic masculinity” – hegemonic because it perpetuates power inequalities between men and women (external hegemony) and between men and other men (internal hegemony: Connell, 1995; Demetriou, 2001). Heterosexuality is the lynchpin of hegemonic masculinity because it reproduces patriarchy: Women are sexual objects for which men compete (Donaldson, 1993).

Connell (1995) argues that although not many men are able to embody hegemonic masculinity, all are positioned in relation to it, occupying less valued, culturally-subordinated masculinities. Gay masculinities reside at the bottom of the gender hierarchy because homosexuality negates the hegemonic ideal of male domination over women, and because homosexual pleasure is elided with femininity, the antithesis of hegemonic masculinity. As a result, homophobia and anti-femininity

are core components of hegemonic masculinity, which might explain why, compared with heterosexual women, heterosexual men are particularly hostile towards gay men, and especially towards those who are effeminate (Monto & Supinski, 2014).

Although hegemonic masculinity theory has been influential, some have questioned its relevance in contemporary Western societies. For example, Anderson (2009) and McCormack (2014) have argued that since cultural homophobia has become less prevalent in the US and the UK, young heterosexual men have increasingly incorporated alternative gender expressions into their repertoires of masculinity. This emerging form of heteromascularity is referred to as “inclusive” because the young men who subscribe to it reject homophobia, form closer homosocial relationships and welcome gay men into their friendship networks (Anderson, 2016). If masculinities are becoming inclusive – i.e., are structured horizontally rather than hierarchically – then this has implications for how all men, including gay men, define and experience their masculinity.

Another critique of hegemonic masculinity theory is that it does not describe how men position themselves in response to a hegemonic masculinity discourse (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). For example, research has identified a range of alternative masculinities that heterosexual men may embody, that might reflect at least an attempt to resist hegemonic masculinity. These attempts can be seen through the emergence of “hybridised” contemporary heteromascularities (masculinities that heterosexual men embody: Bridges, 2014; Demetriou, 2001) and “metrosexuality” (Hall, Gough & Seymour-Smith, 2012), both of which describe heterosexual male gender expressions that incorporate stereotypically feminine, or “gay”, behaviours. However, it is argued by some that the apparent shift in the way that heteromascularities are performed may reflect a “repackaging” of hegemonic masculinity (Hall et al., 2012, p. 223) rather than

a genuine reconfiguration of the hierarchical gender arrangement: Alternative heteromasculinities may still be hegemonic (Demetriou, 2001; Edley & Wetherell, 1999), and heterosexual gender expressions may remain more valued (Allen, Harvey, & Mendick, 2015). As Connell (1992; 1995) suggested, the masculinity of even the most “straight” gay man is negated by his sexual attraction to other men.

***6-B-2: Gay men and hegemonic masculinity: Existing literature***

It has been suggested that gay men experience social pressure to negotiate their identities against culturally-embedded discourses of hegemonic masculinity and stereotypic gay effeminacy, and are under greater pressure than heterosexual men to “prove” their manliness (Drummond, 2005; Eguchi, 2009; Hunt, Fasoli, Carnaghi & Cadinu, 2015; Sánchez, Greenberg, Liu & Vilain, 2009). Much of the extant literature regarding gay men’s response to hegemonic masculine is focused on the gay male body. Some gay men value muscular bodies (to a greater extent than heterosexual men) because muscularity offers an escape from the stereotype of effeminacy and the opportunity to embody a masculinity valued in a heteronormative culture (Calzo, Corliss, Blood, Field & Austin, 2013; Filiault & Drummond, 2008; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). However, in some gay social contexts, it is thinness rather than muscularity that is valued (Barron & Bradford, 2007). This suggests that other discourses, apart from hegemonic masculinity, influence gay men’s engagement in certain behaviours.

The reproduction of hegemonic masculinity has been identified in many fields of gay culture, including the gay adult film industry (Burke, 2016); online gay communities (Dowsett, Williams, Ventuneac & Carballo-Diéguez, 2008); in scripts of anal intercourse (Johns, Pingel, Eisenberg, Santana & Bauermeister, 2012; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017b); in gay online dating (Clarkson, 2006); in sports (Filiault &

Drummond, 2008); and within certain gay subcultures (Borgeson & Valerie, 2015; Manley, Levitt & Mosher, 2007). Hegemonic masculinity can explain the antagonism some gay men show towards gay men who subvert normative masculinity: Anti-effeminacy is pervasive in some fields within the gay community (Brennan, 2016; Eguchi, 2009; Sánchez & Vilain, 2012; Taywaditep, 2001). In his interviews with gay men, Taulke-Johnson (2008) identified a discourse of the “good gay”, a man characterised by his lack of visibility as someone who is gay, achieved largely via avoidance of stereotypically gay (i.e., effeminate) behaviours. This is reminiscent of Brekhus’ (2003) typology, the “gay centaur”, a gay man whose gay identity is a small and non-defining aspect of his overall sense of self. Some gay men identify as “straight-acting”, a discursive strategy intended to distance themselves from effeminacy (Clarkson, 2006; Eguchi, 2009). The deployment of such discourses by gay men suggests that they may have internalised a cultural value of toleration of homosexuality, as long as gayness is not performed too ostentatiously, and is therefore not too visible (Eguchi, 2009).

Some gay men consciously eliminate femininity from their gender repertoire and adopt only behaviours that they understand to be masculine, as a response to pressure to conform to currently accepted hegemonic standards of manliness (Wilson et al., 2010). Therefore, the performance of masculinity by gay men may be framed as self-conscious, and indicative of their awareness that masculinities that look heterosexual are more socially desirable than alternative gender expressions (Duncan, 2007). However, other work has identified examples of gay men who view their masculinity as an authentic representation of their true selves (Adams et al., 2014; Duncan, 2007; Eguchi, 2009). Further, some gay men may value femininity over masculinity, which may be associated with their conflation of femininity with homosexuality and a desire to make

their sexual orientation known publicly (Wilson et al., 2010): “Gayness” can contribute to gay men’s social and cultural capital (Morris, 2017). Brekhus (2003) would refer to these men as “gay peacocks”, because their gayness is central to their identities. Other gay men are comfortable with combining stereotypically feminine and masculine behaviours as part of a more balanced repertoire of gender expression (Wilson et al., 2010), and value the same in their romantic partners (Johns et al., 2012). Therefore, hegemonic masculinity may not be the only discourse that gay men negotiate in constructing their identities.

### ***6-B-3: The present study***

The extent of men’s subscription to hegemonic masculinity has implications for their engagement in an array of health-related and social behaviours (Courtney, 2000; de Visser & McDonnell, 2013; de Visser, Smith & McDonnell, 2009). Further, for gay men, messages about the desirability of hegemonic masculinity, and their endorsement of the masculine ideals that constitute it currently, may reduce psychological well-being and be associated with risky sexual behaviour (Brennan et al., 2015). It is therefore important to know how gay men define and experience their masculinity, and to identify the strategies they have in place for negotiating the hegemonic masculinity discourse. Much of the small body of existing research into gay men’s masculinities has been undertaken in the US. The aim of this study was therefore to examine how a sample of gay men based in England and Wales defined and experienced masculinity and how they responded to messages about what it takes to be a man. This study therefore provides a foundation on which to consider further how gay men’s behaviours are related to beliefs about and experiences of masculinity.

## **6-C: Method**

### ***6-C-1: Data collection***

Individual interviews lasting between 45 and 60 minutes each were conducted with 21 gay men between July and December 2016. The interviewer was a 34-year-old, white, British gay man. Participants were able to choose between a face-to-face and Skype interview. Geographic distances between the interviewer and the participants made Skype more convenient for most participants. Eighteen participants chose to be interviewed via Skype. Video was enabled during some Skype interviews, at the request of the interviewees. The three participants who elected for face-to-face interviews all lived in the vicinity of the university where the interviews were held.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the lead author. Video recording was not used. Transcripts were checked for accuracy against the original interview recordings before the analysis took place. The key interview questions were: (1) *“How masculine do you see yourself?”*; (2) *“How important is it for you to be masculine?”*. These two questions were used to initiate more in-depth discussions about the participants’ masculine subjectivities. Other questions were also asked – the interview schedule is included as Supplementary Material.

The participants guided the interview content; the author used prompts and spontaneous follow-up questions to elicit more detailed responses (Flowers, Smith, Sheeran & Beail, 1997). The data presented here was part of a study that had a broader remit to examine gay men’s experiences of masculinity and of anal intercourse. For this paper, only the analysis relating to gay men’s beliefs about and experiences of masculinity is included.

### ***6-C-2: Analytic approach***

The data were analysed using a discourse-dynamic approach (Willig, 2000) based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), an idiographic approach that examines subjective experiences of individuals in specific situations (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). However, IPA's focus on individual experience does not preclude the opportunity to identify social discourses and to examine subject positioning within them. The lynchpins of IPA are phenomenology – the description of subjective experience – and symbolic interactionism, the perspective that people make sense of their experiences by a process of interpretation, via interaction with the social world (Smith, 1996). Although focused on the experiences of individual people, IPA researchers are able to identify communalities between participants' verbal accounts, which reflect shared understandings of the phenomenon under examination (Flowers, Hart & Marriott, 1999; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

A key concept associated with IPA is the “double hermeneutic” – the understanding that as the researcher is charged with making sense of participants' own sense-making, both participant and researcher are engaged in the process of interpretation (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). IPA researchers must “give voice” to the participants by describing how they experience the phenomenon under examination, and must also consider *what it means* for that individual to experience the phenomenon in the way it is reported (Larkin et al., 2006).

### ***6-C-3: Data analysis procedure***

There is no one way in which to perform IPA; for this study, the procedure described by Flowers, Hart and Marriott (1999) was employed. The first step was to become familiarised with the interview transcripts, which involved repeated reading of each transcript. Both authors were engaged in this stage, annotating the transcripts with

their initial observations. For the second step, one transcript was examined by the authors in more detail. Examining the participant's descriptions of his experiences accomplished the phenomenological element of the analysis, and the interpretative aspect was fulfilled by paying close attention to and making extensive interpretative notes regarding how the experiences had been described, and why they had been described in that way. In particular, the authors noted where participants' accounts were contradictory, and where they had used explanation, rationalisation, repetition, changes in pronouns, rhetorical questions, laughter and unusual phrasing. In the third step, each observation was given a label that captured its content, and was thenceforth treated as an emergent theme.

Once the authors had discussed their analyses of this exemplar transcript and negotiated how to manage divergence in coding, the first author continued the analysis process to identify emergent themes in the remaining transcripts. Once all transcripts had been coded, a detailed profile of each participant was produced (see Supplementary Materials). Participant profiles comprised descriptions of the participants' experiences as they had been reported, and the author's interpretative observations. They were used alongside spreadsheets of emergent themes to identify commonly recurring themes that captured the participants' shared experiences. These recurring themes were grouped together into overarching themes, and the overarching themes were given labels to describe the collection of emergent themes they represented.

It is acknowledged that IPA is inevitably interpretative, and therefore analyses are necessarily influenced by the perspective of the person interpreting. However, throughout the analysis, the authors attempted to honour the world-view adopted by the participants by doing case-by-case analysis of each transcript and bracketing preconceptions and insights emerging from the analysis of other transcripts. Therefore,



the authors strived to suspend their own preconceptions, expectations and experiences of the phenomenon in question and represent the phenomena as the participants experienced it (Flowers, Hart & Marriott, 2009; Willig, 2013).

#### ***6-C-4: Participants***

The data from interviews with four men was disregarded. In two cases, this was because the participants did not provide sufficient detail for IPA to be utilised. In one case, the participant did not answer the questions posed. In one case, the Skype connection was too poor to allow for accurate transcription. The final sample was therefore 17 men, who were aged between 20 and 42 years (median = 32). Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) recommend a sample size ranging from four to 10 for an IPA study, but for this study a larger sample was selected. Research evidence suggests that there may be generational differences in experiences of gay and masculine identity between younger and older gay men: For example, younger gay men report having “come out” to themselves and to others at a significantly earlier age than older gay men (Dunlap, 2016; Grov, Bimbi, Nanín & Parsons, 2006). Therefore, it was important to include both younger and older men in the sample. Further demographic information about the participants is provided in Table 6.1.

Some participants were recruited purposively from the sample of an earlier study (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017a). These men had given their permission to be contacted regarding their participation in future studies. A number volunteered to be interviewed in response to recruitment advertisements placed on gay interest pages on social media. The majority of participants were recruited via word of mouth, where men who had been interviewed already contacted their acquaintances and suggested that they take part. Potential participants were advised that the study was about “Experiences as a gay man”. None of the recruitment materials or pre-interview correspondence with potential

participants mentioned that the interview would involve questions about experiences of masculinity.

Ethical approval was obtained from the authors' employing university. A £10 gift voucher was given to participants. Informed consent was acquired. At the start of each interview, the participants were advised that they were not obliged to answer any given question, that they were free to stop the interview at any time, and could request that their data be excluded from the analysis. To maintain the participants' anonymity, their names were changed to pseudonyms at the point of transcription, and any potentially identifying references to other people or places were deleted.

In the extracts from interview transcripts provided in the analysis, three spaced full stops indicate that some words or sentences have been omitted for brevity and clarity. Bracketed content has been added by the authors.

Table 1: *Participant demographic information*

	Age	Ethnicity	Country of residence / Location	Relationship status	Highest academic attainment
Sahib	20	Mixed ethnicity	England / City	Single	Undergraduate
Jack	22	White British	England / Suburban town	Single	Undergraduate
Ryan	22	White British	Wales / City	Single	Postgraduate
Andy	23	White British	England / City	Partnered (M)	High school
Reza	23	Other Asian	England / City	Partnered (M)	Postgraduate
Ben	24	White British	Wales / City	Single	High school
Pete	30	White British	England / City	Single	Postgraduate
Dale	31	Indian and Black US	England / City	Single	Postgraduate
Ross	32	White British	England / City	Partnered (M)	Postgraduate
Adam	33	White British	England / Large town	Partnered (M)	Postgraduate
Craig	33	White British	England / Suburban town	Partnered (M)	High school
Arman	35	Indian	England / City	Partnered (M)	Postgraduate
Rob	35	White British	England / City	Single	Postgraduate
Geoff	36	White British	England / City	Single	High school
Mike	38	White British	England / City	Partnered (NM)	Postgraduate
Evan	39	White US	England / City	Single	Undergraduate
Carl	42	White British	England / Suburban town	Partnered (NM)	Undergraduate

*Note:* M = monogamous / closed relationship; NM = non-monogamous / open relationship.

## 6-D: Results

The analysis identified two themes relating to how gay men conceptualised masculinity: (1) Masculinity in opposition to “gayness”; and (2) Alternative interpretations of masculinity. Two themes were identified relating to gay men negotiating hegemonic masculinity: (1) The value of appearing masculine and avoiding effeminacy; and (2) Masculinity and gayness in different social contexts. Each theme and subtheme is described alongside illustrative, verbatim quotations from participants.

### *6-D-1: Conceptualisations of masculinity*

#### 6-D-1-1: Masculinity in opposition to “gayness”

As they attempted to locate and define their own masculinity, the majority of participants drew on discourses of hegemonic masculinity and stereotypic gay effeminacy. Within these discourses, gender and sexual orientation were often conflated and positioned in opposition to their alternatives. In the hegemonic masculinity discourse, heterosexuality was constructed as masculine, gay as feminine; heterosexual/gay and masculine/feminine were constructed as dichotomous; and gay could not be masculine. Engaging in these discourses had implications for some participants’ self-perceived masculinity, as Reza (23) described:

*I: How, how masculine would you say that you are?*

Not very.

*I: How come?*

In terms of personality I'd say, “No”, like absolutely, I, like, hate football and all that shit obviously. I quite like quite camp music [Laughs].

By declaring his disdain for football, Reza positioned himself implicitly in relation to a heterosexual man – football is the sport “indexical of [male]

heterosexuality” (Barron & Bradford, 2007, p. 150). Reza believed that he was not masculine because he did not have the interests that he perceived as masculine – and as a gay man, nor should he be expected to, “obvious[ly]”. Reza’s account suggested his definition of masculinity was centred on the masculinity he would expect a heterosexual man to embody. In this discourse, men who did not have interests that epitomised heterosexual men could not be masculine, at least in terms of their “personality”. However, when Reza compared himself to other gay men, his perceptions were different:

‘Cause to me, the more masculine you are, the less gay you are, and the more feminine you are, the more gay you are sort of thing . . . So, and because, because obviously you're not wearing the makeup and stuff, when you're in places like [gay nightclub], you think, "Well actually, I'm a little bit more masculine because I'm being less feminine, I'm being less gay."

Because he framed masculinity and femininity as poles of the same dimension, Reza’s self-perceived masculinity was influenced by his belief that he was less feminine than the other men present in a gay nightclub: To Reza, what was less feminine must be more masculine. Reza’s account suggested that self-perceived masculinity was relational and context-dependent, associated with perceptions of the masculinity of other men. According to Reza, gay men could embody degrees of “gayness” that were determined by how masculine and feminine they were: Reza was “less gay” than others because he was comparatively more masculine than them. Rather than referring to sexual orientation, the word “gay” in this context described a gendered social identity positioned in a particular social context. To Reza, and to other participants, there was a distinction between being gay and *doing* gay: Gay men who did not *do* gay (i.e., enact

certain feminine behaviours such as wearing makeup) to the same extent as others had the potential to identify as and be perceived by others as at least “a little bit” masculine.

Self-perceived masculinity was for many participants influenced by beliefs about the sexual orientation judgements made about them by others. When asked to report on their self-perceived masculinity, some participants responded immediately with a reference to whether they believed they were visibly gay, again suggesting that masculinity and gayness were constructed in opposition. Andy (23) provided an example:

I'd put myself quite high on the masculinity scale, you know, proper masculine, people like my dad who is, you know, shaven hair and smokes forty a day, to feminine being, you know, majority of gay, you know, camp gay [city] men . . . I feel like I would be able to walk into a straight bar, normal bar, and no one would be able to tell the difference.

Andy's belief that patrons of a “straight bar” would not be able to differentiate between himself and a heterosexual man was contingent on several beliefs: First, that true (“proper”) masculinity was embodied by heterosexual men like his father; second; that gay men were (usually) identifiable because they were feminine; thirdly, that he was different to the “majority” of gay men; and lastly, that because his sexual orientation was not visible, he must embody a masculinity that looked sufficiently heterosexual. Although he believed that there was a “difference” between heterosexual men and himself, Andy's view that this difference was undiscernible in non-gay contexts allowed him to distance himself from other gay men: The “difference” was limited to sexual attraction, and was not related to masculinity. Being gay did not affect Andy's masculine subjectivity because he embraced the mandates of hegemonic

masculinity and, with the exception of his homosexuality, was aligned closely to them: Andy *was* gay, but he did not *do* gay like most gay men did.

Andy's description of his dad as the personification of masculinity hints at how masculinity may intersect with class. Working class masculinities may align with certain hegemonic masculinity standards – particularly physical strength and emotional stoicism (Coston & Kimmel, 2012). Andy's described growing up in a “masculine household, very working class area”. His beliefs about masculinity were rooted in a hegemonic masculinity discourse that he had been engaged in since he was a young child – there was little room for the consideration of any alternatives.

The positioning of masculinity and homosexuality in opposition was not only evident in men who experienced themselves as masculine, as self-identified “camp” gay man Sahib (20) illustrated:

Camp is what I am, so if a guy doesn't think I'm camp I'm like, “Are you dumb?” . . . I've had so many guys go, “Are you straight?” I'm like, “Really?!” . . . And it's one of those things, like, I'm just, like if a guy ever goes, “Are you straight?” I would always think they're stupid. I will automatically assume that other people think I am, because just the way I, like, just everything about me, I'm like, “There is no way you can assume I'm straight.”

With a strong feminine subjectivity (“I see myself very feminine, like as a woman”) and a strong belief that only gay men could embody such femininity, Sahib was incredulous that anyone could doubt his sexual orientation. Sahib was not just gay, he was the personification of the gay effeminacy stereotype, and in that discourse, his sexual orientation should have been overtly obvious to others. That “so many” men had asked if he were heterosexual might have suggested to Sahib that others were not

guided so unwaveringly by the same stereotype – or at least, did not want to be seen to be endorsing it – but for Sahib it was unequivocal: only gay men could embody femininity to the extent that he did. This belief was sufficiently strong that others' apparent doubt over his sexual orientation did not influence Sahib's masculine identity: he repeated "I don't feel masculine at all" three times during the interview.

Other participants' attributes were more ambiguous, and this influenced their beliefs about how their sexual orientation was perceived by others, and their self-perceived masculinity. Voice was the most commonly-referenced give-away of sexual orientation. Some participants suggested that gay men might not be discernible on the basis of their appearances, but their effeminate, or stereotypically gay-sounding, voices could reveal their true sexual orientation, as Jack (22) illustrated:

On Saturday night, I went out into, like, a club . . . and the doorman wasn't going to let me in because he thought I was straight and [my friend] was like, "Oh no, wait until you hear him talk," and then I was talking to one of my friends, he was like, "Oh yeah, it's fine." Like, after he'd heard me speak [Laughs].

. . .

*I: How do you feel about people assuming that you're straight?*

It doesn't happen very often until I, well it does actually, until I start talking. And then as soon as I open my mouth people are like, "Oh my God, are you gay?" and it's like, "Yes, I get the voice gave it away, it's cool."

According to gym-goer Jack, he had the appearance of a heterosexual man – Jack equated muscularity with masculinity, and masculinity with heterosexuality – but appearances were deceptive because his voice distinguished him as gay, and as far he was concerned, everyone knew it. Jack explained, "I just feel like inside I'm a lot more



feminine than I appear to look”. Femininity was not a gender performance for Jack, it was who he was, and a masculine appearance alone did not change how he experienced his gender. Accustomed to hearing the “Are you gay?” question, there was in Jack’s mind no doubt over how he was perceived by other people: The stereotype of gay effeminacy was activated as soon as he spoke. From Jack’s experience, a voice that sounded gay could not be the voice of a heterosexual man, and in the discourse of hegemonic masculinity, a man with such a voice could not be masculine.

#### 6-D-1-2: Alternative interpretations of masculinity

Although the majority of participants framed masculinity and gayness in polar opposition, as hegemonic masculinity prescribes, others had alternative interpretations. From Ben’s (24) experience, masculinity and gay were not mutually exclusive because expressing gayness had masculinising implications:

I’ll still strut around in a straight bar, pole dance in a straight bar, it’s happened once but I was very drunk! [Laughs] . . . As soon as I got off that pole, people were cheering and giving me high fives, you know. Then I felt butch! [Laughs] And gay at the same time.

Ben conceptualised masculinity as something done by men (“the butchest thing I do is shave”) and he not believe that normative behaviour for men included pole dancing – if he had then his story would not have been notable. However, Ben experienced the honour bestowed on him by heterosexual people for his pole dance as a source of social power – and therefore as masculine (or, in Ben’s terms, “butch”). For Ben, masculinity and gayness were not on a binary dimension because gay men like he could feel masculine at times, despite not identifying as masculine in more general terms (“I’m not butch in the slightest”).

For Arman (36), locating his own masculinity was difficult because he had observed such diversity within and between the gay men he had encountered:

*I: Generally, how masculine do you see yourself?*

I don't think I really see myself as either or, I just kind of like see myself as me . . . I've learned to accept that there's loads of different people. And, yeah, there are some guys who are very feminine in their appearance, in their actions and stuff, and then equally as much as you've got guys who can be masculine. But I've been to loads of parties where you've got the most masculine guy, and a Britney [Spears] song comes on and they're mincing everywhere. . . . So, it's, for me, I suppose again it comes down to environment and who you're with. But in my day-to-day life, I'm kind of like, I'm just me.

Although Arman's account implied that he conceptualised masculinity and femininity as oppositional ("either or"), it also suggested that both were unpredictable and context-dependent and could be embodied in the same person. As a consequence, gender was not a preoccupation: Arman did not identify as masculine because he knew that whether he might be perceived as masculine depended on what he was doing and where he was doing it. As other participants also reported, in "day-to-day" (i.e., non-gay) contexts, Arman did not have a particular gender performance, just his authentic self, which he did not identify as gendered.

Some participants reported pluralistic interpretations of masculinity, referring to their understanding that some heterosexual men enacted non-masculine and/or feminine behaviours, which had implications for how gay men could define and experience their own masculinity:

Dale (31): People could easily say I'm much more straighter than the straight guy, or much more masculine than the straight guy, you know, because he's sort of like beautiful and gets his teeth bleached . . . It's just like, "Here's Dale, he's not shaved, again. He smells like rugby, and like car oil." But, but yeah, I don't, I never think about it. 'Cause I've got quite a few straight friends who I go to their house, and I'm just like, "This is the gayest house I've ever been in." . . . I use derogatory words all the time, so like, the, the F-word, faggot, I use that . . . But it's all in good fun, and it's only with people who I can feel comfortable using that with of course . . . And it's just like hand soaps made from, like, essential oils with like real flowers in them, I'm just like, "What sort of gay ass shit is this?!" . . . But it's just like, that doesn't define how masculine or feminine they are.

Dale's account suggested that he understood there was a discourse of masculinity wherein heterosexual men were expected to avoid femininity, and could expect legitimate denigration via homophobic taunts if they did not, (Anderson, 2005; de Visser & Smith, 2007; de Visser et al., 2009; Emslie, Hunt & Lyons, 2013). However, Dale attempted to position himself and his heterosexual friends outside of this discourse. He asserted that it was other people (not he) who conflated heterosexuality with masculinity and who defined a man's masculinity (and in this discourse, their sexual orientation) by their interests and behaviours. However, this did not prevent Dale from engaging in the homophobic teasing of his heterosexual male friends for violating hegemonic masculinity ideals. The interviewer was not to assume that these homophobic jibes were made in seriousness: "of course" they were made in a light-

hearted, ironic spirit, and aimed at particular individuals who would receive them as such.

For gay men to taunt heterosexual men with homophobic abuse plays with hegemonic masculinity, both reinforcing it and contesting it simultaneously. Dale indicated that masculinity was positioned in opposition to all things “gay”, and that men who engaged in “gay” things were suitable targets for (albeit irreverent) homophobic taunting. However, knowing that some heterosexual men could present as more stereotypically feminine than gay men like himself meant that it was erroneous to define masculinity by what heterosexual men did. Some heterosexual men did not “do straight” just as some gay men (including Dale) did not “do gay”, so the masculine-heterosexual dichotomy was not valid. As a result, Dale could have a masculine subjectivity that was unthreatened by his sexual orientation.

#### ***6-D-2: Negotiating hegemonic masculinity***

##### **6-D-2-1: The value of appearing masculine and avoiding effeminacy**

Many participants showed reverence for attributes that constitute hegemonic masculinity as it is understood currently, on the understanding that the masculinity they embodied was socially desirable and for gay men, counter-stereotypic. The attributes that participants identified as masculine, and what they valued as part of their masculine identities, included face and body hair, large and/or muscular bodies, lack of attention to grooming, beer drinking, gym patronage, dominant and controlling personalities, dominance and power in sexual relations and competence in and/or fandom towards masculine sports (e.g., rugby). For rugby player Andy, being masculine meant opposing a stereotype that did not represent who he was:

*I: But how important, generally, is masculinity to your identity?*

I would say it is fairly important because I don't want to be a stereotype I guess. If you ask my mother what a stereotypical gay man would be, it would be, you know, drag queens and, you know, crop tops and things like that, whilst I am very far removed from that, so it is quite important to me to, to, to be masculine and come across as masculine . . . It's not something I have to put on, it's just kind of who I am.

Andy's fear of being stereotyped as feminine meant that his masculinity – which he framed as authentic (“it's not something I have to put on”) – had particularly high value. His concern was not to “be” (and not merely “be seen as”) stereotypically gay, because his masculinity was genuine, not just an appearance. Using his mother as an example of someone who held stereotypic beliefs about gay male effeminacy reinforced Andy's claim to a counter-stereotypic identity. She was of a different sex, a different sexuality and a different generation to Andy, and therefore her stereotypic beliefs could not capture who he was. Earlier in the interview, Andy had described himself as “straight-acting”, and had then said: “But I don't really like that term – I'm just me” – a discursive tactic intended to avoid any suspicion that his masculinity was a self-conscious attempt to emulate heterosexuality.

Like Andy, self-proclaimed “alpha-male” Rob (35) desired to be perceived as masculine, and his proficiency in and enjoyment of rugby contributed to his strong masculine identity:

When I'm in the middle of [gay bar] singing at the top of my voice the words to "This Boy is a Bottom" and pointing at all my friends, I'd say that that's quite feminine, but, like, when, like, I'm playing rugby and smashing into people and

not really giving a damn, then it's kind of like, "Actually, no, not that feminine."

It's like, "It's quite butch." . . . I just, I flip from one, both ends of the scale.

*I: What would you prefer to feel like?*

. . . [The] majority of the time I'd like people to think I was quite manly . . . I don't want to be seen as a screaming queen.

*I: Can you elaborate on that? Why, why wouldn't you want people to think that you were a screaming queen?*

'Cause that's not me. And it's not the sort of person that I find attractive in a man. So, I kind of like, you, you know, sames attract, and I don't find screaming, you know, I'm not, I'm not saying I'm prejudiced against them, it's just what you find attractive, and I just don't find anybody that's kind of screaming at the top of their voice, running through, you know . . . Yeah it's, it's that kind of, it's just that kind of cliché, kind of over the top, I'll say "twinky" kind of screamer.

Rob's account indicated how hegemonic masculinity might be embraced in some contexts and played with in others. He emphasised his hegemonic masculine credentials ("playing rugby, smashing into people, not giving a damn"), and contrasted them with what he described as the femininity of singing a song in a gay bar about a man who is receptive in anal intercourse (a "bottom"). His description of his singing performance suggested how Rob engaged with and queered hegemonic masculinity – he maintained his masculinity by being positioned as the centre of attention in the gay bar, performing to an audience who he was indicating were anally-receptive (and therefore, in a hegemonic masculinity discourse, less masculine) bottoms (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017a).

Rugby enabled Rob to embody a masculinity reminiscent of hegemonic masculinity: it was aggressive and unconcerned about his wellbeing. Even Rob's ability to "flip" from what he understood was femininity in a gay context to what he saw as masculinity on the rugby pitch was framed as a source of masculine pride. Rob positioned himself apart from effeminate gay men ("them"), and his hyperbolic description of "screaming" and "running" exaggerated their effeminacy and augmented the distance between them and himself. Rob's masculine identity was particularly valuable to him because he believed it was also favoured by other gay men: as he opined later in the interview, "It is the age of the hairy man, gay guys have now become a lot less preened and tweezered and waxed . . . It's the age of the rugby player." On the understanding that being masculine would attract masculine partners, it was vital that Rob was distanced from effeminate gay men because effeminacy was not sexually appealing, and from Rob's perspective, nor was it valued in his particular gay community. According to Rob, gay men found a form of masculinity typically associated with hegemonic masculinity (hirsuteness, lack of care for grooming, sporting prowess) most desirable, and his anti-effeminacy helped him align with this attractive male archetype.

Participants like Rob created categories for themselves and other gay men, which enabled them to distance themselves from those in an unfavourable category (i.e., "screaming queens"). However, this "othering" of effeminate gay men was not always associated with the value the participants attached to masculinity. For example, Reza distanced himself from "camp" and "flamboyant" gay men despite not identifying as particularly masculine, nor being "really that bothered" with being perceived as such:

I don't really go around screaming that I'm gay sort of thing, like, I just keep to myself like, in that sort of sense, if I don't know someone. Like, I don't feel the

need to say it. Whereas obviously some people are very, like, in your face and, like, that sort of thing.

*I: Oh, some people it's kind of more, it's more in your face?*

Yeah, like they're very like flamboyant and, like, camp and stuff. I don't think I'm that like, like, obvious sort of thing.

Although Reza did not actively avoid effeminacy, there were undertones of anti-effeminacy in his account. He disparaged some gay men's flamboyance and campness, framing it as an inauthentic reflection of an attention-seeking "need" to communicate their sexual orientation to others. Reza was distinguished from other gay men because his gayness was less ostentatiously and less aggressively performed. Consequently, Reza's sexual orientation was less visible, which was favourable, either because it was not important to Reza for this information to be publicly available, or because it was important that it was concealed.

A minority of participants who categorised themselves as "camp" did not hold masculinity in high esteem, although this did not preclude them from expressing anti-effeminacy. Bartender Ryan (22) valued his campness because he believed that it honoured his gay identity, by communicating his sexual orientation to others ("I want people to know I'm gay"). However, as illustrated in the following account of his experiences of working in a gay nightclub, not all gay men were equal when it came to such expressions of campness:

I'd found people weren't being themselves. Like, I'd talk to people there when I was sober, 'cause I was working, and they'd be so, like, out there, confident, putting on like this façade, and then I'd see them sober in the street the following day and they were just completely different people . . . I'm not saying there's



anything wrong with being camp 'cause I'm camp as Christmas myself, but it's when [audio fault] in a different side, and they're not that person, and that's what it was a bit frustrating for me to see.

Ryan's anti-effeminacy was not motivated by a desire to be distanced from effeminate gay men. Rather, like many of the other participants, Ryan identified other gay men's effeminacy as fluid and dependent on social context, whereas his was consistent and an authentic performance of his gay identity. From Ryan's perspective, campness was integral to his gay identity, which, unlike other men, he honoured in all spaces, not just on the gay scene.

#### 6-D-2-2: Masculinity and gayness in different social contexts

Many of the participants described the importance of being perceived as masculine in certain social contexts. The workplace was identified by many as a location where being perceived as masculine was important, and some participants described the strategies they had in place to accomplish what they believed was a valued masculinity in that space, as illustrated by Ross (32):

I think I would certainly deepen my voice, stand up straight and be far less flamboyant when I was presenting.

. . .

*I: How important is it for you to be, to be perceived as masculine then?*

I think, I think part of it is that my own stigma of, "If I'm not masculine and I'm not professional and I'm not conforming to what people think men should be, I won't be taken seriously." . . . And particularly with the people who I was managing were straight, and they obviously knew I was gay, but I think, I think

there was a certain amount of holding back on elements of my personality in order not to be, sort of, looked down on in their eyes.

Ross' concern was that if he *did* gay in a context where people knew he was gay, his attempts to influence people's perceptions of his masculinity would be futile and his professional credibility lost. At work, Ross' gayness had to be reined in and his masculinity performed consciously, a response to his belief that there was stigma attached to "flamboyance". This was the reverse of the situation described by Ryan in gay environments. The stakes were high for Ross because his sexual orientation was known: His heterosexual colleagues might have expected effeminacy, and in response, Ross was vigilant over his behaviour and mannerisms in an attempt to maintain a respected counter-stereotypic, masculine identity. However, Ross explained that in other contexts, it was by utilising his gayness that he could acquire social power:

Playing the fool and being a little bit camp is entertaining, and straight people who might not necessarily have a vast number of gay friends—or *any* gay friends—I think probably appreciated my company, because I'd slightly play the fool with the girls, you know, making jokes with them about the blokes they're going out with, or the blokes in the club. They would always really enjoy that, having a little, kind of, being a fag hag for an evening and having a gay man come along and, you know, toddle along next to them and make jokes about the blokes. But that again probably wasn't really my personality, I would much rather be standing at the bar with the blokes.

Ross had explained earlier in the interview that he often felt like a "Plain Jane" on the gay scene, and "disadvantaged" and "awkward" in the company of heterosexual

men, because their conversations were often masculinised (“not part of my world”). “Playing” with gayness when in the company of heterosexual women afforded him attention that he did not receive elsewhere, and also facilitated bonding him with his female friends. Ross was clear about his position in this context: He was a novelty, the joker (“the fool”) and an outsider (“toddle along”), charged with the responsibility to entertain. Ross’ understanding was that those who embodied a masculinity he believed was typically expected of men (“deeper voice; less flamboyant”) were to be taken seriously, whereas those who enacted gayness were frivolous, and also marginalised. Although he had a preference for socialising with heterosexual men, the masculinity performance this demanded eluded Ross. However, as a gay man with a firm understanding of people’s stereotyped expectations of him, Ross was able to utilise his gayness to his advantage when he was in female company.

Many participants described the importance of inhibiting gayness in non-gay contexts, in response to perceived threat. Threat was particularly likely in contexts populated by heterosexual men. For example, Adam (33) described the “discretion” he exercised by refraining from stereotypically gay behaviour when in a “pub with a group of lads”. For self-identified “flamboyant” and “very, very gay” Ben, some threatening contexts required hypervigilance over his mannerisms:

*I: When you said sometimes you kind of either act or have acted a bit more butch, what do you actually do to, to do that, to accomplish that?*

I try and walk differently, I try and talk differently, you know, this with my hand [gesticulates wildly] didn't exactly help when I'm gesturing so I tried to stop doing that as much as I could . . . I do go and club down this place called [street name] in [Welsh city], and, you know if there's a situation there where it gets a little bit dicey, you know, I will try and butch up.

Ben used the phrase “butch up” to describe his attempts to conceal his sexual orientation when he was in some potentially threatening contexts dominated by heterosexual people, by avoiding certain behaviours. Aware that people were able to discern men’s sexual orientation by observing subtle behaviours (Johnson, Gill, Reichman & Tassinary, 2007), Ben felt obliged to attempt to walk and talk in a way that he believed would make his sexual orientation less conspicuous. “Butching up” meant emulating a masculinity that he believed would not be expected from a gay man, which for “flamboyant” Ben demanded close and conscious attention to the subtle behaviours that might reveal his true sexual orientation.

Appearing masculine was crucial in some social contexts, but many participants – including those who described identifying strongly as masculine and valuing their masculine identities – also discussed the importance of opportunities for expressing gayness. The gay scene was cited frequently as a space where gayness could be enacted, as Andy explained:

*I: If [your friend] was, like, dancing around on the dance floor, doing the splits and stuff, how would that affect you? How would you feel about him doing that if you were next to him?*

It’s funny isn’t it? ‘Cause if he did that in the public during the day I’d be like, “Get the fuck up you idiot. What are you doing?” and I’ll probably walk away, but in [gay club] I’d be like, “Yes, that’s brilliant,” you know, and then probably try and do it next to him [Laughs] . . . I guess I can feel like I can really, sort of, let go if I was in a, a gay bar or a gay club.

For Andy, maintaining a masculine identity and avoiding gayness were paramount until he entered the gay scene, which provided relief from his everyday gender performance (“I can really let go”). The gay scene was not “public” space because from Andy’s perspective, public spaces demanded a masculinity that looked heterosexual from those (like he) who were concerned about their masculine identities. As Andy explained elsewhere, there was “a time and a place” for gayness, and the gay scene was that place. Like other participants’ accounts – including “alpha-male” Rob’s – Andy suggested that in at least some gay spaces, it was gayness rather than masculinity that was socially desirable.

### **6-E: Discussion**

The discourse-dynamic approach taken in this study allowed for the detailed examination of how a sample of gay men living in England and Wales defined masculinity in relation to their own sense of masculine identity. It also identified how gay men negotiated a hegemonic masculinity discourse that privileges heterosexuality. Many (though not all) of the participants’ conceptualisations of contemporary masculinity were anchored in a hegemonic masculinity discourse, which meant that they located their own masculinity by considering the extent to which they were “gay”. In this discourse, “gay” did not refer only to sexual behaviour – all of the men interviewed were self-identified gay men who had sexual relationships with other men – and neither was it necessarily a synonym for “feminine”. Rather, “gay” referred to a particular social identity that was characterised by a constellation of attributes that participants believed would not be displayed by heterosexual men, and were therefore particular to gay men. As suggested by other work (e.g., Clarke & Smith, 2015), “gayness” – the *doing* of gay – was on a continuum, and with hegemonic masculinity the point of reference for the majority, it was associated with self-perceived masculinity.

Masculinity was often relative, dependent on the visibility of a man's gayness in different contexts and contingent on the comparative gayness of other gay men.

These observations accord with Adams et al.'s (2014) distinction between "gay" and "Gay", the former describing men for whom being gay is an aspect of self-identity relating solely to their desire for same-sex sexual relationships, the latter referring to men whose gayness is visible and for whom being gay may be a "master status". Many of the participants in the present study discussed their masculinity in relation to their visibility as gay men – for some, it was the first point of reference. If some heteromasculinities go unnoticed by virtue of their normativity, and if gayness is non-normative, then gay men who go unrecognised as gay must embody a masculinity that mirrors normative versions of heteromascularity. For some of the men in this study, being unidentifiably gay was highly valued because it reinforced their belief that they were masculine in a normative sense, and satisfied their desire to be perceived as such.

A number of participants maintained that their masculinity was genuine, reflecting who they were rather than who they were trying to be. This discourse of normalcy is reminiscent of "ordinary" (Wetherell & Edley, 1999) and "authentic" (de Visser & Smith, 2006) self-positioning by heterosexual men. In Wetherell and Edley (1999), study ordinariness was associated with a critique of hegemonic masculinity as macho and extreme; in the present study, ordinariness was a critique of *gayness* as extreme and hyperbolically camp. Some of the men in this study were "ordinary" men because they embodied an authentic masculinity and did not enact gayness. In Brekhus' (2003) terms, these men were "gay centaurs", or "integrators", because their gayness did not define who they were. The very fact that some participants rationalised their masculine identities in this way suggests that some gay men may feel obliged to "prove" the authenticity of their masculinity, perhaps reflecting their understanding that

others view it as self-conscious and performative, an attempt at appearing heterosexual (Duncan, 2007). This assumption may be perpetuated by the rhetoric of the phrase “straight-acting” to describe gay men who embody such masculinities (Eguchi, 2009).

Many of the gay men in this study reported strategies for negotiating hegemonic masculinity in different contexts. The most commonly described strategy was the avoidance of feminine behaviours; and some participants’ accounts were saturated with anti-effeminacy. Avoiding effeminacy was often deemed particularly important in non-gay contexts where there was perceived threat, either to professional integrity in the workplace or to physical safety in contexts populated by heterosexual people who might be hostile towards gay men. Therefore, for some gay men, avoiding effeminacy was associated with the belief that effeminacy is indexical of homosexuality, and that being perceived as gay risks being subjugated, including via the threat of violence (Connell, 1995).

A number of participants rationalised their anti-effeminacy by referring to their belief that masculinity is attractive to other gay men: Anti-effeminacy may therefore be normative (and desirable) in some gay communities (Taywaditep, 2001). This contributes to an explanation as to why many of the participants valued their attributes that they identified as masculine, such as their facial and body hair, their large/muscular bodies and their competence at masculine sports. As suggested by the participants in this study for whom a masculine identity was important, anti-effeminacy may also be motivated by a desire to disprove and create distance from the (inaccurate) stereotype of gay effeminacy (Taywaditep, 2001). The results suggest that some gay men may share a particular value system where gay male gender conformity is held in high esteem, and this may be a response to a hegemonic masculinity discourse (which positions femininity as opposed to masculinity: Connell, 1995; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011).

Gay men may be excluded from hegemonic masculinity by virtue of their homosexuality, but scripts of hegemonic masculinity may influence gay men to value masculinities that appear heterosexual on the understanding that that they are more socially desirable than alternative gender expressions (Duncan, 2007).

However, not all of the men in this study valued masculinity as they interpreted it, nor identified as masculine. Some dismissed the relevance of gender – there was too much diversity and unpredictability in others’ gender performances for gender to be salient to their own identities. The recognition by some participants that there was a multiplicity of masculinities available to heterosexual men may have negated the belief that their own masculinities were less desirable. If heterosexual men can incorporate nonmasculine and/or stereotypically feminine behaviours into their gender repertoire, then heteromasculinities are not necessarily distinct from gay masculinities, which are frequently framed as feminised (Blashill & Powlishta, 1999; Connell, 1995). This observation echoes Anderson’s (2009) claim that contemporary masculinities may be conceptualised in a horizontal rather than hierarchical structure: Gay men may embody masculinities that are equally viable to those embodied by heterosexual men, even if they do not embody hegemonic masculinity.

It has been argued that heterosexual men are increasingly deploying “gay aesthetics” as part of their gender expression (Bridges, 2014, p. 59), meaning that more fluid expressions of masculinity may be becoming “the new normal”. In this study, a number of participants engaged with hegemonic masculinity at times and rejected it at others. They played with hegemonic masculinity by emphasising their hegemonic masculine attributes, but also describing their enjoyment of enacting non-masculine, or feminine, gayness. This may reflect the general trend, observed in other masculinities research, for men to challenge hegemonic masculinity, and produce novel



configurations of gender practice (e.g., Anderson, 2005; McCormack, 2010). Even among the men who mostly avoided femininity, many described the value it had in one particular social context: the gay scene. Prior research has found that some gay men conceptualise the gay scene as a space to be “Gay”, particularly in terms of conforming to a particular appearance that makes gayness more visible (Clarke & Smith, 2014). The findings from the present study echo those identified in previous work: The gay scene provides some gay men with opportunities to be a space to “let go” from a masculine gender performance that assures inconspicuousness in non-gay contexts (Adams et al., 2014; Drummond, 2005b). Hegemonic masculinity discourse was powerful in guiding some of the participants’ behaviour in general terms, but it could be resisted in certain contexts.

#### ***6-E-1: Limitations***

The purpose of taking a discourse-dynamic IPA approach in this study was to describe the experiences of masculinity in a small sample of gay men, and to interpret how these experiences were made sense of (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). There are no attempts to conclude that the study’s findings reflect the experiences of all gay men who live in England and Wales. There was a substantial degree of diversity in the participants’ accounts: The findings presented here reflect where accounts were consistent, and also notes where there was divergence. The degree of consistency in the findings reported lends itself to the tentative suggestion that other gay men in England and Wales may experience masculinity and respond to a hegemonic masculinity discourse with the diversity identified in this study. However, more qualitative research using more diverse samples would be required to draw any generalisable conclusions.

When they were asked to describe their self-perceived masculinity, a small number of participants questioned the interviewer’s interpretation of the word

“masculinity”. This might imply that the participants’ subsequent accounts were shaped by their expectations of how masculinity was defined by the interviewer. In these cases, the interviewer redirected the question back to the interviewee. When participants asked the interviewer to clarify what he meant by “masculine”, this suggested that their understanding was that masculinity was open to interpretation. The discourse-dynamic approach made it possible to see where participants defined masculinity in terms of hegemonic masculinity, but only did so because that discourse was the most readily available: it was not assumed that this necessarily reflected how they interpreted masculinity in actuality. With the emphasis of IPA on data analysis on the idiographic level, it was possible to identify where participants positioned themselves in relation to the range of gender discourses they accessed.

This study did not examine how beliefs about masculinity may change through the life course, and how this may be related to changes in behaviour practices. In light of contemporary theorising regarding the changing nature of masculinities, future research may study a cohort of gay men over the course of their development from adolescence to adulthood, and observe how their strategies for negotiating masculinity discourses develop as they age. This would also allow for a more intersectional approach – there would be more possibilities for examining how variables such as age, social class, employment status, and health status intersect with the construction of gay men’s masculine identity throughout the life course.

### ***6-E-2: Conclusion***

The majority of the men who participated in this study constructed their understanding of masculinity in a hegemonic masculinity discourse. Those who had a desire to feel and be perceived as masculine in hegemonic masculinity terms were inclined to emphasise their masculine attributes, and avoid gayness in non-gay spaces.

Some men played with hegemonic masculinity, by negotiating an identity that embraced some of its mandates in some contexts (emphasising their heterosexual appearances, their competence in aggressive sports, and their disdain for effeminate men) and queering them in others (directing homophobia to heterosexual men; deploying gayness selectively). For some participants, masculinity was not a salient aspect of identity at all – these men often acknowledged the hegemonic masculinity discourse, but experienced no inclination to engage with it actively. Consequently, the findings identified a significant degree of diversity in how the participants negotiated masculine and gay identities in response to cultural messages about what it takes to be a man, and what it means to be gay.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Study 3(C)**

**“Looks like Tarzan and sounds like Jane”:**

**A case study of one gay man’s masculine identity**

Chapter 7 has been submitted for publication to the Journal of Homosexuality.

#### **Key responsibilities**

Conceptualisation:	James Ravenhill & Dr Richard de Visser
Data collection:	James Ravenhill
Data analysis:	James Ravenhill
Drafting:	James Ravenhill
Reviewing and editing:	James Ravenhill & Dr Richard de Visser

### **7-A: Abstract**

It has been argued that gay men in contemporary Western societies must negotiate a masculine identity against a cultural backdrop where the more valued masculinity is heterosexual, “hegemonic” masculinity. This article presents a case study of how a 22-year-old gay man living in the South East of England positioned himself in relation to the dominant hegemonic masculinity discourse. In a semi-structured interview, he described the strategies he employed for constructing and managing both his masculine and gay identities. The case study demonstrates the role that muscular bodies can play in supporting the construction of gay men’s masculine identities, because muscularity facilitates the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity and may compensate for effeminacy. It also identifies how some gay men may be active in “queering” hegemonic masculinity and creating novel gender configurations, by embodying a hegemonically masculine and an effeminate gay identity in parallel.

*Key words: Gay men; Masculinity; Masculine capital; Qualitative; IPA*

## **7-B: Introduction**

In contemporary Western societies, the dominant masculinity discourse is “hegemonic masculinity”, a configuration of gender practice that promotes an ideal way of “being a man” (Connell, 2005). At the core of hegemonic masculinity lies heterosexuality, because heterosexuality itself is hegemonic, a result of the reproduction of heteronormativity in cultural institutions and everyday social practices (Avila-Saavedra, 2009). Therefore, hegemonic masculinity privileges heterosexual men over gay men. The positioning of gay men within discourses of masculinity is an important area of enquiry, because it might be associated with their engagement in health-related behaviours (Courtney, 2000). For example, it has been found that subscription to traditional values of masculinity is associated with greater engagement in risky sexual behaviour among gay men (Brennan et al., 2015). Taking a discourse-dynamic approach based on positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990; Willig, 2000) and utilising Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA: Smith, 1996), this paper presents a case study of one 22-year-old, British gay man’s experiences of negotiating his gay and masculine identity against a cultural backdrop that privileges heterosexual expressions of masculinity.

### ***7-B-1: Positioning: The construction of masculine identity***

According to Positioning Theory (Davies & Harré, 1990), identity construction occurs as a function of positioning in relation to the discourses available in the local cultural context. Therefore, a suitable way of examining subjectivity – the experience of “being” – is to identify the subject positions occupied by individuals in these discourses, which determine what the individuals can think, feel and do – i.e., what they can experience. Positioning theory is compatible with a “discourse-dynamic” approach to subjectivity (Willig, 2000), because it acknowledges that discourses are inherently tied

to practice (what is and can be done). Subject positions are ephemeral and labile, meaning that in any given discursive account, individuals may move between a variety of different and sometimes contrasting positions (Harré & Moghaddam, 2011).

From a positioning theory perspective, construction of a masculine identity involves positioning in relation to dominant and alternative discourses of masculinity (e.g., Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Men's positioning in relation to masculinity discourses may influence the behaviours and characteristics they choose to display. According to hegemonic masculinity, to be a "real man" takes physical and emotional strength, economic and social dominance, the denigration of women and gay men, and ostentatious heterosexuality (Connell, 2005). Therefore, men who desire to be aligned with hegemonic masculinity (and be perceived as masculine) must shape their behaviour accordingly. Only a minority of men may enact hegemonic masculinity successfully: it might not be "normal" (in a statistical sense), but it is normative, and therefore is the object of aspiration for the majority of men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Men who reject hegemonic masculinity are nevertheless obliged to construct their identities against its mandates, and acknowledge that they risk being perceived as less manly (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013; de Visser & Smith, 2006; Wetherell & Edley, 1999).

Hegemonic masculinity theory conceptualises masculinity as plural and hierarchical: any non-hegemonic expressions of masculinity occupy subordinated or marginalised positions in a gender hierarchy (Connell, 2005). Gay men are subordinated because their homosexuality is counter to the hegemonic masculine ideal that negates men as sexual objects: patriarchy is (in part) reproduced by male heterosexuality (Connell, 2005). The culturally-dominant stereotype of gay men is one of effeminacy (Blashill & Powlishta, 2009), and hegemonic masculine is positioned in opposition to

all things feminine. Gay men must therefore construct their masculine identities within a dominant masculinity discourse that devalues their manliness.

### ***7-B-2: Gay men and discourses of masculinity***

Although gay men are inherently unable to enact hegemonic masculinity, they (like all men) are positioned in relation to it, and many experience social pressure to conform to its heteronormative ideals (Eguchi, 2009; Sánchez, Greenberg, Liu & Vilain, 2009). It has been suggested that gay men become accustomed to engaging in “continual masculine introspection” (Drummond, 2005b, p.277), because they experience greater demands than heterosexual men to “prove” their manliness. One way that they may accomplish this is via the development of masculine (i.e., muscular) bodies (Calzo, Corliss, Blood, Field & Austin, 2013; Filiault & Drummond, 2008; Lanzieri and Hildebrandt 2011). Muscularity has been identified as an important source of attraction between gay men (Lanzieri and Hildebrandt, 2011; Sanchez et al., 2009), reflecting a heteronormative script that promotes the desirability of masculinity as it is performed by the body (Duncan, 2007).

Scripts of hegemonic masculinity have been identified in many domains of gay culture, including online dating (Clarkson, 2006); pornography (Burke, 2016); sexual relationships (Johns, Pingel, Eisenberg, Santana & Bauermeister, 2012; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017b); and in various gay subcultures (Borgeson & Valerie, 2015; Manley, Levitt & Mosher, 2007). Endorsement of hegemonic masculinity has been associated with the anti-effeminacy that is prevalent within the gay community (Clarkson, 2006; Taywaditep, 2001). Some gay men consciously opt to eliminate femininity from their behavioural repertoire (Wilson et al., 2010), which may reflect an internalised mandate of hegemonic masculinity that rejects femininity and reveres displays of masculinity that look heterosexual (Duncan, 2007).



However, some have questioned the relevance of hegemonic masculinity in a society that is becoming increasingly tolerant of homosexuality (de Visser, Badcock, Simpson, Grulich, Smith, Richters and Rissel, 2014). For example, Anderson (2009) and McCormack (2010, 2014) point to the changing attitudes towards gay peers of adolescent and young heterosexual men to suggest that emerging contemporary masculinities might be conceived as “inclusive”, rather than hierarchically structured. Through his research in UK school and college locations, McCormack (2010, 2014) identified the presence of strong homosocial relationships between young heterosexual men, an absence of homophobia in their discourses, and the acceptance of young gay men into predominantly heterosexual peer groups. One of the consequences of declining homophobia is the contesting of hegemonic masculine ideals by heterosexual men (Anderson, 2009). This is reflected in the feminisation of contemporary media representations of heterosexual men (Brook, 2015), and in the emergence of “hybridised” forms of heteromasculinities, masculinities characterised by the integration of stereotypically feminine behaviours into the gender performance (Bridges, 2014; Demetriou, 2001; Hall, Gough & Seymour-Smith, 2012).

If heteromasculinities are not positioned in opposition to femininity, then gay men – who are often stereotyped as effeminate (Blashill & Powlishta, 2009) – may experience less pressure to conform to a masculinity that at least appears heterosexual. Further, gay masculinities need not be conceptualised as subordinate if heteromasculinities “look” increasingly “gay” (Bridges, 2014). However, both of these possibilities exist in a discourse wherein effeminacy and homosexuality are inevitably elided. The embodiment of masculinity by some gay men is sometimes framed as a self-conscious performance of gender – a response to the understanding that it is socially desirable, may conceal homosexuality, and can facilitate the formation and maintenance

of male friendships (Duncan, 2007; Wilson et al., 2010). However, some gay men view their masculinity as an authentic embodiment of who they are (Adams, Braun & McCreanor, 2014; Duncan, 2007; Eguchi, 2009). These men might be “gay” in that they have a desire for sexual relationships with other men, but they are not necessarily “Gay” (with a capital g) in the sense that their gayness is central to a particular social identity (Adams et al., 2014). Brekus (2003) distinguishes between three categories of gay man: the peacock, whose gay identity is a defining feature of who he is; the chameleon, to whom being gay is salient only in gay spaces; and the centaur, who is fully integrated into heteronormative society and does not actively enact a gay identity. “Authentically” masculine gay men may be described as fitting the latter two of these categories.

### ***7-B-3: A case study of masculine subjectivity***

The present study takes a discourse-dynamic approach using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA: Smith, 1996) to examine the experiences of one gay man as he navigates social discourses of masculinity. IPA is based on the philosophical traditions of phenomenology – how people experience the world – and symbolic interactionism, the perspective that human experience is a consequence of subjective meaning-making, which occurs as a process of interpretation, and of interaction with the social world (Denzin, 2004; Smith, 1996). IPA is an idiographic approach, focused on the experience of specific individuals involved in specific situations (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006).

The use of a case study is compatible with a discourse-dynamic, IPA approach for a number of reasons (de Visser & Smith, 2006). It honours IPA’s idiographic perspective by permitting the focus on the particular rather than the general; it accommodates the researcher’s interpretation of the participant’s account, which is a key component of the IPA approach; and it allows for the in-depth exploration of how

the participant's positioning in relation to masculinity discourses is associated with his experiences of being a gay man (Smith, 1996; Willig, 2000). The purpose of presenting this case study is therefore to deepen existing awareness of the variety of ways in which gay men may construct and understand their masculine identities in relation to the discourses of masculinity that are available to them.

## **7-C: Method**

### ***7-C-1: Data collection***

The case study reported here comes from a broader qualitative study that investigated masculine identity and experiences of anal intercourse among a sample of 17 UK-based gay men. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted by a gay male interviewer between July and December 2016. The majority of interviews were held via Skype; on the request of the participants, three were conducted face-to-face. Each interview was approximately 45 to 60 minutes in duration. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the first author. Before analysis, transcripts were checked for accuracy against the audio recordings. Video recording was not used. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for the data collection because they can facilitate the development of a rapport between the researcher and the participant, where the interviewee gives an in-depth and personal account of their experiences of the phenomenon in question (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Interviewees were asked to describe their experiences of being gay men, their sense of masculine identity and their experiences of anal intercourse with other men. Only responses pertaining to masculine identity were relevant to this paper. Key interview questions are provided as supplementary material, although each interview was shaped around the interviewee's responses, and therefore questions were not necessarily framed in the same way or asked in the same order for each interviewee.

In interview transcripts, participants' names were changed to pseudonyms and other identifying information was removed. Participants gave informed consent for their data to be used in papers written for publication. They were advised that they were able to withdraw from the study at any point during the interview, and could choose not to answer any given question. A £10 gift voucher was provided to participants in acknowledgement of the time they had given.

In the extracts of the transcripts presented in this paper, three spaced full stops indicate that some of the interview content has been omitted for brevity and clarity. Clarifying words and phrases in brackets were added by the authors.

### ***7-C-2: Interviewee***

Jack is a 22-year-old, single, self-identified gay man who lives in South East England, and describes his ethnicity as White British. He is educated to undergraduate degree level. He has no affiliation with any gay "tribe" or subidentity. Jack volunteered to take part after a friend (who had not taken part) advised him that gay men were sought for an interview study. All pre-interview materials sent to Jack (consent form; demographics questionnaire) referred to a study about "Experiences as a gay man". Jack was not informed prior to the interview that he would be asked questions pertaining to his masculine identity.

Like the majority of the men interviewed, Jack's understanding of masculinity was centred around hegemonic masculinity. However, Jack's interview was not selected to be presented as a case study because he was prototypical of the gay men interviewed for this study. Rather, his interview was chosen owing to the vivid description he provided regarding his efforts to negotiate a complex identity in response to hegemonic masculinity.

### ***7-C-3: Analytic approach***

A discourse-dynamic approach was taken, using Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Unlike nomothetic approaches, IPA is not concerned with studying large samples of people to identify general laws about human behaviour. Rather, its focus on the particular experiences of individual people is intended to shed light on the meanings people attribute to and acquire from the phenomena they encounter in their lives (Smith, Harré & van Langenhove, 1995). Thus, rather than starting with the general and generalising to the individual, idiographic approaches such as IPA champion the examination of specific cases which might then be generalised tentatively to the nomothetic realm (Smith et al., 1995). Case studies are compatible with an IPA approach because they permit the detailed examination of a particular individual (or group of individuals), thus affording a greater understanding of the phenomena of interest (de Visser & Smith, 2006).

Like other qualitative approaches such as discourse analysis, IPA is concerned with the importance of language, since it assumes that people's efforts at sense-making are revealed through their verbal or written accounts of their experiences. (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999; Smith et al., 2009). IPA can therefore be used to identify the social discourses people access when they talk about a given phenomenon, and the links between these discourses and subjective experience (Smith, 1996).

IPA is distinguished from other phenomenological approaches because it goes beyond the description of experience. A key concept associated with IPA is the "double hermeneutic" – the understanding that if people's sense-making is an interpretation of their own experiences, then the researcher's attempts to make sense of the participant's interpretation is also interpretative (Smith et al., 2009). For the IPA researcher engaged in analysis, the emphasis on both phenomenology and interpretation means "giving

voice” to the participants – describing how the phenomenon under examination is experienced – and also “making sense” of the participants’ experience, exploring *what it means* for that individual participant to experience the phenomenon in the way described (Larkin et al., 2006).

#### ***7-C-4: Data analysis procedure***

The procedure for IPA outlined by Flowers, Hart and Marriott (1999) was used as a guide. First, both authors read and reread the interview transcript, making brief notes of initial impressions, until they had reached a high degree of familiarity with the transcript. Both then examined the descriptive content and the use of language in the transcript, paying particular attention to the presence of contradiction, justification, explanation, repetition, laughter, changes in voice and unusual phrasing. Each observation was given a summary label, and was treated as an emergent theme. The phenomenological phase of the analytic process was the identification of Jack’s descriptions of his experiences. The interpretative phase was fulfilled by “reading between the lines”, considering how and why Jack had reported on the phenomena (i.e., masculinity and associated issues and behaviours) in the wider context of the interview. The authors met to discuss where there was agreement and divergence in their analyses. The first author created a detailed “participant profile” (see Supplementary Materials) for Jack, which incorporated both descriptive and interpretative comments.

The extracts presented for analysis in this paper identify the social discourses accessed by the interviewee, the implications of these discourses – i.e., subject-positioning and behaviour – and the meaning of the phenomena as to the interviewee, as constructed within the available discourses (de Visser & Smith 2006).

### **7-C-5: Reflexivity**

IPA necessarily involves researcher interpretation, and it is therefore essential that the interviewer/researcher acknowledges how their reflexivity before, during and after the interview may be implicated in the results acquired. The interviewer's approach was to not state explicitly his own sexual orientation unless he was specifically asked, because to start the interview by telling the respondents that he was gay would be to reify an identity that is variable and contestable, and this may have shaped the course of the interview (Walby, 2010). Jack did not raise the question of the interviewer's sexual orientation, but it was evident during the interview that he was responding to a certain script of sexuality that he assumed was shared (for example, the use of "we" when describing certain gay experiences). It is possible that Jack had been told by the person who had referred him to the study that the interviewer identified as a gay man; it is possible that Jack had picked up on certain cues in the interviewer's voice which he used to make a sexual orientation judgement (e.g., Valentova & Havlíček, 2013); and it is also possible that the interviewer had inadvertently "outed" himself during the exchange, by, for example, agreeing with a sentiment Jack offered about living as a gay man. The authors of this paper acknowledge that in discussions about sexuality and identity, the meaning of both is shaped by the reflexivity of both the interviewer and the respondent as the interaction progresses (Walby, 2010).

### **7-D: Analysis**

#### ***7-D-1: Deceptive appearances: The role of muscularity***

Pervasive in Jack's account were descriptions of his experiences of looking masculine because of his muscular physique – a result of extensive gym patronage – and feeling feminine. He explained, "the interior and exterior are quite contrasted . . . I just feel like inside I'm a lot more feminine than I appear." Jack had a feminine

subjectivity, but at times presented a discordant image of himself as a hegemonically masculine man. For Jack, masculinity was defined by appearances, and therefore was dependent on what other people could see: From his perspective, a “man’s man” was “a builder”, who had “big shoulders, big chest . . . and a bit of a belly”. With his interpretation of masculinity anchored in hegemonic masculinity, Jack believed that by having a muscular body, he could influence others’ perceptions of his masculinity. Jack described his desire to appear masculine on the online gay dating and “hook-up” app, Grindr:

*I: What was, what was the [Grindr profile] picture of?*

Oh, it was just me, in, like, a vest at the gym.

. . .

I think it just shows me in a better light, I suppose, like, in regards to my physique. And I suppose people are definitely going to be turned on. Do you know what, we all know that, like, we all know that people get, gay men have a thing against camp gay men. They just do.

*I: Right.*

And I suppose if you're not, you're not on there to date, you're not on there to get to know someone, you're on there to fuck them, do you know what I mean? It's like, "I just want a bloke that looks like a bloke that I can have my way with, and then he can fuck off."

Jack’s muscular appearance served a number of purposes (as will be discussed throughout this analysis). As explained in the extract above, it was intended to facilitate the pursuit of sex because muscularity was attractive to other gay men – a source of “erotic capital”. From Jack’s understanding, gay men found femininity (or “campness”)



undesirable in a sexual partner. However, this was not necessarily an opinion Jack shared – perhaps unsurprising given his own feminine subjectivity. According to Jack, all gay men knew that gay men found campness sexually unappealing (“*we* all know that” – emphasis added). Changing the pronoun from “*we*” to “*they*” (“*they* just do”) may have functioned to create distance between Jack and this mandate of hegemonic masculinity, which subordinated effeminate gay men like himself. Jack did, however, play along with it by selectively avoiding being perceived as effeminate himself, at least in his online presentation. This was suggestive of how Jack showed signs of actively “queering” hegemonic masculinity by *appearing* hegemonically masculine when it afforded potential benefits – looking like a “bloke” and being more sexually appealing – while simultaneously embodying an effeminate gay identity.

At one point during the interview, Jack described how people often assumed that he was heterosexual on account of his muscular body – he was accustomed to hearing from people that he was “quite muscly for a gay boy.” In this discourse, masculinity was heterosexual and muscularity *looked* heterosexual because it looked masculine. Jack’s body was sufficiently masculine to conceal his homosexuality. However, Jack’s pursuit of muscularity (he exercised in the gym “a hell of a lot”) was not simply a reflection of his desire to be perceived as heterosexual, but was associated with his understanding that appearing masculine in hegemonic masculinity terms was desirable to other gay men.

When people became more strongly acquainted with Jack, they realised that his masculine appearance was deceptive:

We had a drag queen in a couple of weeks ago, and he said that [laughs] a thing that, he said, “Looks like Tarzan” - this was about me - “and sounds like Jane!” [Laughs] And that kind of stuck. So I think, they all think . . . whenever they

[customers] come in, that I'm going to be a bit like, I don't know, sort of, I suppose masculine as such. But then when I start talking and when they get to know me after a couple of, like, a few weeks or a few evenings, it's like, "Oh," their perception of me is totally different.

Jack's transformation from Tarzan to Jane occurred when he spoke: Gay-sounding men could not be masculine, notwithstanding their masculine appearances (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017a). The incongruity between Jack's ostensibly masculine appearance and the effeminacy of his voice was comical, hence Jack's laughter when he described what the drag queen had said: He might have looked hegemonically masculine, but in reality it was gayness, the antithesis of hegemonic masculinity, that was central to Jack's identity. Jack's voice played a significant role in his subjective experience of femininity because it was such an overt indicator of his "gayness". However, the gayness conveyed by his voice was also a source of conflict. Jack claimed that he "hate[d] his voice so much", and that the reason he was so inclined to achieve a muscular physique was to accrue that masculine "credit" that might compensate for the effeminacy he displayed (de Visser & Smith, 2006, 2013):

*I: So how important would you say kind of muscularity is to you? Your own.*

I'd say it definitely, it's definitely a big factor . . . 'Cause I am quite a, I'm quite, I'd say I am quite feminine in my, like, my voice and like my natures and stuff, so I suppose that kind of counteracts it. But a lot of time I go on dates and things and people always say that I'm quite nice looking till I start talking [laughs]

*I: Really? How does that make - how does that make you feel when they say that?*

Well I'm the kind of, I just laugh at everything, but I suppose deep down that's probably why I'm so self-critical.

In this extract, the value of muscularity was once again framed in terms of its sexual appeal to other gay men: It was intended to “counteract” his effeminacy, including that conveyed by his voice. However, Jack recognised that his attempts at embodying a masculine persona were in vain: He concluded, “You can change what you look like, but you can’t change who you are”, and it was effeminacy, not masculinity, that was central to who Jack was.

***7-D-2: Being the underdog***

Jack explained that one of the consequences of being identifiably gay (on account of his voice) was that he felt marginalised by heterosexual people. When asked to describe his personality, Jack replied with “defensive, funny, and overlooked”. Being “overlooked” is not a trait of personality, and the fact that he used this word to describe himself implied that it was a highly salient aspect of his subjective experiences of living in a society wherein he felt subjugated:

*I: Why would you describe yourself as "overlooked"?*

I think some people just kind of, like especially, well I suppose sometimes I do probably play up to it a little bit as well, which doesn't help, but I think people just look at you as, you know what I mean, being "the gay person", like, "the gay kid", as your identity. It's like, that's just a part of who you are, but people I think generally just assume that that's what you're about. "Oh he's gay." And it's like, "Well, yeah, you're straight, but that doesn't come into the topic of conversation does it?"

*I: I see.*

Do you know what I mean? And I think people like, when I talk and stuff, like I think people kind of, I don't know, they underestimate like what I'm interested in. They're like, "Oh, so do you not like, just like shopping and," you know what I mean, "like, nightclubs?" It's like, "Oh no, like, there's a lot more to me than that, in regards to, like, what I," you know what I mean, "my interests, my tastes, I suppose my intellect."

Jack believed that his effeminacy meant that, for him, "Gay" (with a capital G: Adams et al., 2014) was a master status, imbued with meaning beyond sexual orientation; it became a stereotyped social identity imposed by others, which did not reflect how Jack experienced his homosexuality. In Brekhus' (2003) terms, Jack might have presented as a "gay peacock", but there was more to Jack than effeminacy – his reference to "tastes" and "intellect" are terms associated with a refined, hegemonic masculine dominance. Jack's gayness was displayed via effeminacy, and to heterosexual people, effeminacy was frivolous and irreverent – but taste and intellect, important aspects of Jack's sense of self, are antonymic to frivolity. The implications of being positioned in this stereotypic gay discourse were familiar to Jack – he described feeling "stuck in the confines" of his gay identity, even though he had "always been OK with being gay". It was others' positioning of him in the stereotypic gay discourse ("interactive positioning": Davies & Harré 1990) that restricted his experiential possibilities.

It is possible that another reason why a muscular physique was so desirable was because it afforded him an escape from those confines – as long as he was seen and not heard. Positioned unfavourably in relation to hegemonic masculinity throughout his life, Jack was accustomed to experiencing himself as subordinated – "kind of the underdog"

– in non-gay contexts. It was therefore “quite a nice feeling” when people thought he looked masculine – it afforded the possibility that he would be taken seriously. Men whose masculinity appeared heterosexual were not “underestimated” because they were assumed to be heterosexual, and by virtue of the normativity of heterosexuality, were not subject to further stereotyped scrutiny.

### ***7-D-3: Using gayness as symbolic capital***

Despite Jack’s frustration at being denied access to a viable masculinity when he spoke, he claimed that, at times, he “played up” to people’s expectations of him as a gay man. This involved using gay (or “camp”) humour when managing certain social interactions – including the interview for this study – as illustrated in the following extract:

I was actually really lucky [at school]. Because obviously I was so out there, I, but like it was really weird, but because I was, I, well I suppose people tell me I'm funny all the time, and I suppose I just kind of played on that and it, yeah, it kind of got me through school. I never really had any trouble. Which is quite rare really. I was never bullied, I was never beaten up, do you know what I mean? People would shout to me, like, “fucking gay” every couple of days but it was like, “[Laughs] State the obvious!” It's not really an insult is it?

Jack’s account suggested that homophobic abuse had been a routine part of school life, although he did not frame the abuse as bullying. His gayness had been highly visible at school, “obviously” (by this point in the interview, the interviewer was to be in no doubt that Jack’s sexual orientation was highly discernible). Jack’s response to homophobia was to embrace his gayness, to laugh at it, and at his abusers’ lack of creativity for homing in on the obvious. However, that does not preclude the likelihood

that he found the homophobia offensive. Rather, laughing at himself served at least three functions: It enabled Jack to “own” his gayness and experience himself as authentically gay; it helped to minimise the meaning of the abuse; and it helped Jack to manage his emotional reaction to it. Jack concluded, “That’s my way of dealing with things. Whenever I’m uncomfortable with anything I will instantly take the mick out of it.” His effeminacy was an intrinsic part of his gay identity: To enter into a discourse of “bullying” to describe his experiences would be to position himself as a victim of his own effeminate identity, which, as Jack had already opined, could not be changed.

In a discourse where heterosexual masculinity was valued and male effeminacy derided, Jack was obliged to seek out ways of managing his effeminate identity. One strategy he used was to deploy gayness via “camp” humour, particularly in social situations where he was unable to fulfil others’ expectations of him to present as masculine, as suggested in the following account:

If I’m in the company where I need to be more masculine, instead of taking on a more masculine role I just instantly use humour.

*I: Oh, I see.*

Like, I jump to being funny.

*I: Why do you think you do that?*

I don’t know. I suppose it’s the card that’s just, I always play that just gets me through things, if you can make people laugh I think you can just, you can kind of get away with anything.

*I: Yeah.*

‘Cause people are too busy laughing with you or like at what you’ve said to really like want to decipher or go any deeper, you know what I mean? They just want to use you for comedic value, and that’s fine.

*I: Yeah.*

Jesus, I feel like I'm on Trisha<sup>8</sup>!

From Jack's understanding, men who did not embody hegemonic masculinity risked being marginalised for their "failure" to do their gender appropriately in certain social contexts. Jack's camp humour helped him avoid social punishments, because it entertained those who administered them. Owing to his effeminacy – especially that conveyed by his voice – his attempts at embodying an acceptable masculinity were futile, so humour was a viable alternative. Non-masculine/effeminate men transgressed normative expectations of men and were therefore less valued, unless they were funny: Humour afforded the symbolic capital that could not be provided by masculinity. It served the purpose of reminding Jack's audience that he was gay, and as such, it was effeminacy and frivolity that should be expected from him, rather masculinity.

Jack's reference to feeling like he was on the talk show "Trisha" was intended in amuse the interviewer, and demonstrated just how accustomed Jack was to deploying gayness in the form of camp humour in particular social circumstances: Talk shows are a "women's genre [of television], with a special interest in the sexual, the domestic, and the intimate" (Gamson, 1999, p. 191). Jack had agency in deciding when to deploy his gayness on the assumption that it might serve a particular function in social interaction. By making the "Trisha" comment, Jack was staking a claim on his gay identity, to an audience who he believed would understand the joke. Therefore, Jack was not necessarily a "victim" of his effeminacy – including as he embodied it through his voice. Podesva (2007) argued that people are active in using their voices to achieve certain objectives. For example, some gay men may deploy a higher-pitch (fundamental

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<sup>8</sup> Trisha was a British tabloid talk show broadcast on television from 1998 – 2010.

frequency, or f0) in order to construct a “diva identity” that might have value in certain social contexts (Podesva, 2007, p471). As described previously, Jack felt feminine, and he used his effeminate voice as part of his performance of an effeminate gay identity. His account suggested that that this was strategic – an effeminate voice could provide “gay capital” (in the form of social prestige) in domains where gayness might be valued (Morris, 2017).

Jack’s use of humour was associated with his discomfort at his sexual orientation being so determinable on account of his voice, and yet his voice played a key role in producing a comic effect. This apparent contradiction supports the suggestion that Jack constructed his identity in part by contesting hegemonic masculinity and the subjugation he experienced owing to its dominance. On the one hand, Jack used muscularity to “counteract” his gayness; on the other hand, Jack’s gayness was constitutive of who he was, and he did not necessarily want it to be concealed by a masculine expression that appeared heterosexual – at times, he wanted it to be overtly identifiable. Hegemonic masculinity was stifling and made Jack feel less valued – enacting gayness was a means of being noticed (not “overlooked”), of managing his gayness and of being true to his sense of self. However, Jack’s use of camp frivolity came at a cost – it conformed to the same stereotypic assumptions people held about him that made him feel “underestimated”. Humour might have mitigated his lack of masculinity, but it was not necessarily successful at making Jack feel less marginalised.

Some of Jack’s concluding remarks from the interview suggested that he was cognizant of the agency he had in managing his identity in different contexts:



Even, even if I was with, had that video [Skype] thing on, this would be totally different, and I wouldn't be able to look you in the face for more than about ten seconds.

*I: How do you think it would have been different?*

I would have been a lot more unserious, I would have made a lot more jokes.

*I: Right.*

I would have jazzed it all up a little bit more, do you know what I mean?

*I: Do you feel like you've been kind of [unfinished sentence]?*

Yeah, massively honest. And I think sometimes you need these conversations, 'cause I think about these things a lot, but they very rarely come out of my mouth, 'cause I have nobody, no reason to talk about it, do you know what I mean?

Jack recognised that the interview provided a rare opportunity to talk about his feelings towards and experiences of living as a gay man. The interviewer was interested in the same issues that preoccupied Jack, so Jack claimed to experience less need to “jazz up” his account and distract the interviewer with camp humour – although he did make a number of attempts at doing so. Jack’s comment, “I think about these things a lot” indicated how salient it was to Jack to negotiate an identity against the dominance of hegemonic masculinity, and attempt to reconcile it with his gay effeminacy.

## **7-E: Discussion**

This study adds to the extant literature on gay men’s masculinities by identifying the reflexive positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990; Tan & Moghaddam, 1995) of one gay man as he strategised and negotiated an identity in relation to the dominance of a hegemonic masculinity discourse. The analysis suggested that some gay men may

experience themselves as socially disadvantaged in a culture that values hegemonic masculinity, especially when they identify effeminacy in their own characteristics and behaviours. However, it also indicated how some gay men may challenge the dominant messages regarding what it takes to be a “real man”, and fashion unique configurations of gender practice that incorporate attributes associated with hegemonic masculinity but also honour expressions of “gayness”, to which hegemonic masculinity is diametrically opposed.

***7-E-1: Muscularity as masculine credit***

Men like Jack who are unable to enact hegemonic masculinity nevertheless construct their identities with knowledge of and reference to its mandates, whether or not they desire to be aligned with them (de Visser & Smith, 2006). Jack’s interpretation of masculinity was anchored in a discourse of hegemonic masculinity: Men who embodied hegemonic masculinity – or at least appeared to – were “real men” (and heterosexual men) who had social power. In response, and as has been previously noted is true for other gay men (e.g., Drummond, 2005b; Filiault & Drummond, 2008), Jack turned to exercising for muscularity in an attempt to enact a masculinity that he understood mirrored hegemonic masculinity – i.e., was desirable, particularly to other gay men. To some extent, his attempts were successful because his masculine body looked sufficiently heterosexual to conceal his homosexuality, at least on the basis of appearances (Drummond, 2005; Filiault & Drummond, 2008).

Jack’s reference to the compensatory value of his muscularity suggests that muscularity can afford masculine “credit” to gay men, intended to mitigate self-perceived effeminacy in other domains. It has been suggested previously that the extent to which a man is perceived as masculine is associated with the combination of attributes he displays, each having a differential effect on perceptions of masculinity (de

Visser & McDonnell, 2013; de Visser, Smith & McDonnell, 2009). It has also been demonstrated that men may be able to use certain masculine attributes/behaviours to ameliorate their overall masculinity when it is threatened by the display of stereotypically feminine characteristics (de Visser et al., 2009). Masculinity can therefore be conceived as a type of “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu, 1984) that can be lost, acquired and traded depending on the “field” (Bourdieu, 1977) where certain gendered attributes/behaviours are displayed (Anderson, 2009; de Visser et al., 2009).

In this study, Jack’s desire to be muscular can be interpreted as an attempt to accrue “masculine capital” where it was lost on account of his effeminacy – particularly that conveyed by his voice, which he believed influenced perceptions of his sexual orientation (Gaudio, 1994; Madon, 1997; Valentova & Havlíček, 2013). The benefit of this qualitative case study is that it provides in-depth, explanatory information that enhances understanding of quantitative research findings: Jack’s attempts at compensating for his effeminate (or “gay-sounding”) voice via muscularity were in vain because, as quantitative research has demonstrated, voice quality is more strongly associated with perceptions of gay men’s masculinity than physique (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017a).

This may have implications for understanding gay men’s health. Gay men who are concerned with presenting a masculine identity that is aligned with hegemonic masculinity may turn to health-related behaviours to augment their masculine capital. For example, if traditional beliefs about masculinity are associated with engagement in HIV risk behaviours (i.e., condomless anal intercourse: Brennan et al., 2015; Wheldon, 2014), then future research may examine how gay men might be encouraged to engage in alternative masculine behaviours, such as sport and exercise, to support the construction of their masculine identities.

### ***7-E-2: Gayness and subordination***

As identified in other research with gay men (e.g., Johnson, 2005; Phua, 2007), Jack both embraced and resisted the mandates of hegemonic masculinity in constructing an identity. A preoccupation with presenting as hegemonically masculine via muscularity represented Jack's attempt at aligning himself with hegemonic masculinity. At the same time, he reported feeling feminine, and he embraced his gayness, conveyed most conspicuously by his gay-sounding voice. Jack used camp humour (perhaps adjusting his voice so it would be perceived as more "gay": Podesva, 2007), in defiance of hegemonic masculinity, and as a means of acquiring symbolic "gay capital" (Morris, 2017). Jack's ostentatious gayness was at odds with his masculine appearance and a direct challenge to normative expectations of men. However, it was an endorsement of others' expectations of how *gay* men should be. Thus, Jack was able to construct and perform a normative *gay* identity (Barron & Bradford, 2007) that relieved him from the social pressure to enact a particular masculinity which, owing to his effeminacy, could not be fully realised.

"Playing up" to people's stereotyped expectations might have afforded a degree of social power to compensate for Jack's inherent effeminacy, but it did not function to make Jack feel equal to the heterosexual actors in his social interactions. Rather, it reinforced his subordinated position. Morris (2017) suggested that young gay men in contemporary Western societies can acquire symbolic gay capital from their sexual orientation, because their gayness is legitimised by heterosexual people and recognised as a form of prestige. Like Anderson and McCormack (2016), Morris (2017) argued that contemporary masculinities are more inclusive of gay men, and that some heterosexual men embrace transgressions of hegemonic masculinity, rather than subordinating those who display them. However, the discourse-dynamic, IPA approach taken in the present

study identified how positioning in relation to different masculinity discourses can affect the extent to which gay men experience benefit from this apparent shift in the masculinities structure. To an extent, Jack benefitted from “owning” his gayness in certain social situations; but performing gayness also increased his experience of difference and subordination by heterosexual people. If gay men do not see the inclusivity and increasing diversity of heteromasculinities, then they may continue to position themselves as subordinate to them.

For Jack, the opportunity to talk about his experiences seemed cathartic. Accustomed to deploying his gayness in order to manage sensitive social interactions, it was notable to Jack that he had responded to the interview questions with such candour. This might be in part attributable to Jack’s understanding that the interviewer was also a gay man. It has been argued that hegemonic masculinity is not the main script that guides social interaction between gay men (Walby, 2010). Consequently, in this interview, Jack did not position himself as a gay man in relation to a heterosexual man of hegemonic privilege, but rather as an interviewee engaged in a non-stratified relationship with a researcher. Walby (2010, p. 654) opines that “discourses concerning sexuality are not as abstract and fixed as researchers often pretend, as sexuality is produced in encounters through interaction”. It is therefore important to acknowledge both the interviewer’s *and* Jack’s reflexivity in terms of how sexuality and masculine identities were constructed during the interview, and how Jack’s understanding of the interaction with the interviewer may have shaped his account.

### ***7-E-3: Conclusion***

To generalise from this single case study would be inappropriate. However, the benefit of using an idiographic case study to explore the strategies used by gay men as they navigate discourses of masculinity and homosexuality is that they can identify

examples of individual experience that reinforce and/or challenge existing understanding (de Visser & Smith 2006). This case study showed how one gay man constructed his masculine identity in relation to the mandates of hegemonic masculinity, and attempted to strike an uneasy balance between these and his own counter-hegemonic effeminacy and gay identity. The study therefore provides a useful insight into the types of strategies one gay man had for negotiating an identity in relation to available discourses of masculinity and gayness, when the two are often discursively opposed.

## Chapter 8

### Discussion

#### 8-A: Introduction

Since it was first proposed in the 1980s, hegemonic masculinity theory has been highly influential in the study of men and masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The historical subordination of gay men has been cited as illustrative of hegemonic masculinity's privilege in Western societies (Connell, 2005). It is argued that derision and fear of gay men is the bedrock of hegemonic masculinity because of the deeply embedded cultural assumption that male homosexuality must be effeminate: Effeminacy threatens patriarchy because it blurs the distinction between men and women (Connell, 2005).

However, in recent years, theories of emerging "hybrid", or "inclusive" masculinities have challenged the assumptions that hegemonic masculinity is the most culturally-esteemed version of manhood, and that heterosexual men position themselves inevitably in superordinate positions to women and gay men (Anderson, 2009; Demetriou, 2001). The appropriation by heterosexual men of attributes that are stereotypically associated with femininity or gay men, as well as a decrease in cultural homophobia, have been said to reflect a change in the structure of masculinities, where gay masculinities need not be conceptualised as subordinate (Anderson, 2009). Some scholars are less optimistic, claiming that these "new" heteromasculinities (masculinities embodied by heterosexual men) are wolves in sheep's clothing: They argue that hegemonic masculinity will diversify and reconfigure in order to maintain cultural dominance, in response to social and cultural changes (de Boise, 2015; Demetriou, 2001).

The debate around the state of masculinities was a key inspiration for the programme of research presented in this dissertation. There is a scarcity of literature to have emerged from the UK that has examined how gay masculinity is defined and experienced in the “post-gay era” (Ghaziani, 2011). One of the reasons for undertaking this programme of research was to address this gap in the literature.

A second motivation was to examine how the concept of “masculine capital” may apply for gay men. Existing qualitative and quantitative research has shown that masculinity can be conceptualised as the “sum of its parts”: The more masculine attributes a man has, the more likely that he will be perceived as masculine (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013). However, not every attribute is weighted equally in terms of the degree of masculinity it affords (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013). It has been demonstrated previously that men are able to “compensate” for transgressions of masculinity via proficiency in alternative masculine domains. For example, men who do not consume alcohol can mitigate any doubt regarding their masculinity by displaying competence in masculine sports (de Visser, Smith & McDonnell, 2013). If homosexuality is incommensurate with hegemonic masculinity – which sets the standards for an ideal manhood – then this raises the question of whether / how gay men may utilise certain masculine attributes to augment perceptions of their masculinity, as it has been demonstrated heterosexual men are able to do.

#### ***8-A-1: Summary of key novel contributions***

The programme of studies presented in this dissertation provides some novel contributions to the literature on gay masculinities, increasing understanding of the masculinities embodied by gay men who live in the UK. These contributions include:

- Insight into how heterosexual people and gay men construct gay masculinities in discourse



- Insight into how the concept of masculine capital may apply for gay men, and identification of attributes particularly pertinent to gay men's masculine capital
- An understanding of the relative contribution that sexual self-labels, voice quality and physique make to gay men's masculine capital, from the perspectives of gay men and heterosexual people
- An examination of how gay men's responses to hegemonic and alternative discourses of masculinity may be associated with their beliefs about and experiences of sexual self-labelling and anal intercourse with other men
- An examination of how gay men's beliefs about masculinity may be associated with how they construct and experience their masculine identities
- A detailed insight into one gay man's strategies for negotiating his masculine and gay identities in response to the hegemonic masculinity discourse

## **8-B: Summary of each study and the main research findings**

### ***8-B-1: Study 1 (Chapter 3) – Discursive constructions of gay masculinity***

In a hegemonic masculinity discourse, gay men are disadvantaged in terms of possessing masculine capital: Heterosexuality is the cornerstone of hegemonic masculinity, and gay men are frequently stereotyped as effeminate (Connell, 2005; Blashill & Powlishta, 2009). However, evidence from prior research with gay men has indicated that certain attributes, such as muscularity, may be salient to gay men's masculine identities, suggesting that some gay men may embody (or attempt to embody) masculinities that might at least emulate hegemonic masculinity (Drummond, 2005b; Duncan, 2007). All people, including those who identify as heterosexual and gay, have access to the discourses of masculinity that are culturally available – the discursive possibilities for gay masculinity are not limited to what *gay men* say about their own and others' masculinity. Consequently, Study 1 employed a sample of both

gay men and heterosexual people in a Foucaultian Discourse Analysis (FDA) study, with the aim of identifying discursive constructions of gay masculinity, and ascertaining which behaviours / attributes may contribute to gay men's masculine capital.

The first key finding was that for all groups of participants (i.e., gay men, and heterosexual men and women), hegemonic masculinity discourse was the reference point for constructing gay masculinity: Male homosexuality was incommensurate with masculinity as it was defined, and therefore constrained the possibilities for gay men to be masculine. Gay participants constructed gay masculinities in plural terms and as hierarchically structured. Gay masculinities were closely tied with gay subidentities, or "tribal" affiliations. A raft of gay subidentities were referenced, including the "twink" and the "bear", notable because the two are "oppositional anchors" (Hennen, 2005, p. 34). The former was constructed in terms of stereotypical femininity (youth, hairlessness, slender body), whereas the latter embodied hegemonic masculinity, at least in terms of his appearance (hirsuteness of the body, facial hair, large body). However, the bear was also described as "camp" and "emotional", and therefore displayed feminine traits that, in a hegemonic masculinity discourse, were at-odds with his masculine appearance. It was concluded that gay masculinities may not necessarily mirror heteromasculinities (and may not necessarily be intended to), but the attributes that constitute them may have value in fields occupied by gay men.

The second key finding was that if gay men were sufficiently concerned with being perceived as masculine, they needed to compensate for their homosexuality via the display of the behaviours / attributes associated with hegemonic masculinity. Exercising for muscularity was cited as a means by which gay men might acquire compensatory masculine capital. However, compensatory masculine attributes could only be successful in enhancing perceptions of gay men's masculinity if they were

displayed in the absence of characteristics associated with “gayness”, the overt display of a gay identity that is characterised by non-heteronormativity, including effeminacy. An effeminate voice was identified as a component of gayness, and had a profound negative influence on gay men’s masculine capital.

Sexual self-labels were identified by gay participants as salient to gay men’s masculinity. In the most available discourse, which constructed anal intercourse between men in accordance with stereotypical male and female gender roles, anally-insertive “tops” were often described as masculine, and anally-receptive “bottoms” as feminine. It was suggested that to avoid these stereotypes, some bottoms utilised muscularity as a means to accrue the masculine capital lost on account of their sexual positioning behaviour. However, bottoms were also constructed as potentially more masculine than tops, so long as they were “power bottoms”, and as such, wielded power over the insertive partner, and were in control of their own sexual pleasure. This suggests that masculine capital can be acquired by gay men in ways that subvert heteronormative expectations, but are nevertheless centred on hegemonic masculinity mandates of power and dominance.

#### ***8-B-2: Study 2 (Chapter 4) – Perceptions of gay men’s masculinity***

Gay men’s positioning in anal intercourse has attracted research attention, principally owing to its association with potential risks to sexual health, which are greater for the receptive partner (Patel et al., 2014; Wei & Raymond, 2011). A number of studies have examined how gay men’s beliefs about masculinity may be associated with their engagement in potentially risky sexual behaviours, such as condomless anal intercourse (e.g., Brennan et al., 2015). A smaller body of literature has examined how the sexual positions available in anal intercourse between men (i.e., “top”, “bottom”, “versatile” etc.) are related to gender role stereotypes (e.g., Carballo-Diéguez et al.,

2004). Many of the gay men who took part in Study 1 discussed the relevance of sexual self-labels – indicating position preferences in anal intercourse – to their perceptions of gay men’s masculinity. Therefore, gay men who are concerned with masculine identity may be able to use sexual self-labelling as a means to accrue masculine capital.

Study 2 was a quantitative survey study which had two aims: to investigate the degree of masculinity associated with the sexual self-labels top, versatile, bottom and power bottom; and to examine the contribution to gay men’s masculine capital made by sexual self-labels, compared with other attributes that have been identified previously as salient to gay men’s masculinity – voice quality and physique (Drummond, 2005b; Duncan, 2007; Madon, 1997; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017b). Measures included in the survey were adapted from those used successfully in prior research that studied masculine capital (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013).

The first key finding was that gay men and heterosexual men and women gave the highest masculinity ratings to the anally-insertive “top” sexual self-label, and the lowest masculinity ratings to the anally-receptive “bottom”. Gay men rated all sexual self-labels as more masculine than feminine; heterosexual women rated all but the bottom self-label as more masculine than feminine; and heterosexual men rated all but the top self-label as more feminine than masculine. The versatile self-label was deemed to be more masculine than the bottom self-label among all groups of participants. Heterosexual participants rated the power bottom self-label as more masculine than the bottom self-label. Gay men gave higher masculinity ratings than heterosexual men for all of the sexual self-labels, and higher masculinity ratings than heterosexual women for the top and versatile self-labels.

The findings from Study 2 confirmed that it is possible to measure quantitatively the relative contribution to gay men’s masculine capital of different attributes (de Visser

& McDonnell, 2013). Sexual self-label was less strongly associated with gay men's masculinity than their voice quality and their physique, from the perspectives of all groups of participants. For gay men, voice quality was more strongly associated with masculinity than physique. It was demonstrated that gay men who had deep voices and muscular physiques but were known to be anally-receptive bottoms were perceived as less masculine than those with the same attributes who were known to be anally-insertive tops. Therefore, it was concluded that sexual self-labels are related to gay men's masculine capital, but that voice quality and physique make a greater contribution to it.

There were no significant differences between gay men, heterosexual men, and heterosexual women in beliefs about the degree to which sexual self-labels contributed to gay men's masculine capital. However, compared to heterosexual respondents, gay men reported that voice quality and physique were more strongly associated with gay men's masculine capital. Gay participants gave higher masculinity ratings than the heterosexual participants to descriptions of hypothetical men who had more masculine attributes. However, when hypothetical men had fewer masculine attributes, between-group differences between gay men and heterosexual people were eliminated. This suggests that gay men saw more potential for gay men to be perceived as masculine than did heterosexual men and women.

### ***8-B-3: Study 3 (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) – Experiential accounts of masculinity and sexual positioning***

Although Study 1 provided insight into the discursive possibilities of masculinity for gay men, the Foucaultian Discourse Analysis (FDA) approach did not afford an experiential account of what it is *like* to be a gay man who negotiates a masculine identity in relation to discourses of masculinity. Similarly, although Study 2

highlighted the gendered nature of gay sexual self-labels, and demonstrated how they contribute to gay men's capital relative to voice quality and physique, the quantitative approach could not examine what it *means* to gay men to display particular constellations of attributes that are related to masculinity. Consequently, Study 3, which took an experiential Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA: Smith, 1996) approach, was designed to address what the other studies could not, and therefore provide a more detailed, grounded account of gay men's attitudes towards and experiences of masculinity, and of self-labelling and positioning in anal intercourse. Although the sample could be considered homogeneous in that all the participants were all self-identified gay men who lived in the UK, recruitment was designed to select gay men whose experiences of masculinity were likely to vary, on account of their ages and different sexual self-labels.

Three papers were produced from Study 3. The first (Chapter 5) provided an experiential analysis of how gay men's beliefs about masculinity and masculine subjectivities were associated with their beliefs about sexual self-labelling, and with their sexual positioning experiences. The second paper (Chapter 6) examined how gay men's positioning in relation to hegemonic and alternative masculinity discourses was related to how they experienced their masculine identities, and adapted their behaviours accordingly. The third paper (Chapter 7) presented an analysis of one gay man's experiences of constructing both masculine and gay identities in response to the hegemonic masculinity discourse, with a particularly focus on his body and his voice.

The key finding of Chapter 5 related to how beliefs and experiences of masculinity were related to beliefs about, and experiences, of sexual behaviour. Gay men who had a less essentialist understanding of masculinity, and/or for whom masculinity was less of a preoccupation, were more likely to contest the gender role

stereotypes associated with gay sexual self-labels. On the other hand, those who interpreted masculinity in essentialist terms, anchored in hegemonic masculinity, and/or identified as masculine in a sense they understood to be heteronormative, were more likely to sanction the stereotypes: Tops were assumed to be more masculine than bottoms. For men who were concerned with displaying a masculine identity, self-label presentation was often particularly salient, and did not necessarily accord with position preferences: Some bottom and versatile men preferred to be perceived as masculine tops, and they adjusted their behaviours accordingly.

Even men who did not endorse the gender role stereotypes associated with tops and bottoms described experiencing positioning practices in anal intercourse in relation to gender. Topping was often described as masculinising, whereas bottoming was described as both a feminising and masculinising experience. This suggested that a stereotypic gender role discourse may help some gay men to make sense of their experiences of anal intercourse, even if the stereotypes themselves are contested. That bottoming could be masculine may suggest that some gay men fashion alternative ways to be masculine, by contesting the hegemonic masculinity discourse that prescribes the established gender scripts in anal intercourse.

Gender role stereotypes associated with topping and bottoming influenced sexual position decision making among versatile men: An assessment of the relative masculinity of the sexual partners often guided position negotiations. The partner deemed comparatively more masculine in terms of both psychological (e.g., dominant) and physical (e.g., muscular) traits tended to take the top position, whereas the partner perceived as less masculine was more likely to bottom. However, there were also further examples of participants “queering” the stereotypic gender scripts by negotiating positioning so that the less hegemonically masculine partner took the top position.

Together with the observation that self-label presentation and position preference do not always accord, these findings indicated that some of the gay men who took part in this study distinguished between top and bottom as (potentially gendered) social identities, and *topping* and *bottoming* as sexual behaviours, which might be, though are not necessarily, gendered as hegemonic masculinity would prescribe.

The key focus of Chapter 6 was how gay men's interpretations of masculinity are related to their experiences of being masculine and being gay. Many participants' experiences of masculinity were rooted in their interpretation of masculinity in terms of hegemonic masculinity. As a consequence, they ascertained their level of masculinity in different contexts (or fields) by assessing the extent to which they enacted "gayness", the visible display of a gay identity, characterised by a constellation of attributes that were non-normative. Self-perceived masculinity was also measured in relation to the gayness of other gay men.

In line with hegemonic masculinity, anti-effeminacy and the avoidance of femininity contributed to the masculine subjectivity of men who valued heteronormative masculinity and identified, or desired to be perceived, by its standards. These men often described the value they saw in their bearded faces, their large and hirsute bodies, and their proficiency in sports like rugby. Avoiding femininity and embodying a heterosexual-looking masculinity was often motivated by a desire to avoid the stereotype of gay male effeminacy.

Some of the participants were less preoccupied with presenting as and feeling masculine because the masculinity of heterosexual men was identified as feminised, meaning that the lines between gay masculinities and heteromasculinities were too blurred for masculinity to be of concern. Others described having *feminine* subjectivities, experienced as such owing to the discrepancies between their behaviours



/ attributes and their interpretation of the standards of masculinity. Even some men with strong masculine subjectivities, who normally avoided femininity, described the value of femininity in certain fields – particularly when they were out in gay venues, thus demonstrating their propensity to both embrace and resist hegemonic masculinity. Consequently, the importance to the participants of both masculinity and femininity was variable and highly contingent on the social context.

Chapter 7 presented a case study of one gay man's experience of masculinity in relation to his sexual and social behaviour. He was chosen for a case study as an exemplar of a challenge to static categorical conceptualisations of masculinity. Jack, the gay man who was the focus of the case study, had an essentialist interpretation of masculinity aligned with hegemonic masculinity. He used muscularity as a means of embodying a masculinity that looked heterosexual, believing that such a masculinity was sexually attractive to other men. Muscularity also enabled Jack to pass as heterosexual, which provided him with temporary relief from what he experienced as a confining stereotype of gay effeminacy. Jack's muscularity was therefore intended to be a source of both erotic and masculine capital.

Although Jack's beliefs about masculinity were anchored in hegemonic masculinity, he resisted conforming to its mandates by actively maximising the discrepancy between them and his own gay identity. He felt subordinated by hegemonic masculinity and reacted with a show of defiance, by using "campness" – which was strongly associated with his effeminate voice – to acquire symbolic, "gay capital". His voice and his camp humour therefore were salient parts of his gay identity, which co-existed, although was at odds with, the masculine identity he attempted to convey via his appearance.

### 8-C: Six research questions

At the end of the Chapter 1 of this dissertation, six key research questions were posed. Brief answers to each of these question are provided below:

*1. How is “gay masculinity” constructed in discourse?*

Gay masculinity was constructed with reference to hegemonic masculinity such that if gay men want to be perceived as masculine, then they must be seen to engage in hegemonically masculine behaviours.

*2. How does the concept of “masculine capital” apply to gay men?*

It was found that gay men can accrue masculine capital to compensate for their homosexuality by displaying attributes associated with hegemonic masculinity. A “top” sexual self-label, muscularity and a deep voice can contribute to gay men’s masculine capital. However, these attributes may not afford sufficient masculine capital to overcome attributes associated with femininity and/or “gayness”, such as an effeminate voice.

*3. To what extent are the gay sexual self-labels top, bottom, versatile and power bottom perceived as gendered?*

The top sexual self-label was perceived as the most masculine and the bottom self-label as the least masculine. Gay men generally perceived sexual self-labels to be gendered (i.e., masculine) to a greater extent than heterosexual men and women do.

*4. How do gay men’s sexual self-labels contribute to their masculine capital?*

Gay men who have a top self-label were believed to have more masculine capital than those with a bottom self-label. Voice quality and physique were more strongly associated with masculine capital than sexual self-labels. Therefore, a bottom man with a deep voice and a muscular physique was perceived to have more masculine capital than a top man with a high pitched voice and a muscular physique.

5. *How are interpretations and experiences of masculinity related to beliefs about, experiences of and behaviour in anal intercourse, and to sexual self-label identification?*

Gay men who endorsed hegemonic masculinity and identify as masculine in heteronormative terms were more likely to endorse gender role stereotypes associated with sexual self-labels and sexual positioning behaviours (i.e., that tops and topping are more masculine and bottoms and bottoming are more feminine). These beliefs influenced the sexual self-labels they present. Men with less essentialist interpretations of masculinity were more likely to contest these stereotypes, but still experienced topping and bottoming as gendered experiences. Relative masculinity judgements influenced positioning decision making, so that more masculine men topped and less masculine men bottomed. However, even men with more traditional views on masculinity made attempts to subvert gender scripts in anal intercourse that are influenced by hegemonic masculinity by (for example) bottoming on top, or by topping more masculine men.

6. *How are gay men's interpretations of masculinity related to their experiences of being masculine and being gay?*

Some gay men's masculine subjectivities were influenced by hegemonic masculinity, so that feeling masculine may be contingent on not being overtly "gay", or being less gay than other gay men. Others contested hegemonic masculinity and were less concerned with being / feeling masculine. The importance of masculinity varied depending on the social field – for example, in the professional workplace, expressions of a more normative masculinity were more valued, whereas on the gay scene, expressions of gay identity were important, even for gay men who typically presented as masculine.

## **8-D: The implications of the research findings**

In the section that follows, the implications of the results yielded from the studies are discussed, in terms of how the findings advance understanding of gay masculinities, and how the concept of masculine capital may apply for gay men.

### ***8-D-1: Implications for understanding how “gay masculinity” may be defined and experienced***

#### **8-D-1-1: Gay men and hegemonic masculinity**

The qualitative findings presented in Chapters 3, 5, 6 and 7 indicate that gay masculinities are most frequently evaluated in terms of the extent to which they reflect the standards of hegemonic masculinity. As Connell (2005) observed, true masculinity is heterosexual, homosexuality is the negation of hegemonic masculinity, and as a consequence, gay men are inherently unable to embody fully the masculinity that is most culturally valued. The Foucaultian Discourse Analysis (FDA) approach used in Chapter 3 identified how a discourse of hegemonic masculinity may constrain the possibilities for gay men to be masculine, by privileging heterosexuality. However, the findings also indicated that gay men are not excluded unconditionally from masculinity, because they are able to embody a masculinity that *appears* heterosexual via the display of behaviours / attributes traditionally expected of men – for example, muscularity, or by excelling in competitive sports (e.g., Anderson, 2002).

Findings from Chapter 6 add experiential detail to this observation, providing an account of how some gay men’s masculine subjectivities may be associated with hegemonic masculinity. As described in Chapter 6, feeling masculine may be contingent on appearing to embody heterosexual masculinity and not being overtly gay – or “Gay”, with a capital G (Adams, Braun & McCreanor, 2014, p.463). Therefore, same-sex sexual attraction or behaviour need not render a man inevitably non-masculine (or

feminine), so long as the man's gayness is not too visible – so long as he is “gay, but not too gay” (Clarke & Smith, 2014, p.20). For gay men who define and experience their masculinity in relation to the absence of gayness (i.e., in accordance with hegemonic masculinity), it is their perceptions of the heteronormativity of their gender expression that influences their masculine subjectivities.

These men might be described as “identity centaurs” or “integrators”, because they are fully integrated into heteronormative society and the gay aspects of their identities are just that – aspects, not core defining features (Brekhus, 2003). They might also be referred to as “good gays”, because they do not challenge normative gender expectations of men, and their gayness is therefore concealed behind heterosexual masculine expressions (Adams et al., 2014; Epstein, Johnson & Steinberg, 2000; Taulke-Johnson, 2008). Further, as identified in Chapter 6 and in previous research, such gay men may use rhetorical strategies such as self-defining as “straight-acting” to distance themselves from the effeminacy stereotype, which highlights the strength of the association between heterosexual presentation and the presentation of a masculine identity deemed acceptable (Connell, 2005; Clarkson, 2006; Eguchi, 2009; Payne, 2007).

It was identified in Chapter 3 that when gay men engage in hegemonically masculine behaviours, this may be interpreted as an attempt to avoid cultural subordination by appropriating masculinities that look heterosexual. Therefore, gay masculinity may be defined as self-conscious, suggesting that some gay men are cognisant of their subjugated position in relation to hegemonic masculinity (Duncan, 2007). Experiential findings presented in Chapters 6 provided corroboratory evidence. In Chapter 6, it was suggested that adopting certain stereotypical masculine behaviours (and avoiding gayness) might help gay men to avoid subordination in certain contexts

that are perceived as heterosexist, and where heterosexual masculinities are deemed as more valued, such as the workplace (Flowers & Buston, 2001). Gay men may be more self-conscious of their masculine presentation than heterosexual men, having “learned” early in childhood the social value attached to a normative gender expressions (Barron & Bradford, 2007; Drummond, 2005b; Meyer, 2003; Plummer, 2001).

However, some gay men may be active in producing novel configurations of gender that at times borrow from hegemonic masculinity, and at other times subvert it. In some social contexts, it may be gayness rather than heterosexual-looking masculinity that is valued by even the most hegemonically masculine gay men. The results in Chapter 6 accord with what has been noted previously: The gay scene can provide a “refuge from heterosexism” (Adams et al., 2014, p.424), and a space where maintaining heterosexual-looking masculinity need not be a preoccupation, and where gayness may flourish. Enacting gayness in gay spaces can reap benefits, in terms of facilitating social cohesion and enabling gay men to live out aspects of their selves which may be constrained in non-gay social arenas (Barron & Bradford, 2007; Clarke & Smith, 2014; Ridge, Plummer & Peasley, 2006). Gayness might be said to afford gay men “gay capital”, or social prestige, in both heteronormative and gay contexts. Gay masculinities that mirror heterosexual masculinities are therefore flexible – gayness is not necessarily eliminated from these masculinities, and may even be deployed strategically when it might help secure social and personal benefits. The “queering” of hegemonic masculinity by gay men observed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 is reminiscent of how some heterosexual men apparently contest hegemonic masculinity by incorporating stereotypically feminine or “gay” characteristics into performances of “hybrid” or “inclusive” heteromasculinities (Anderson, 2009; Demetriou, 2001).

### 8-D-1-2: Gay men and “hybrid” / “inclusive” masculinities

Some research evidence suggests that heteromasculinities have become more inclusive of gay men, in part a consequence of the reduction of cultural homophobia (Anderson, 2009). However, an absence of explicit homophobia does not necessarily translate to experiences of masculine egalitarianism among gay men. As de Boise (2015) argued, when socially privileged groups (i.e., white, middle class, heterosexual men) embrace previously subordinated practices, this does not necessarily reflect changes to institutional practices or challenge implicit prejudice that perpetuate the subordination of other groups (e.g., gay men). A reduction in overt homophobia from heterosexual men may suggest that homophobia is no longer integral to hegemonic masculinity, rather than indicating that heteromasculinities no longer aspire for hegemonic status (de Boise, 2015). As the data from Study 3 showed, attempts at avoiding subordination by hegemonic masculinity may continue to guide the behavioural practices of many gay men, including those who are relatively young (<25 years).

Nevertheless, as the findings in Chapter 5, 6 and 7 suggested, gay men are also active in resisting the dominance of hegemonic masculinity. Some gay men are comfortable with their effeminacy and have no inclination to present as masculine in the heteronormative sense (Wilson et al., 2010). At least three of the men who took part in Study 3 (Jack, Ryan and Sahib) might be described as “identity peacocks”, because their gayness was a master status – a defining feature of who they were (Brekhus, 2003). As discussed previously, even those participants in Study 3 who identified as hegemonically masculine also reported valuing gayness at times. Gay men’s willingness to embrace gayness may be associated with the feminisation (or “hybridisation”) of heteromasculinities (Demetriou, 2001). Data presented in Chapter 6 indicated that some

gay men believe that heterosexual men can be more “gay” than gay men, in terms of their interests and behaviours, which accords with Bridges’ (2014) description of the “very gay straight”. This challenges the very concept of the “heteronormativity” of masculinity: Gay masculinities are not necessarily non-normative if heterosexual men enact masculinities that look similar. According to Anderson (2009), contemporary heteromasculinities are becoming less rigid, and more inclusive of non-traditional masculine expression. Gay men to whom this change is visible may benefit. As the findings from Chapter 6 suggested, some gay men may feel less inclined to attempt to conform to the standards of hegemonic masculinity if their own masculinities are increasingly culturally sanctioned and not subjugated. Thus, heterodoxy (non-normative diversity) of heteromasculinities may provide opportunities for gay men (and all men) to contest the dominance of hegemonic masculinity, and for gay masculinities to exist without attempting to appropriate heteronormativity.

The findings of Study 3 provided evidence that some gay men subvert hegemonic masculinity similarly to the heterosexual men who embody non-normative, hybrid, or inclusive masculinities. It is clear from the data presented in Chapters 3, 5, 6 and 7 that hegemonic masculinity discourse dominates constructions of gay masculinity and influences gay men’s experiences of masculine identity, and yet there are also signs that some gay men use certain strategies to resist it, and create unique gay masculinities that resist heteronormativity. This was illustrated in Chapter 6, where it was noted how the men who valued their heterosexual-looking masculinities and had essentialist beliefs regarding masculinity, rooted in hegemonic masculinity, were often the same “chameleons” who relished the opportunity to enact gayness in gay spaces (Brekhus, 2003). In Chapter 7, Jack felt subordinated by hegemonic masculinity, and he responded by “playing” with its mandates – appropriating heteromascularity for the purpose of



attracting other gay men, and also queering it by embracing his effeminate, “gay peacock” identity (Brekhus, 2003). Further, Chapter 5 described how a young and effeminate, “twinky” gay man derived pleasure from subverting gender role stereotypes associated with positioning in anal intercourse – which are based on the hegemonic masculinity script of “man as penetrator” – by being positioned in the insertive position with a more masculine partner. It must also be noted that some men who took part in Study 3 reported being entirely unconcerned with issues relating to masculine identity. The data presented here therefore suggest that rather than being passive victims of subordination by hegemonic masculinity, some gay men are active in engaging with, disrupting, and in some cases dismissing hegemonic masculinity, thus creating unique gay masculinities that are not intended to aspire to or mirror any heterosexual alternative.

#### 8-D-1-3: Gay men and “hegemonic gay masculinities”

Chapter 3 described how some heterosexual participants constructed gay masculinities as unique from heteromasculinities, because gay men, unlike heterosexual men, were deemed unconcerned with subordinating other men. In other words, gay masculinities were framed by heterosexual participants as inclusive. On the other hand, the gay participants constructed gay masculinities as hierarchically arranged. Experiential data presented in this dissertation corroborate this: In Chapter 5, some men wanted to avoid being identified as “bottoms” in anal intercourse for fear of being subjugated by other gay men; and in Chapter 6, some participants who identified as masculine derided the effeminate gay men they encountered on the gay scene. In Chapter 6, it was also discussed how some of the participants valued their stereotypically masculine attributes because they reflected current trends in gay desirability – as one participant explained, “It is the age of the hairy man”. Embodying a

masculinity that *looks* heterosexual, via hirsuteness, physical bulk, and participation in masculine sports (e.g., rugby), may therefore afford gay men hegemonic status in relation to other gay men – hence the term “hegemonic gay masculinity”.

However, the appropriation of this masculinity may not be the (sole) vehicle through which gay men may achieve social prestige. In Chapter 3 it is explained that “bears” may be ostensibly more masculine owing to their large and hairy physiques (which are also indicative of maturity), but may not occupy promoted positions over “jocks” or “twinks” (young, hairless and slender gay men) because it is youth and the “body beautiful” that are more revered in certain gay contexts (e.g., Barron & Bradford, 2007). Also in Chapter 3, and in accordance with prior research, bears were constructed as “friendly” and “emotional”: These attributes are contrary to the hegemonic masculinity standards expected of men who have masculine appearances (Manley et al., 2007). However, these bears may experience social privilege within the bear community, even if they are marginalised in other gay contexts (Manley et al., 2007).

Consequently, to assume that hegemonic gay masculinities are hegemonic because they appear heterosexual would be erroneous. The data suggest that the hegemonic configurations of masculinity extant in gay fields may not necessarily *look* like hegemonic masculinity as it is most commonly understood by men and women. Rather, gay masculinities may acquire hegemony because the characteristics by which they are constituted are desirable in certain gay fields. Hegemonic masculinity is not intended to be conceived as monolithic or archetypal – it is what men *do* rather than what they *are* that affords them hegemonic power (Connell, 2005; Demetriou, 2001). It is suggested that hegemonic gay masculinities are constructed in light of accepted and desirable strategies of “doing” masculinity and “doing” gayness in particular gay fields.

## ***8-D-2: Implications for the application of the concept of masculine capital to gay men***

### **8-D-2-1: Habitus, fields and symbolic capital**

According to Bourdieu (1984), habitus is formed as a consequence of exposure to social fields, and also guides practices within these fields, allowing people to respond to different fields reflexively and strategically. A person's status in a given field is dependent on the behaviours s/he exhibits, which are related to her/his habitus, and to the social norms that characterise that field. Gay men might occupy subordinated positions in the field of masculinity generally, but, as the findings from Chapters 5 and 6 suggested, may not experience their masculinity as subordinated in gay fields. This could be because they recognise their own behaviours / attributes in other men who operate in the same domain: In other words, their habitus functions to regulate their dispositions and behaviours in line with those of others around them (Coles, 2009). Therefore, gay men may perceive their masculinity to be viable, notwithstanding how it is embodied, if it is legitimised within the particular field where they are operating. This can help to explain why some of the men discussed in Chapter 6 were intent on maintaining a heterosexual-looking masculinity in everyday contexts, but also valued opportunities to enact gayness when they were out on the gay scene. It might also explain why some of the men were proud of their *femininity*, as it allowed them to “own” their gayness and present what they interpreted as an authentic *gay* identity. As Drummond (2005b) opined, gay masculinities are fluid because gay men must negotiate identities that are valued in both heteronormative and gay contexts.

Bourdieu (1984, 1986) refers to the social power afforded by the resources available to an individual as “symbolic capital”. Symbolic capital can be acquired when an individual's habitus directs the production of certain practices that are valued in the given social field. Consequently, men who have the reflexive capacity to deploy

practices that are valued within their current field are afforded symbolic capital. The concepts of habitus and field can thus help to explain why power distributions vary between different social contexts.

In the domain of masculinity, the display of attributes typically associated with heteronormative, hegemonic masculinity can contribute to a man's symbolic "masculine capital", whereas the display of non-masculine or feminine attributes can detract from it (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013; de Visser, Smith & McDonnell, 2009). Importantly, masculine capital can be traded, so that masculine transgressions in one behavioural domain can be compensated for via proficiency in others (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013; de Visser et al., 2009). The findings from the studies presented in this dissertation indicated that in the field of gay masculinities, muscularity, sexual self-labelling in relation to positions in anal intercourse, and voice quality are all related to gay men's masculine capital (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017b). There may also be other characteristics and behaviours that could be explored in future research.

#### 8-D-2-2: Muscularity, voice quality and sexual self-labelling

In accordance with earlier research (e.g., Drummond, 2005b; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011), muscularity was identified as a potential source of masculine capital for gay men in all three studies. Muscularity is indicative of physical strength, and thus promotes the hegemonic masculine ideals of activity, discipline, power and intrasex competition (Coles, 2009). It has been argued that lean muscularity affords gay men compensatory social status (Duncan, 2007). The data presented in Chapter 7 accorded with this – Jack stated that his muscularity was intended to "counteract" what he identified as his innate effeminacy. In gay fields, lean muscularity may contribute to hegemonic gay masculinity because: (a) it looks heterosexual (muscular gay men are "real men") and is therefore deemed socially desirable, and/or (b) it affords "erotic

capital” – it is sexual attractive to other men (Duncan, 2007; Filiault & Drummond, 2008; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011; Ridge et al., 2006).

The results from the qualitative studies presented in Chapters 3 and 7, and the quantitative study described in Chapter 4 suggested that muscularity may not afford gay men sufficient masculine capital to overcome the possession of a high-pitched, effeminate voice. It has been found previously that vocal femininity is a strong component of the stereotype of gay effeminacy (Madon, 1997). It has also been suggested that gay-sounding voices may be performative, deployed selectively by some gay men to construct particular gay identities that are likely to be valued in certain social contexts (Podesva, 2007). Gay-sounding voices might decrease gay men’s masculine capital, but this may be of no concern, if it is gayness that is valued over masculinity. For example, in Chapter 7, Jack used his gay-sounding voice as part of his gay performance at times when he wanted to “own” his gayness, and acquire gay capital by parodying his lack of masculinity.

As the results from Chapter 4 showed, muscularity makes a greater contribution to gay men’s masculine capital than their sexual self-label: Different behaviours and attributes confer masculine capital to different extents (de Visser & McDonnell, 2013). However, men who are known to be anally-receptive (bottoms) were perceived as less masculine than anally-receptive men (tops) who have the same voice quality and physiques. Sexual self-labels are related to gay men’s masculine capital, as part of a constellation of other characteristics. If bottom gay men are aware that their sexual self-label may influence others’ perceptions of their masculinity, and are concerned about presenting as masculine, then muscularity may provide an alternative domain where they may succeed at accruing masculine capital.

The experiential data in Chapter 5 identified that being perceived as a top may be important for gay men who wish to be perceived in line with hegemonic masculinity: Top self-labels contribute to masculine capital. This indicates that some gay men – particularly those who have more traditional, essentialist interpretations of masculinity – understand anal intercourse in terms of the heterosexual construction of man as insertive and woman as receptive (Carballo-Diéguez et al., 2004; Johns et al., 2012). Being perceived as a bottom (though not necessarily engaging in bottoming) may be stigmatised because of the association between receptivity and passivity, and therefore femininity (Carballo-Diéguez et al., 2004). The findings offer an explanation for why sexual self-labels and sexual positioning in actuality do not always accord (Wei & Raymond, 2011). Self-labelling can be viewed as strategic, because for some gay men it may not (only) communicate a position preference, but (also) a gendered social identity.

It was also identified in Chapter 5 that discourses of gender and power can help gay men to make sense of their experiences of engaging in topping and bottoming. Irrespective of whether the gender role stereotypes were endorsed, whether masculinity was defined in traditional or pluralistic terms, or whether masculinity was a salient consideration, topping and bottoming were frequently experienced as gendered practices. In Chapter 4, it is shown that, unlike the heterosexual participants, gay men perceived the bottom self-label as more masculine than feminine. The experiential findings described in Chapter 5 help to clarify this finding. In a hegemonic masculinity discourse, bottoming may be experienced as both feminine *and* masculine, because although it is associated with feelings of vulnerability, it also is related to feelings of power (controlling the top's pleasure) and demonstrates an ability to withstand anal penetration (i.e., showing physical resilience: Dowsett, Williams, Ventuneac & Carballo-Diéguez, 2008; Kiguwa, 2015). It is suggested that because gay men are more

likely than self-identified heterosexual men to have experienced receptive anal intercourse with other men, their assessments of the masculinity of gay sexual self-labels are informed by their own experiences of receptive intercourse.

Self-labelling as bottom may have a negative influence on a gay man's masculine capital, but engaging in bottoming is not necessarily emasculating. The evidence presented in Chapter 5 suggested that gay men may use particular strategies to escape the constraints of hegemonic masculinity, for example, by "bottoming on top". To assume that bottoming is necessarily a passive, feminine activity, and that bottoms are subordinated in a sexual hierarchy (as the hegemonic masculinity discourse would prescribe) would be incorrect. As Dowsett (1996, 2000) opined, an anus in anal intercourse can be viewed as "active", something that demands pleasure, consumes the penis and offers liberation from the confines of heteronormative intercourse. In anal intercourse between men, both partners can be constructed as active (and therefore potentially masculine) agents.

The results described in Chapter 5 also suggested that bottoming may afford power to gay men in sexual relationships via erotic capital, because it is associated with the provision of sexual pleasure (Kiguwa, 2015). Prior research has revealed that gay men who identify (or are identified) as twinks may have greater erotic capital than other gay men, because they possess the attributes that are deemed sexually attractive – principally youth, hairlessness and slender bodies (Clarke & Smith, 2014; Green, 2011). The findings in Chapter 5 indicated that another source of erotic capital for twinks may be their greater propensity for engaging in anally receptive intercourse (Lyons & Hosking, 2014). Consequently, the symbolic capital associated with certain characteristics may vary considerably depending on the interaction between a gay man's habitus and the social field where he is located. Characteristics such as muscularity and

top self-label presentation may afford masculine capital in spaces where masculinity is valued (i.e., in heteronormative fields and some gay fields), but in others, non-masculine and stereotypically feminine characteristics can act as sources of social power that is unrelated to masculinity.

### ***8-D-3: Implications in relation to other theoretical contexts***

#### **8-D-3-1: Intersectionality**

Rooted in feminist and critical race theories, intersectionality is an approach to conceptualising and researching psychological phenomena by taking into consideration how different personal characteristics (e.g., ethnicity, religion, physical ability, class, sexual and gender identity) may moderate human experience (Cole, 2009). An intersectional approach to research can examine power dynamics in society: Whereas membership of certain groups may bring social privilege, occupying other positions may be associated with disadvantage (Rosenthal, 2016). Therefore, intersectional research can identify structural inequity in society owing to its focus on the experiences of people who experience multiple layers of either oppression or opportunity, or a combination of both (Cole, 2009). For example, minority ethnic gay men may experience double discrimination in mainstream society. They may be marginalised in gay contexts because of their ethnicity, and marginalised in their ethnic subculture because of their sexuality.

The research presented in this dissertation did not explore comprehensively how a range of social identities intersected with sexual orientation in relation to masculine identity (see 8-E-4). However, it does provide useful insights for those interested in intersectionality by focusing on sexuality rather than more commonly-studied characteristics. For example, the findings presented in Chapter 3 indicated how gay men may experience social disadvantage, because, when positioned within a hegemonic



masculinity discourse, their gayness renders them insufficiently “manly”. In other words, gay men may not experience the same social privilege as heterosexual men, who have greater opportunity to exemplify hegemonic masculinity because they are untarnished by conflation between their sexual identity and lack of masculinity. Nevertheless, the findings presented in Chapter 6 suggested that some gay men may acquire local hegemony by accentuating their hegemonic masculine attributes as “ordinary men” and distancing themselves from a stereotypically effeminate gay identity. Therefore, the intersection of “man” and “gay” may be associated with both oppression and opportunity (Shields, 2008).

One of the benefits of intersectional research is that owing to its focus on how group membership is associated with societal inequity, it can identify how individuals *resist* oppression and inequality (Rosenthal, 2016). The findings from Study 3, presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, identified how some gay men may actively contest hegemonic masculinity, and the heteronormativity it prescribes, and in doing so, stake claims on alternative ways of being men, in ways not characterised by subjugation or the desire to subjugate others. There would be value in exploring how sexuality intersects with other characteristics such as class and ethnicity, particularly because definitions of masculinity may vary according to these variables (see 8-E-4: Bowleg, 2013; Costin & Kimmel, 2012; Kimmel & Messer, 1991)

#### 8-D-3-2: Queer theory

With a focus on incongruities between biological sex, gender, and sexual desire, queer theory scrutinises the social practices that reify and represent as given contestable social categories such as heterosexuality and homosexuality, and masculinity and femininity (Chan, 2013; Jagose, 1996). “Queer” is defined by what is non-normative, and can therefore describe non-heterosexuality, non-hegemonic masculinities, and even

non-normative gay identities (Spargo, 1999). Owing to the dominance of certain discourses of sexuality, it is not possible for people to be positioned outside of current conceptions of heterosexuality and its alternatives (Namaste, 1994). For example, someone who declares themselves as “gay” may do so only because “gay” is differentiated from “straight”: The word “gay” only has meaning in relation to the meaning of its alternatives (Namaste, 1994). Nevertheless, queer theorists argue that people are able to *play with* the boundaries of sexuality and gender – to question from where they emerged and to contest them actively (Namaste, 1994).

A queer theory perspective can be applied to the research findings presented in this dissertation. In Chapter 5, it was identified that some gay men resisted conceptualising anal intercourse in line with gender role stereotypes (i.e., masculine top; non-masculine / feminine bottom), and made sense of their sexual experiences by subverting normative interpretations of their behaviour– for example, by framing being anally receptive as the epitome of a masculine act, and by fetishising topping a man they deemed more masculine. Further, the findings described in Chapter 6 suggest how gay men may play with the boundaries of their *homosexuality* by emphasising their hegemonically masculine attributes; and then deconstruct their masculine identities by engaging in behaviour they understand to be incongruous with hegemonic masculinity, particularly on the gay scene.

This “queering” cannot occur outside of dominant discourses of gender and sexuality: For example, for it to be notable that bottoming could be experienced as masculine requires access to a gendered discourse of sexual intercourse where bottoming is constructed as non-masculine or feminine (Namaste, 1994). Using queer theory to interpret these apparently active efforts to disrupt normative expectations surrounding sex, sexuality and gender positions gay men less as passive victims to

established “rules” that police their sexual identities, and more as active agents in fashioning novel, unpredictable, and resistant ways of “doing man” and of “doing gay”.

#### 8-D-3-3: Gender performativity

When gender is described as something that is “done”, rather than as a state of being, then it may also be described as “performative” (Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). The term gender performativity is not intended to describe the self-conscious enactment of “being a woman” or “being a man”, but refers instead to the repeated behavioural and discursive actions that constitute an individual’s gender. The repetition of certain acts (e.g., ways of moving, and ways of speaking) reflects the “mundane and ritualised” way in which already socially-established gender expectations are legitimised and propagated (Butler, 1990, p.191). As Butler (1990, p.45) stated:

“Gender is the stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, a natural sort of being.”

Gender is therefore something that *becomes*, rather than something that is inherent in the person; and gender identity cannot exist prior to the actions of which it is constituted (Butler, 1990).

Butler (1990) argued that sex, gender, and sexual desire are constructed discursively around heterosexual norms (the “heterosexual matrix”), producing a coherent, binary structure where sex (e.g., male) relates to gender (i.e., masculine), and both relate to oppositional desire (i.e., attraction to women and femininity). According to the heterosexual matrix, masculine identity – the outcome of the repeated performance of so-called masculine acts – must be evidence of the rejection of homosexuality, since masculinity is opposed to femininity, which can exist only in women (Butler, 1995; Edwards, 2005). A small number of men who took part in Study

3 (presented in Chapters 5, 6, and 7), ostensibly rejected their gayness in order to stake claims on being masculine. From a gender performativity perspective, their masculinity was a consequence of their ongoing rehearsal of particular actions that made them feel like men. Further, they aligned with the “compulsory practice of heterosexuality” (Butler, 1990, p.151), emphasising a form of oppositional desire, by distancing themselves symbolically from homosexuality – for example, by denigrating effeminate men (see 6-D-2-1). It might be argued that for other gay men who took part in Study 3, it was gayness rather than gender that was performative: Their non-masculine or feminine *gay* identities arose as a result of their ongoing enactments that subverted the male-masculine-oppositional desire pattern.

Chapter 5 described how masculinity was not necessarily an oppressive force that bound all gay men to enact their sexualities in anal intercourse in particular ways. Rather, masculinity in anal intercourse was, for some gay men, something to be played with, subverted and transfigured, in the pursuit of sexual pleasure (Dowsett et al., 2008). Gay men’s gender performativity (including that in anal intercourse) may involve their selective enactment of particular “citations” of gender, that are temporary and may be deployed at such times to make the gender performance theatrically parodic (i.e., queer: Butler, 1993; Dowsett et al., 2008). For example, the gay man in Chapter 5 who reported finding himself “on his back screaming” when being anally-penetrated by another man was also positioned as the epitome of “manliness”. Similarly, Jack – whose case study is reported in Chapter 7 – cited a heterosexual-looking masculinity via his dating profile picture, featuring himself in a gym, muscles exposed; but this “Tarzan” also spoke with the voice of a “wears-a-lot-of-gold-jewellery nan”. Such citations of gender that subvert normative gender performativity expose the fragility of gender

“realities”, and may offer gay men more flexibility to present unique gender identities (Butler, 1990; Dowsett et al., 2008).

#### 8-D-3-4: A brief history of intersecting sexual and gender identities in sex between men

According to Butler (1990, p.9), sex and gender cannot be conceptualised as separate entities within the prevalent social discourses, because sex is “always already gender”: The discourses propagate a binary structure that prescribes that the penis is “male” and “masculine”, just as the vagina is “female” and “feminine”. People are therefore unable to engage with their own bodies, and the bodies of others, without some reference to gender. Accordingly, sex between men might be conceptualised as masculine, because it is masculinity that is inherent in the bodies of the men concerned (Connell, 2005) – something partially supported by the data presented in Chapter 5. However, as the research presented in this dissertation identified (and in accordance with earlier research), social discourses can construct anal receptivity in sex between men as *non-masculine*, or even feminine, and this can have implications for the gendered experience of bottoming.

Before homosexuality and heterosexuality were reified as distinct categories of sexual behaviour, sexual identity could not intersect with gender identity in sex between men. However, the intersection between sexual *behaviour* and gender identities has a long history. Ancient Romans, despite not differentiating between male and female sexual partners in terms of sexual identities (i.e., no homosexual / heterosexual dichotomy existed), held that a man’s masculinity in sex hinged on their position as the penetrator in anal intercourse, rather than the penetrated (Langlands, 2006). Ancient sexuality is thought to have been structured around the “priapic model” (after Priapus, Greek god of fertility, who was endowed with a large penis), where the sole matter of concern was phallic domination (Langlands, 2006; Williams, 2010). Sexuality was

therefore based on a model of active versus passive (Langlands, 2006). The active-passive dichotomy in relation to sex between men is perpetuated in common discourse in modern times: In Latin cultures, the terms “activo” and “pasivo” are often used in place of “top” and bottom” (respectively) to describe insertive and receptive positions and identities (Carballo-Diéguez et al., 2004; Jeffries, 2009). Whereas “activo” men are conferred masculinity in penetrative intercourse, regardless of who the sexual partner is, “pasivo” men occupy the status of “the woman” when they are in the receptive position (Jeffries, 2009). Use of the words “active” and “passive” to refer to anally-insertive and anally-receptive positions is also found in non-Latin cultures, including in Anglophone countries (e.g., Payne, 2007).

Chapter 5 described how participants often reported their experiences of topping male partners as masculine, suggesting that a discourse of the “masculinity of penetration” dominates and may influence subjective interpretations of sexual experiences. One participant in Study 3 (Chapter 5) claimed that topping a man was tantamount to a heterosexual behaviour; another participant in Study 1 (Chapter 3) claimed that topping was less “gay” than bottoming. Thus, the act of penetration seems to be bound up in heterosexist discourses of both gender and sexual identity (Dowsett, 1996). It was important for some of the men described in Chapter 5 to present as tops to other people, against the belief that tops were more viable representations of “real men”, and would therefore avoid the stigmatising social consequences of being perceived as effeminate.

In Chapter 5, it was reported that some participants felt submissive in receptive anal intercourse; others implied that bottoming afforded sexual power. One participant, who had a strong hegemonic masculine subjectivity, was at pains to convey to the interviewer that he was an “*active* bottom” – to this man, anal receptivity could be

masculine as long as the receptive partner had control. According to the active-passive model of penetration, power is bestowed on the penetrator, and is denied to the penetrated. Given that power is so central to interpretations of masculinity – and is inherently hegemonic – engaging in a power discourse when interpreting experiences of anal intercourse may inevitably render the experiences gendered. Power relationships were central to many of the participants' accounts of their experiences of anal intercourse – their interpretation of these experiences in terms of masculinity and femininity might have been influenced by their conflation between gender and power. It is important to note that power is not always a salient consideration in sex between men. For example, versatility has been identified as a means by which gay men can escape connotations of gender in anal intercourse and maintain a more equal, power-sharing sexual and romantic relationship (Johns et al., 2012; Kippax & Smith, 2001).

### **8-E: Limitations**

A number of limitations concerning the three studies presented in this dissertation should be acknowledged. In what follows, limitations are organised according to the order of the studies as they are presented.

#### ***8-E-1: Limitations of Study 1 (Chapter 3)***

The first limitation concerns the sample employed in this group interview study. All participants were recruited from a city in the UK which is populated by people who are typically politically liberal, and are known for their progressive views regarding gender and sexual diversity. The city was host to the highest number of same-sex civil partnership registrations in the UK, for the year 2015 (Office for National Statistics, 2016). Almost 10% of the UK's lesbian, gay and bisexual population reside in this small city (Public Health England, 2017). A strength of this is that the heterosexual people who took part in the study may have been more likely to have experience of

interactions and/or friendships with gay men, and therefore have been in a more informed position to discuss gay men's masculinity. However, it is likely that neither their views, nor those of the gay men who took part, reflected the perspectives held by people who lived elsewhere in the UK. It is possible that people who responded to recruitment advertisements for a study on "Gender and Identity" were particularly interested in these issues and held non-typical views. Though this is not reported in the paper that was produced from the study, it was evident to the facilitator that some heterosexual participants were hesitant to discuss differences between gay and heterosexual men in terms of their masculinity, which might reflect a locally prevalent (and perhaps socially desirable) discourse that emphasises gender and sexual diversity and egalitarianism, and devalues stereotypic delineations between gay and non-gay people.

It might be argued that the use of group interviews may have constrained the deployment of certain discourses and encouraged the deployment of others. If masculinities are constructed in social interaction, then they are likely to vary in expression in light of the gender relations in a given social context – including a group interview (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). For example, in the groups constituting heterosexual men only, a hegemonic masculinity discourse may have been more widely accessed than alternative discourses because it is within heterosexual, homosocial relations that hegemonic masculinity is produced and policed (Bird, 1996; Gough & Edwards, 1998). Consequently, the construction of gay masculinities as inherently less masculine than heteromasculinities may have, to some extent, reflected the heterosexual men's attempts at maintaining psychological distance from gay men, and a concern that by not doing so, their own masculinity (and heterosexuality) may be called in question (Conroy & de Visser, 2013; Emslie, Hunt & Lyons, 2013; Gill et al., 2005; Harding,



2007; Swain, 2006b). The research presented in this dissertation suggests that some gay men may desire to construct a hegemonic gay masculinity in the presence of other gay men, which again may have impeded the deployment of alternative masculinity discourses in group interviews that comprised gay men only. However, it is suggested that the group interviews mirrored the dynamics of masculinity that are found between men in other all-male contexts (whether heterosexual or gay), and therefore the discourses accessed in the study reflect the availability of discourses that exist when men function in other group contexts.

#### ***8-E-2: Study 2 (Chapter 4)***

Although this quantitative survey study comprised a fairly large sample, a key limitation was its irregular composition: Heterosexual men made up only 88 of the 538 respondents, whereas gay men and heterosexual women were represented more equally (202 and 248 respectively). At least two explanations for the unequal distribution of respondents are suggested. First, female students were disproportionately represented in the participant database from which some participants were recruited: 47% of the heterosexual women who took part were current undergraduates compared with 25% of the heterosexual men, and 7% of the gay men. Second, there were more opportunities for targeted recruitment of gay men via gay communities' social media pages, by flyering at gay venues, and by word of mouth via the researcher's acquaintances. The low numbers of heterosexual male respondents cannot be explained in terms of differential levels of engagement in the issues raised in the survey (i.e., the masculinity of gay sexual self-labels), which might have resulted in the termination of participation before the survey was completed – thirty-seven (30%) of all heterosexual men who started the survey did not complete it, which is comparable to the proportion of gay men (29%) and heterosexual women (30%) who withdrew.

There were also discrepancies in the mean age between the groups of participants: Gay men were significantly older than the heterosexual participants. This might be owing to the lower number of gay men who were students. However, it should be noted that age and student status were significant covariates in only a small minority of the analyses, and analyses were adjusted for these variables.

A second limitation is that the cross-sectional design means that the causal direction of the associations found in the study cannot be determined. Although it might be concluded that sexual self-labels influence perceptions of gay men's masculinity, it is also potentially true (and was identified in findings presented in Chapter 5) that perceptions of gay men's masculinity influence assumptions regarding their likely sexual self-label. Sexual self-labels are frequently referenced by gay men in their self-presentation on dating and hook-up apps (and most likely on other online mechanisms gay men use to meet other men), but are not otherwise explicitly advertised (Miller, 2015). Gay men's sexual self-labels may be of particular interest to other gay men, perhaps because, as discussed in Chapter 5, they are used to infer the masculinity of a potential sexual partner: Preferences for a partner with a given sexual self-label are stated frequently in gay dating app profiles (Miller, 2015). On the other hand, people who are not gay men may not even consider sexual self-labels when they appraise a gay man's masculinity – and when they do become aware of a gay man's self-label, they may not fully appreciate how self-labels are related to sexual behaviour (for example, how a bottom may differ in terms of his sexual behaviour compared with a power bottom). Consequently, sexual self-labels can only “influence” perceptions of gay men's masculinity once they are known, and the implications of self-labelling for likely sexual positioning are understood. Further, sexual self-labels may be associated with gay men's masculine capital on both an individual and social level. For example, the

results from this study demonstrate that gay men who are known as tops are perceived as more masculine than those known as bottoms / versatile / power bottoms, but do not reveal anything about how self-labelling as a top may be associated with subjective feelings of masculinity.

A third limitation concerns the use of a factorial design, which only allowed for the examination of binaries of attributes. The categories “top” and “bottom”, “muscular” and “thin”, and “deep” and “high-pitch” are arbitrary, and do not capture the diversity and nuance associated with sexual self-labelling, voice quality and physique. For example, gay men who identify as tops or bottoms do not belong to monolithic, stable categories. There is fluidity in sexual self-labelling: Self-labels do not necessarily reflect positioning practices, and motivations for self-labelling differ both between gay men and within an individual gay man in different contexts and at different points in his life (Moskowitz & Roloff, 2017; Pachankis, Battenwieser, Bernstein & Bayles 2013; Wei & Raymond, 2011). However, these categories provided easily-manipulated and -interpreted categories.

It might be argued that a fourth limitation is presented by the failure to define the concepts of “masculinity” and “femininity” to guide the participants as they gave their ratings. The study concluded that voice quality was more strongly associated with gay men’s masculinity than their physique and sexual self-label, and that the top self-label was perceived as more masculine than other self-labels, but the word “masculinity” is contestable, and may not have had the same meaning for each respondent. The decision not to provide definitions was influenced by the critical realist stance adopted, which acknowledged that concepts such as masculinity and femininity are provisional, and therefore how they exist as objects does not necessarily correspond to the terms that people use to define them (Bryman, 2016). In the absence of qualitative

data, it cannot be concluded with any certainty that, for example, tops are perceived as more masculine because penetration is associated with hegemonic masculinity – which is why the study presented in Chapter 5 can be seen as complementary to this quantitative study.

Finally, it is also acknowledged that the failure to ask self-identified heterosexual men to comment on their homosexual experiences in the survey presents a further limitation to this study. Identifying as heterosexual does not preclude the possibility of engaging in homosexual activity (Smith, Rissel, Richters, Grulich & de Visser, 2003). If the heterosexual men who took part had experienced insertive and/or receptive anal intercourse then this may have influenced the masculinity ratings they gave to the gay sexual self-labels.

### ***8-E-3: Study 3 (Chapters 5, 6 and 7)***

Studies that employ Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA: Smith, 1996) typically have small samples: Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) recommend a sample size of up to ten. In Chapters Five and Six, a sample of 17 gay men was employed; Chapter 7 presents a case study of one gay man. Small sample sizes are acceptable for IPA studies, given IPA's commitment to providing detailed, idiographic accounts of individual experience (Smith et al., 2009). However, tension is created by IPA's concurrent focus on a more nomothetic concern for identifying convergence and divergence between participants' accounts. A larger sample size than that recommended by Smith et al. (2009) was selected for Study 3 in order to provide more diversity in terms of the participants' age, which it was assumed would support the identification of convergent and divergent accounts, and identity groups. Evidence suggests that there are generational differences between older and younger gay men in terms of experiences relating to gay identity. For example, millennial gay men (i.e., those born in the 1980s

and later) make fewer references to socio-political circumstances when describing the formation of their gay identities than gay men whose identities were formed during the 1960s, 70s and 80s (Weststrate & McClean, 2010). Further, younger gay men (i.e., those age under 25 years) report (retrospectively) having reached several gay identity formation milestones at significantly younger ages than older gay men, including: concluding that they are not heterosexual; “coming out” to themselves and to others; and having their first homosexual relationships (Dunlap, 2016; Grov, Bimbi, Nanín & Parsons, 2006).

There are no attempts to conclude that *all* gay men share the experiences of the men who participated in Study 3: To make empirical generalisations from the small sample would not be appropriate. Further qualitative research with other gay men would be required before the results could be generalised with any confidence. However, the findings presented might instead be evaluated in terms of their theoretical transferability (Smith et al., 2009). For example, in Chapter 7, Jack’s experiences of using his body to negotiate hegemonic masculinity situates him in line with participants described in earlier qualitative work on the social meaning of gay men’s bodies (e.g., Duncan, 2007; Filault & Drummond, 2008). A reasonable conclusion from the case study might be that Jack’s intention to use his body to construct a masculine identity that he believed was socially desirable provides an example of *one of the ways* in which gay men strategise in relation to hegemonic masculinity, which is *theoretically* transferable to other gay men in similar contexts (Smith, Harré & van Langenhove, 1995; Smith et al., 2009).

***8-E-4: General research programme limitation: Intersections with other aspects of identity***

A general limitation of the research programme is the absence of any rigorous discussion of how gay masculinities intersect with other aspects of identity, such as age,

ethnicity and social class. The importance of these variables to understanding the pluralism of masculinity is captured by Kimmel and Messner (2001, p. vxi):

Masculinity is constructed differently by class culture, by race and ethnicity, and by age. And each of these axes of masculinity modifies the others. Black masculinity differs from white masculinity, yet each of them is also further modified by class and age. A 30-year-old middle-class black man will have some things in common with a 30-year-old middle-class white man that he might not share with a 60-year-old working-class black man, although he will share with him elements of masculinity that are different from those of the white man of his class and age.

The research programme presented here has identified that gay masculinities are diverse, but the matrix of gay masculinities that arises as a consequence of the intersections between masculinity, age, ethnicity, social class and other variables such as disability status and religion, should also be acknowledged. For example, working class masculinities may be celebrated for being physically strong and emotionally stoical, but also be problematised for being unintelligent and brutish (Coston & Kimmel, 2012). Working class masculinity imagery is ubiquitous in the gay community, although it has been suggested that its prevalence reflects the desirability of an authentic, rugged and “outdoorsy” masculinity rather than the genuine acceptance of working class gay men: The gay community is characterised as a middle-class (white) institution (Barrett & Pollack, 2005). Working class gay men may therefore enjoy some privilege but may also have to contend with marginalisation, both within and outside of the gay community.

With youthful and physically fit embodiments of masculinity so revered, older gay men, whose bodies are less likely to meet idealised standards of masculine attractiveness, may experience marginalisation in the gay community (Lodge & Umberson, 2013). On the other hand, ageing may have some positive consequences for how some older gay men experience their masculinities, since it is associated with psychological maturity and self-acceptance, and therefore a reduced preoccupation with attempting to embody a particular version of masculinity that is considered desirable (Slevin & Linneman, 2010). Further, ageing gay men may orient towards alternative gay identification, such as bear identification, and construct different styles of non-heteronormative masculinity that they experience as valued in particular gay spaces oriented to older men (Manley, Levitt & Mosher, 2007).

Non-white gay men may experience masculinity in different ways to their white contemporaries. White gay men may have greater access to the privileges associated with hegemonic masculinity because homosexuality can be concealed, whereas ethnic differences are more visible – and non-white masculinities occupy subordinated positions in the masculinities structure (Connell, 2005). Some Asian men may have to negotiate masculine identities against cultural stereotypes that construct them as skinny and lacking musculature, passive, and inherently feminine (Drummond, 2005a). Evidence suggests that in gay fields, black gay men may acquire both masculine and erotic capital (and therefore local social privilege) owing to the stereotypic assumptions that they are hypersexual and well-endowed with large penises (Bowleg, 2013; Green, 2008). Outside of the gay community, black gay men may experience greater pressure than white gay men to present as heterosexual and therefore to embody heterosexual-looking masculinities (Bowleg, 2013). Ethnicity is likely to intersect with masculinity

differently depending on culture – research into the experiences of masculinity among non-white gay men in the UK is therefore warranted.

The data from the studies presented in Chapters 3 to 7 showed how gay masculinities were understood by gay men and heterosexual people, and experienced by gay men. However, it is not underestimated how variables such as class, age, ethnicity and physical ability status may modify these perceptions and experiences. For example, in the interviews described in Chapter 6, a number of participants described “bodily reflexive practices”, where their beliefs about masculinity influenced and were influenced by their own hirsuteness and physical bulk – physical attributes which (although not framed as such by the participants) may be age-related (Connell, 2005). Consequently, it might be argued that experiences of embodied masculinity are highly contingent on age. Further, in the same interviews, some participants related their interpretations of masculinity to their early socialisation experiences, particularly with reference to their own and their parents’ (fathers’) social class. Although this was beyond the remit of study presented, future research may utilise a narrative analysis approach to examine how gay men’s socialisation experiences shape their beliefs about masculinity and influence positioning in relation to masculinity discourses later on.

#### **8-F: Implications for future research**

Investigating the intersectionality UK-based gay men’s identities is one potential future research direction. Other suggestions for future research are offered in Chapters 3 to 7, and are elaborated on and added to in this section.

##### ***8-F-1: Implications for researching gay masculinities in different contexts***

It is suggested that future research might be directed at examining how particular social contexts modify the meaning of different behaviours / attributes for and to gay men, and considering the implications of this for how gay men construct masculinities



differentially depending on the demands of these contexts. The findings presented in Chapter 3 suggested that in the field of the gay community, gay men who exhibit certain behaviours / attributes – particularly those associated with hegemonic masculinity – are bestowed higher status. However, Chapters 5 and 6 (and prior research) indicated that more effeminate gay masculinities, including those associated with the twink identity, can also yield social power, including masculine power, in ways that subvert the typical understanding of how hegemonic masculinity is achieved. For example, in Chapter 5 it was proposed that anally-receptive bottoms can acquire power and control over a sexual partner, meaning that bottoming can be conceptualised as masculine in the hegemonic sense. However, the quantitative data presented in Chapter 4 established that from the perspectives of heterosexual people, bottoming was more feminine than masculine, and therefore positioned in opposition to hegemonic masculinity. These findings suggest that the extent to which the behaviours / attributes gay men exhibit are perceived and experienced as gendered depends considerably on the field where they are produced, and the perspectives of those who appraise them.

#### 8-F-1-1: Gay masculinities and the gay scene

A direction for future research may be to develop the small body of existing literature concerning the intersection between gay masculinities and gay subidentities, or gay men's "tribal" affiliation. Gay subidentities are constructed within subcultures, or "communities", that also occupy geographic space – for example, men who identify as bears may frequent community spaces (e.g., bars) that are oriented towards serving bear clientele (Manley et al., 2007). Within the mainstream commercial gay scene, embodying narcissistic masculinities centred on youth, lean muscularity and hairlessness affords gay men social and sexual notoriety and therefore social and erotic status (Barron & Bradford, 2007; Clarke & Smith, 2014; Drummond, 2005b; Duncan,

2007, Duncan, 2010; Ridge et al., 2006). Consequently, even the twink, who embodies a feminised masculinity, may occupy a higher status in these spaces than the bear (Barron & Bradford, 2007; Clarke & Smith, 2014; Manley et al., 2007). However, within the bear community, feminised, narcissistic masculinities (particularly that embodied by the twink) are derided and more “natural”, heterosexual-looking masculinities are celebrated: According to Hennen (2005, p.34), the bear discourse “seeks to minimise the difference between bear and heterosexual masculinity”. Access to bear community spaces by men who do not embody bear masculinity is restricted – only those sanctioned as bear admirers may be welcome (Hennen, 2005). This suggests that the distribution of social power hinges on the value of appearances, which varies depending on the social context and geographic location where they are displayed. By using experiential approaches, future research might examine how a broader range of gay subidentities intersect with gay masculinities in a broader range of gay settings, and consider what the implications may be for the behavioural practices of the men who occupy those settings.

#### 8-F-1-2: Gay masculinities at work

Another potential line of future enquiry would be to investigate gay masculinities in different occupational contexts. As the data presented in Chapter 6 suggested, some gay men may experience increased pressure to enact heteronormative masculinity in the workplace on the understanding that gayness threatens professional integrity. Irrespective of sexual orientation, masculinity may afford capital to men working in masculinised professions (e.g., the construction industry: Chan, 2013), and also in those that are feminised. For example, male nurses may rationalise their ambitiousness and competitiveness by referring to the value of these qualities for accessing career promotions more rapidly (Huppertz & Goodwin, 2013). It has also been

identified that gay men working in feminised occupations such as hairdressing may be able to exploit their gay capital – such as their flamboyance and proclivity for emotional intimacy with women – to reap financial reward (Huppertz & Goodwin, 2013). In another context, Simpson (2014) found that the aisles, galleys and flight decks of commercial airlines are experienced by male cabin crew as gendered spaces, and that cabin crew roles are experienced as masculine positions of power in an otherwise feminised, “domestic” environment. Future research might therefore study how gay masculinities are constructed and experienced by gay men, and how they positioned in relation to each other, *outside* of the gay scene, and in particular, in fields where they occupy (temporary) superordinate positions to heteromasculinities.

A further suggestion would be to examine gay masculinities in highly masculinised and hierarchical environments such as the British military. For example, quantitative measures, similar to those used in the study presented in Chapter 4 might investigate how attributes such as sexual self-label, voice quality and muscularity – and other attributes that are related to masculinity, such as fitness level, sporting competence, risk-taking, and physical alcohol tolerance – are differentially associated with the masculine capital of gay men in the military. Qualitative approaches might then study how military gay men construct their masculinities, and position themselves reflexively in relation to heterosexual men in the military, and to non-military gay and heterosexual men generally. A discursive psychology approach could be adopted successfully in such a study. For example, using this approach might identify the rhetorical strategies used by military gay men to negotiate the dominance of the hegemonic masculinity discourse while occupying an “undesirable” position in an institution that, until the year 2000, excluded openly gay people. It would be enlightening to study how gayness is constructed by military gay men, and to examine

the discursive strategies they may use to manage their own gayness, and that of other military gay men.

***8-F-2: Implications for researching the inclusivity of gay masculinities***

The suggestions for future research outlined above are based on the assumption that gay men are concerned about masculine identity, and as a result, are disposed to adapt their behaviours in different social contexts accordingly. However, for approximately one-third of the participants who took part in the experiential study presented in Chapters 5 and 6, masculinity was not a preoccupation, and these participants tended to interpret masculinity in less essentialist terms. This suggests that some gay men do not necessarily conceptualise gay masculinities as subordinate to heteromasculinities, nor internally hierarchical, and as a result, are not necessarily concerned with their own masculine capital. However, the study did not examine *why* some gay men (like some heterosexual men: de Visser, 2009) have less concern with presenting as masculine in hegemonic masculinity terms; nor did the study identify the origins of some gay men's more inclusive understanding of masculinity. As discussed in section 8-E-4 of this chapter, future research might employ a narrative analysis approach to identify how narrative identities construct particular versions of gay experience, which may help to explain differences between gay men in terms of how they conceptualise gay masculinities.

***8-F-3: Implications for researching masculinities in other men who have sex with men (MSM)***

As discussed previously in this chapter, and in Chapter 4, it is not only self-identified gay men who report same-sex sexual experience (Smith et al., 2003). One of the limitations of the programme of studies presented here is that conclusions may only be drawn regarding gay masculinities, and not masculinities embodied by bisexual men

or heterosexual men who have sex with men. An alternative approach that might be adopted in future research would be to employ samples of “men who have sex with men”, or MSM. In Chapter 3 it was reported that bisexual men were described as less likely than gay men to be anally-receptive (bottom) in intercourse. Quoting a hypothetical bisexual man on his positioning in relation to bottoming, one participant declared, “I’m not *that* gay”. This discourse constructed gayness as continuous rather than dichotomous – that is, gayness could be measured in degrees rather than categories – which accorded with the findings from the experiential study reported in Chapter 6. Further, degrees of gayness were associated with engagement in particular behaviour, including sexual positioning in anal intercourse.

It has been suggested widely that sexual orientation is a continuously distributed variable (e.g., Savin-Williams, 2014). Future research might study more closely how the spectra of sexual orientation and gayness are interrelated, examine their associations with, and implications for, subjective experiences of masculinity, and investigate the consequences for men’s behavioural practices. For example, it would make a useful contribution to know how ostensibly heterosexual men understand and manage their masculine identities if they experience themselves as less masculine (or “gayer”) than hegemonic standards of masculinities prescribe, especially if they engage in homosexual sexual behaviour in conjunction.

#### ***8-F-4: Implications for researching the sexual behaviour of gay men***

Chapter 5 provided an account of how masculine identity may relate to sexual positioning in anal intercourse. Self-labels are a highly salient aspect of identity for many gay men. However, anal intercourse is not necessarily the sexual behaviour that gay men engage in most frequently (Grulich et al., 2014). Future research might address how masculine identity relates to behaviour in a broader range of sexual practices. For

example, using quantitative measures, Moskowitz, Rieger and Roloff (2008) found that self-labelled tops showed preferences for engaging in other (non-penile) insertive sexual behaviours (e.g., insertive fisting); bottoms preferred the receptive role in these practices; and versatile men had a balanced preference for both. However, the researchers did not account for the participants' beliefs about masculinity or their masculine identity, which could have influenced such preferences. Many non-anal sexual practices between men are associated with a risk of transmission of sexually transmitted infections. For example, condomless receptive oral sex carries a small risk of HIV infection, and receptive fisting is associated with higher incidence of Hepatitis A (Mettey, Crosby, DiClemente & Holtgrave, 2003; Richters, Grulich, Ellard, Hendry & Kippax, 2003). Consequently, the associations between non-anal sexual behaviour and a variable like masculine identity, which may be related to gay men's engagement in potentially risky sexual practices, are worthy of research attention.

Another suggested direction for future enquiry would be to examine how the availability of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) medication may be changing how sexual positioning in anal intercourse is conceptualised and experienced. Taking PrEP consistently can reduce the risk of HIV infection by more than 90% (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). This may have implications for anally-receptive, bottom men in particular, given that HIV transmission risk is greater for the receptive partner (Patel et al., 2014). In Chapter 5, it is described how participants often associated bottoming with feelings of vulnerability. It is possible that these feelings may be in some (perhaps small) way influenced by the knowledge that bottoming poses greater risks to sexual health than topping. Future research may examine how the protection from infection offered by PrEP may be related to gendered experiences of topping and bottoming, including experiences of barebacking (i.e., engaging in

condomless anal intercourse), and experiences of ejaculating / receiving semen into the anus (e.g., Dowsett, Williams, Ventuneac & Carballo-Diéguez, 2008). Relatedly, as discussed in Chapter 5, future research might address how beliefs about gender may influence gay men's condom-use negotiations.

### **8-G: A reflection on the main findings**

A reflexive account of the research process, including a discussion of my motivations for researching in gay masculinities, and how my own subjectivity may have influenced the data presented, is provided in Chapter 2. In this section, I reflect on the studies' findings, and consider the extent to which they fit the expectations I had before I began this programme of research.

As discussed in Chapter 2, my own experiences of being a gay man meant that I had many pre-existing thoughts about how gay men negotiate their identities in a heterosexist world – a world permeated by heteronormativity and a prolific “undercurrent of threat” (Connell, 2005, p. 155). I was educated in England during the period when Section 28 of the Local Government Act (1986) prohibited the “promotion of homosexuality” in schools. I never heard a teacher mention homosexuality either as a behaviour or an identity; I had no idea what gay men might actually *do*, who they might be, where they might live, or what they might look like. From my experience, “gay” was a word entrenched with hostility, uttered by other boys who intended to bully and belittle. (In fact, far more offensive synonyms were more commonly used for this purpose.) From what I understood from the messages I received at school – and in many other domains – gay men were sexually subversive, singularly undesirable, and irrevocably effeminate. It was hard to reconcile these beliefs with my own fledgling feelings of attraction to people of my own sex. It was not until I was 17 years old, and was taken by some workmates to a gay bar in a large, industrial city in England, that I found “my space”, and “my people”, and realised that gay men were not effeminate sexual deviants, that I was able to start accepting what had been previously unthinkable.

Research evidence suggests that my early experiences were not unusual: Gay men's narratives regarding the formation of their gay identities commonly refer to



feeling different to others in childhood, experiencing inner-conflict when homoerotic desires are recognised and clash with negative attitudes towards homosexuality, and feeling isolated from male peers (Flowers & Buston, 2001). As discussed in Chapter 1, it is claimed by some that in this “post-gay” era, gay men are mainstream, not marginalised, and male homosexuality is celebrated, not denigrated (Ghaziani, 2011; Morris, 2017). Research that has been conducted over the past two decades has shown that the dominant heteronormative, hegemonic masculinity may be softening, to the extent that heterosexual men are no longer fearful of homosexuality, and even invite gay peers into their friendship networks (Anderson, 2002, 2005; McCormack & Anderson, 2010). This would suggest that gay men need no longer be concerned with constructing a viable masculine identity that avoids subjugation. However, my own experiences (and those of some my gay friends, and those that I continue to read about in the media) have told a different story. I have always found it difficult to be a “real man”, when the messages I have exposed to have told me that to be a real man is to be, at the very least, heterosexual. These experiences were strong influences on what I expected to emerge from the findings of the studies presented here.

As I expected, Study 1 identified that homosexuality was a fundamental threat to perceived masculinity, but could be mitigated via the display of attributes that are associated with hegemonic masculinity – including emulating heterosexuality and having a body that looked hegemonically masculine (i.e., muscular). Although it has not been researched extensively, it was unsurprising that gay-sounding voices had such a profound, negative influence on gay men’s perceived masculinity, as was identified in all three studies – vocal effeminacy is a strong component of the gay effeminacy stereotype, and is an easily-recognisable indicator of homosexuality (Gaudio, 1994; Madon, 1997). Based on the existing literature and my own assumptions, I expected

anally-insertive, “top” men to be perceived as more masculine than anally-receptive, “bottom” men, and this was evidenced in all three studies. I was aware of anecdotal evidence that men who were known to be bottoms, and/or who had effeminate voices might use muscularity as a means of compensating for their transgressions of masculinity – i.e., to accrue compensatory masculine capital – and this was also suggested by the findings in Chapters 1, 4 and 7.

In Chapter 4, gay men rated all sexual self-labels as significantly more masculine than did heterosexual men, and all but one more masculine than did heterosexual women. Further, when hypothetical gay men had more hegemonically masculine attributes, gay men rated them significantly higher in masculinity than did the heterosexual participants. No literature existed to support *a priori* hypothesising in regard to these observations, but on reflection, it is not surprising that gay men see more masculine potential for gay men than do heterosexual men and women. As Drummond (2005b, p.277) opined, gay men engage in “continual masculine introspection” from an early age. In Chapter 6, many of the participants described monitoring their masculinity in certain contexts, and a number explained how they exercised vigilance over their behaviour, to ensure they maintained an appearance of heteromascularity. In Chapter 7, Jack described his masculine consciousness in interactions with heterosexual people. As discussed in Chapter 2, one of my motivations for conducting this programme of research was my awareness of my own masculine difference (inferiority), even in the most mundane of social interaction. Consequently, it is not surprising that gay men may be more sensitive to the masculine possibilities of other gay men – to deny *hypothetical* gay men the opportunity for acquiring masculine capital would be to acknowledge that their own attempts to be perceived as masculine might be in vain.

I expected sexual self-labels to be related to gay men's masculine capital, and assumed that Chapter 4 would reveal they are make a greater contribution to masculine capital than muscularity, and perhaps even voice quality, at least from the perspectives of gay men. This is because sexual self-labels offer gay men a unique means of accruing (and losing) masculine capital that is not available to heterosexual men who do not have sex with men – their heterosexuality already affords them the minimal degree of masculinity required to access hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). As the findings in Chapter 5 suggested, men who endorsed hegemonic masculinity also perceived sexual self-labels to reflect gendered social identities – to them, sexual self-labels were particularly salient aspects of their masculine identities, hence why some of the men described self-presenting (deceptively) as tops. However, there was an unexpected degree of resisting, subverting, or “queering” of the sexual gender scripts of anal intercourse shown by the participants in Chapter 5 – including by those for whom presenting as masculine was important. Perhaps sexual self-labels make less of a contribution to gay men's masculine capital than muscularity (for example) because some gay men know a man who says that he is a top might not be; that a man who is known to be a bottom might not be passive and subjugated in sex; and that to experience topping and bottoming as gendered practices does not say anything about the gender of the person engaging in those behaviours.

Some contemporary, young, middle-class, heterosexual men in the UK might embody masculinities that are characterised by the absence of homophobia and the inclusion of gay men (Anderson, 2009; McCormack, 2014). However, in the studies presented here, it was hegemonic masculinity that was the point of reference for many of the gay men and heterosexual men and women who took part, with the result that homosexuality (or more exactly, “gayness”) was set up in opposition to masculinity.

Only a minority of participants in Chapters 5 and 6 suggested that the supposed uniqueness of gay masculinities was negated by the apparent heterodoxy of heteromasculinities. This accords with my prior expectations. Recent data suggests that young non-heterosexual people in the UK continue to face hostility in a heteronormative society (Bradlow, Bartram, Guasp & Jadvá, 2017). It follows that some gay men in the UK assess their own masculinity and adapt their behaviours in accordance with hegemonic masculinity, given that this sets out the mandates of how real men should be.

However, something that the findings in Chapters 3, 5, 6 and 7 showed to a greater extent than expected was the propensity many of the participants had to construct gay masculinities that were flexible, that borrowed from hegemonic masculinity at times and subverted it at others, and both embraced and rejected gayness, and importantly, were not always experienced as subjugated.

## **8-H: Conclusion**

This programme of research provides a greater understanding of gay masculinities in the UK, showing how gay masculinities may be constructed and experienced in relation to hegemonic masculinity and emerging “hybrid” or “inclusive” heteromasculinities.

The data suggest that the concepts of masculine capital and gay capital may apply in different fields of gay men’s lives. The findings indicate that some gay men may endorse hegemonic masculinity and adapt their behaviours, including their sexual behaviours, accordingly. Others may be unconcerned about their masculine identities and contest hegemonic masculinity because the concept of masculinity is too fluid to be meaningful – this may be in part owing to the observation that heteromasculinities are diverse, and not necessarily in opposition to gay masculinities. Some gay men may

construct their masculine identities by borrowing from hegemonic masculinity at times, and at other times, by actively subverting it. Viewing gay masculinities as inevitably subjugated by hegemonic masculinity obscures the agency that gay men have to construct masculinities that are viable and even celebrated in non-heteronormative domains.

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## Appendices

## Study 1: Ethical Approval Certificate



University of Sussex

Certificate of Approval	
<b>Reference Number:</b>	ER/JPR21/3
<b>Title Of Project:</b>	What are the important components of masculinity for gay men?
<b>Principal Investigator (PI):</b>	Richard de Visser
<b>Student:</b>	James Ravenhill
<b>Collaborators:</b>	
<b>Duration Of Approval:</b>	8 months
<b>Expected Start Date:</b>	05-Jan-2015
<b>Date Of Approval:</b>	29-Nov-2014
<b>Approval Expiry Date:</b>	31-Jul-2015
<b>Approved By:</b>	Richard de Visser
<b>Name of Authorised Signatory:</b>	Richard de Visser
<b>Date:</b>	29-Nov-2014
<p>*NB. If the actual project start date is delayed beyond 12 months of the expected start date, this Certificate of Approval will lapse and the project will need to be reviewed again to take account of changed circumstances such as legislation, sponsor requirements and University procedures.</p> <p><b>Please note and follow the requirements for approved submissions:</b></p> <p><b>Amendments to protocol</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Any changes or amendments to approved protocols must be submitted to the C-REC for authorisation prior to implementation.</li> </ul> <p><b>Feedback regarding the status and conduct of approved projects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Any incidents with ethical implications that occur during the implementation of the project must be reported immediately to the Chair of the C-REC.</li> </ul> <p><b>Feedback regarding any adverse and unexpected events</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Any adverse (undesirable and unintended) and unexpected events that occur during the implementation of the project must be reported to the Chair of the Social Sciences C-REC. In the event of a serious adverse event, research must be stopped immediately and the Chair alerted within 24 hours of the occurrence.</li> </ul> <p><b>For Life Sciences and Psychology projects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The principal investigator is required to provide a brief annual written statement to the committee, indicating the status and conduct of the approved project. These reports will be reviewed at the annual meeting of the committee. A statement by the PI to the C-REC indicating the status and conduct of the approved project will be required on the Approval Expiration Date as stated above.</li> </ul>	

**Study 1: Consent form****Consent Form****Project Title: Gender and Identity****Project Approval Reference: ER/JPR21/3**

I agree to take part in this University of Sussex research project. I have had the project explained to me and I have read and understood the Information Sheet, which I may keep for records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:

- discuss issues of sexuality, gender and health and social behaviours in a small group of up to 8 other same-sex people, plus 1 male facilitator
- have the focus group discussion I am part of audiotaped for later transcription

I understand that no personally identifying information will be attributed to anything I say during the focus group discussion in the analysis and reporting of the data collected.

I understand that I will not have to use my real name during the focus group discussion.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the focus group without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

**Name:****Signature:****Date:**

### **Study 1: Group interview question schedule**

How would you know if a man was masculine? [prompt: what sort of behaviours would a masculine man engage in? What does a masculine man look like? How do they act? What other characteristics would they have?]

Can you think of someone in popular media, even fictional characters, who you identify as being masculine?

Where does your understanding about what masculinity means come from?

How important is it for men to be masculine?

What kind of things do you think men are concerned about in terms of how others perceive them?

Why is it important for a man to be masculine, if it is at all?

What would be an ideal masculinity for a man – a masculinity that should be aspired for?

How can men increase how masculine they are?

What might be the consequences for a man who is not particularly masculine?

What about if a man does something feminine. Does that affect how masculine they come across as?

What sort of feminine things might a man do which affects how masculine he seems?

What characteristics or behaviours might a man do that would make you think he might be gay?

Where does your understanding of the characteristics of gay men come from?

How can a gay man's behaviour or characteristics affect how masculine or feminine they are? [prompt: what about if a gay man was good at sport?

How are gay men and straight men different in how they behave, if at all? [prompt: what about in terms of their hobbies and interests? What about in their use of drugs? What about things like smoking? What about what type of alcohol they might drink? What about their bodies? What about their sexual behaviour?]

To what extent is it possible to be gay and also be masculine?

How do you think gay men feel about being feminine?

Can gay men and straight men be equally masculine?

Do you think straight men see gay men as being masculine?

How important is it for a gay man to be masculine?

What motivates gay men to be masculine?

What can gay men do to increase how masculine they are?

**Study 1: Images used to prompt discussion in group interviews**



## Study 1: Analysis process – Section from an annotated transcript (FG6: 1)

- 50 M5: Mostly concerned with face, I'd say.  
 51 M1: Concerned with face!  
 52 M5: Mostly concerned with saving face. Not really anything else.  
 53 M6: More concerned with saving face.  
 54 M5: Yeah.  
 55 M6: Right. To whom, in what context?  
 56 M5: To anyone, just keeping up a kind of pride and face that is so valued in this society.  
 57 M2: Yeah, I think it's... I would not really agree with the whole-, if we're staying very gender  
 58 stereotypical, obviously, like, yeah, not being, not being empathetic or sympathetic towards someone  
 59 might not be, might be masculine, but I would say more about assurance, keeping... being confident,  
 60 and this does not imply not being sympathetic, I think you can be very masculine and very soft as  
 61 well. And to be, to go back to what has been said, like, I would definitely-, for me it's just a  
 62 combination between both, it has to be physical, it has to be mannered, but someone who is  
 63 extremely thin, who has a high-pitched voice, and who-, it would be like, he'll, this will never be  
 64 masculine for me, even though he's very aggressive or very confident, I would not see him as  
 65 masculine. There needs to be, at some point, one physical aspect of it. And it can be, you know,  
 66 square face or something, but there needs to be something physical, and obviously behavioural, I  
 67 don't know how you'd call \*Laughs\* how you call it.  
 68 M6: Yeah.  
 69 M2: It's obviously necessary as well, but it needs to be a combination of the both.  
 70 M3: I think, back to like, one of the... issues of trying to define what is masculine is that you have to  
 71 look at the opposite and what is feminine, and when we look at what is feminine you have a  
 72 distinction between what is feminine and what is effeminate, and there isn't an equivalent for  
 73 masculine, there's not "emmasculate", or... an equivalent that a woman could be an 'emmasculate  
 74 female', or I mean, it's difficult...  
 75 M2: You would leave masculinity.  
 76 M3: ...cos you're just, when you're looking at guys they can be a masculine and feminine guy,  
 77 which is a very different from a guy who is effeminate, and I think it's just then assigning different  
 78 characteristics, whereas the negative characteristics tend to go to effeminacy, and the slightly more  
 79 positive ones would be feminine. And there's that distinction there I think, which just blurs it even
- masc = confidence/control*  
*masc = pride/confidence*  
*masc = confidence*  
*masc can also have face data*  
*masc = physical (not then)*  
*masc = behavioural*  
*masc = voice (deep)*  
*masc deleted re: feminine*  
*feminine & effeminate*  
*masc can also have face data*  
*masc*  
*feminine*  
*effeminate*

## Study 1: Analysis process – Section from an annotated transcript (FG6: 2)

- 80 further.
- 81 M6: Right. What would be the-? How would you decide between... somebody who was effeminate  
82 or somebody who was feminine? How would you make that distinction?
- 83 M3: I think-. I mean it comes to a broader, I guess, social, cultural perception that within a broader,  
84 you know, environment that we're in, effeminate, guys who are effeminate tend to be, or be  
85 perceived as not having redeeming qualities or not having redeeming characteristics. Guys who are  
86 feminine would still engage, perhaps, in traditionally masculine activities and that, you know,  
87 redeem themselves in that way. I mean, it, I don't know, it, it, I guess it comes to like a power  
88 dynamic in society where women are still perceived as inferior, and as long as men can somehow  
89 show that they are still masculine or 'male' they then are part of the dominant social group. Whereas  
90 if they're more effeminate then they lose that social power, or lose that social... agency. That's not  
91 from a personal perspective, I think that's just how it, like, it sometimes works in society.
- 92 M6: Right. Do you think that if somebody perhaps didn't have the physiological – sorry, the physical  
93 – characteristics of a masculine man, so M2, you said things like, if you were super skinny and  
94 completely hairless, do you think men might engage in certain behaviours to kind of increase how  
95 masculine, masculine they either seem or feel themselves?
- 96 M4: Yeah, you get that whole, like, short man syndrome kind of thing, where, like, guys who aren't  
97 big and tall, like, bulk up and are, like, noticeably more aggressive, just to put forward that, yeah,  
98 they don't, they're not as tall as other men but they are just as masculine I guess.
- 99 M6: Right.
- 100 M1: You can, I, I actually disagree with M2 here, because I, I think that someone who's skinny,  
101 hairless and has a high-pitched voice can still be very masculine. Cos even though you have a high  
102 pitched voice, you can still try and put on a low pitched voice and it comes across that way, you  
103 know. So....
- 104 M4: But I think people would say that they act masculine as opposed to are masculine....
- 105 M1: But acting masculine I would....
- 106 M2: So people can look masculine as well, but not masc-. You can be masculine but not masculine,  
107 that's what I wanted to say, like, I kind of said that some people can look masculine but I'm not  
108 going to say that they are.
- 109 M1: I would say that if you act masculine and you impose that on yourself, then you are masculine.

masculine  
↓  
feminine  
↓  
effeminate

none inferior to men

masculine = tall  
men who lack an more characteristic  
may try (behave) to other more desirable

masculine can be "put on"  
= performance & identity

masculine appearance ≠ masculine person

## Study 1: Analysis process – Section from an annotated transcript (FG6: 3)

- 285 M2: Just to go back to what M6 was saying, like do you think people would still-, I think a lot of  
 286 people would still do it. Because it's not, because it's not fully right, because there is still, yeah, a lot  
 287 of anxieties and we might live in Brighton and it's fine, but in many other cities it's not that fine,  
 288 so...
- 289 M3: Of course.
- 290 M2: ...there is this, like, wish to, and to prove I guess, like, the heterosexuals' fear that actually, you  
 291 know, gay guys are even more masculine than straight guys, so I guess there is this sort of like rush  
 292 and race for m-. I don't know. Not everywhere, just like in certain, like, gay subcultures I guess.
- 293 M4: I don't really think that it's like... that every single really masculine person has, like, a problem  
 294 with their gender or sexuality, I think it's just that they're scared that other people think they will.  
 295 Like, I really do, I think it's all about like how other people perceive you as opposed to what you  
 296 want to be yourself. And, like...
- 297 M3: But isn't that a problem with the gen-, with their gender in itself, or their sexuality in itself,  
 298 they're worried about what other people are going to think of their sexuality or gender. It suggests  
 299 that they're not completely comfortable with their gender or sexuality.
- 300 M4: Yeah, I guess. But like, like, they might be, like, straight males and, like, they're  
 301 completely fine with the fact that their straight males but they just really don't want anyone to think  
 302 that they're anything but straight males. *Maybe*
- 303 M6: Yeah. So, so a lot of the stuff you're saying is about how other people are gonna-. So people are  
 304 motivated maybe, or feel pressured to act out a given masculinity because of the pressure to appear  
 305 masculine, to avoid appearing gay, or perhaps because they're not completely comfortable with  
 306 being seen as just who-, however they are. Like, I don't know what a 'blank-slate person' looks like,  
 307 I think, I don't know, we're kind of shaped by these pressures, but I mean, for, for a man or a-, let's  
 308 stick with gay men: for a gay man and how they see themselves, do you think it's important for a gay  
 309 man to kind of think, to think that their masculine, or to feel masculine, irrespective of what they're  
 310 worried about other people thinking?
- 311 M3: I think it's part of a, part of a journey of becoming ok with yourself. Certainly kind of my own  
 312 personal journey and most of my friends, you know, you go through the phases of coming to terms  
 313 with your sexuality, or you, being gay; and you go through a phase of no, I need to be straight-  
 314 acting, or I need to be really masculine in order to feel comfortable; and then you get to the point  
 315 where you realise that's offensive, and you realise that it doesn't matter; and you eventually, I think

let see of gay men  
let see of men of gay men

let not present as male for others  
not so much for themselves

need to express more openly  
suggested by of men  
let not want to be seen as straight

need to learn to be comfortable  
with identity

## Study 1: Analysis process – Section from an annotated transcript (FG6: 4)

subculture / peer shape  
needs / pressure to conform to  
broader cultural stereotypes

327 now have to make  
sense of sexuality as masculine  
in a culture that would like  
to be as masc

top = masc  
bottom = femine  
but is her  
being  
used to  
be as he?  
↓

you work towards a point where ideally for me, at least, with kind of my life and the people I choose to interact with, it, it doesn't make that much of difference whether you are really masculine or perceive yourself as really masculine or not. I, in my life, I perceive that as a journey with a starting point. Certainly within my friends I perceive the need to be really hyper-masculine or project a certain masculinity or femininity as some sort of insecurity that they're still working through. And that's not fair to say across the board, I know, but, that's just from my own personal experiences.

M4: Yeah, I definitely agree with that but I also think that, like, on the journey of, like, accepting yourself, like, in your sexuality, it's also, like, a lot, well for me, like, a lot of my friends also like, once you've got over the fact that you're not a masculine person or whatever, then you have to, like, realise that there's nothing wrong with being attracted to, or being with people who aren't masculine themselves. Cos like, as you've grown up, you're always like, you never really think of anyone who is, who isn't masculine as attractive and it takes a while after you've actually comes to grips with your sexuality, that you yourself are gay and you, you might not be masculine, like, it takes a while to... realise that it's... that you can be attracted to other people who aren't masculine, if that makes sense? Like, that definitely came a lot after, like, for me. Like, a lot after. Which I don't know if that was an issue with myself, or whatever, but...! \*Laughs\*

M6: No, that's a really interesting point though, isn't it? It's like accepting your own... however you see yourself as being either masculine or not that masculine, and then also how that influences how you see other people, and being comfortable to be in the presence of people who aren't masculine. Or 'feminine'. Or even date people who aren't particularly masculine.

M4: And especially if you're like, with gay culture – I don't know if that's a thing – but in... with this whole top / bottom kind of thing, you have to fall into one of those discrete roles or versatile I guess – but... and, like, the top is always masculine, the bottom is always feminine, and like, if you don't fall into that you have to, like, change yourself or whatever, or, like, change, like, change how you... find attracted to people.

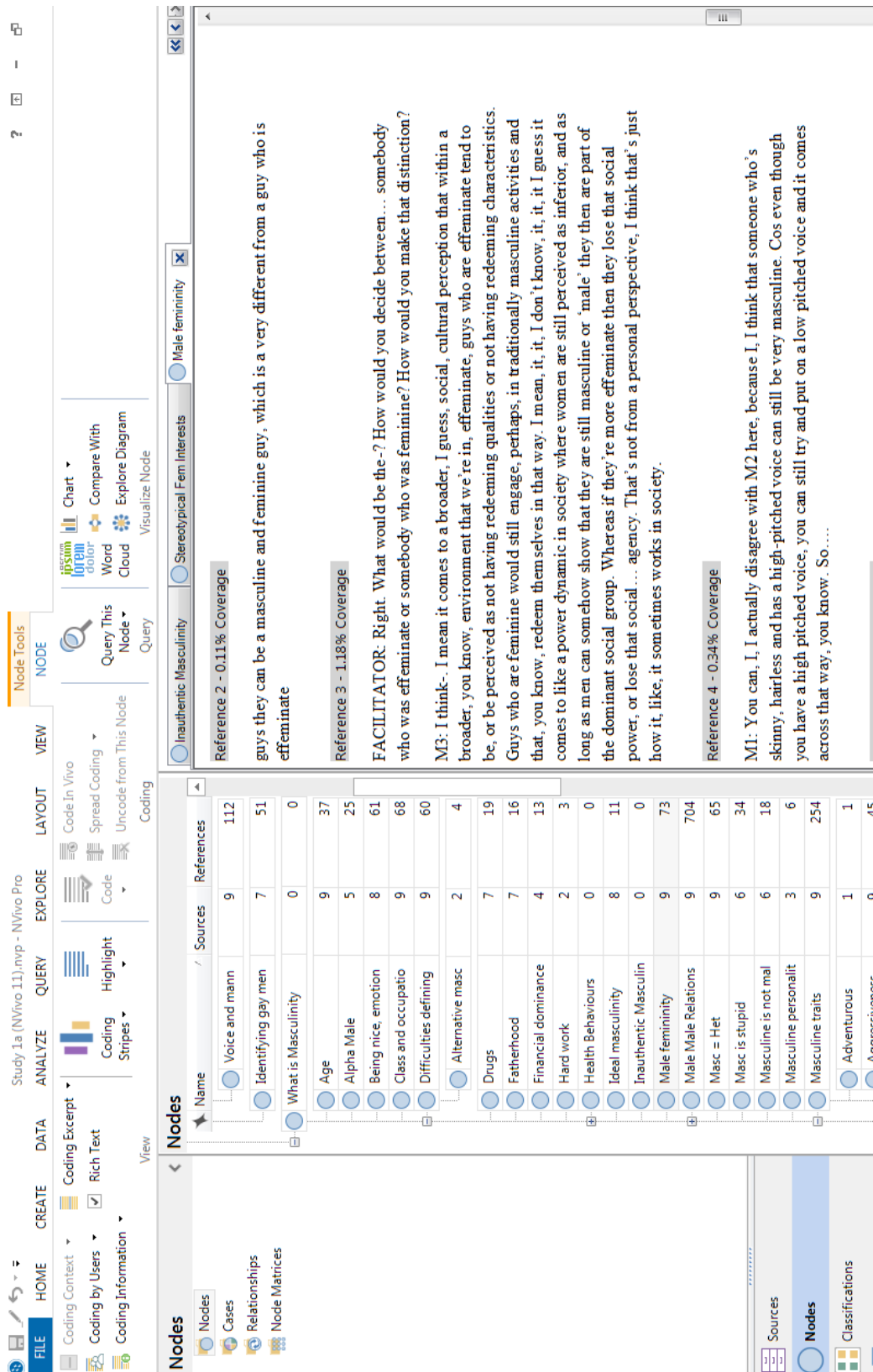
M1: That's definitely true. I've... I think I've seen that around. I've, cos, like, I've, I don't think I've seen... a feminine, feminine person who describes himself as a top, or...

M6: Right.

M1: ...vers-tops, the guy I know, like... they do like to appear masculine, from what I've seen.

M6: They like to *appear* masculine?

### Study 1: Analysis process – Coding in NVivo (FG6: 1)



## Study 1: Analysis process – Coding in NVivo (FG6: 2)

Study 1a (NVivo 11),mvp - NVivo Pro

FILE HOME CREATE DATA ANALYZE QUERY EXPLORE LAYOUT VIEW

Node Tools

CODE

Chart

Compare With

Word

Cloud

Visualize Node

Query This Node

Query

Coding

Code In Vivo

Spread Coding

Uncode from This Node

View

Nodes

Nodes

Cases

Relationships

Node Matrices

What is Gay

Gay is masculine

Gay animal identi

Gay masc attracti

Gay sexual role

Pornography

Variety of gay m

Gay is not masculine

Being and appea

Gay NOT masc

Gay is camp

Gay is Fem

Gay relationships

Gay sexual role

Stereotypical Fe

Voice and manne

Identifying gay men

What is Masculinity

Age

Alpha Male

Being nice, emotio

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Difficulties defin

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Sources

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Classifications

References

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124

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11

26

5

11

342

19

151

24

83

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112

51

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60

19

Reference 1 - 1.10% Coverage

the top is always masculine, the bottom is always feminine, and like, if you don't fall into that you have to like, change, like, change how you... find attracted to people.

M1: That's definitely true. I've... I think I've seen that around. I've, cos, like, I've, I don't think I've seen describes himself as a top, or...

FACILITATOR: Right

M1: ...vers-tops, the guy I know, like... they do like to appear masculine, from what I've seen.

FACILITATOR: They like to *appear* masculine?

M1: They are, I've seen, I've seen... other bottoms, I guess I can't think of any right now \*Laughs\* off the appear very masculine and they don't really mind. Like, they don't put on the effeminate thing so they can interesting point actually. But I know a lot of people who are neither, and they're just normal, I guess. Th

Reference 2 - 0.35% Coverage

M1: I think they're related in the exactly the way that you described in both ways, and they reinforce each masculine and then sometimes you just go, "Oh, I'm masculine so I should be a top," and, "Because I'm masculine." It just goes on I guess.

Reference 3 - 0.73% Coverage

M3: I think for some guys it might be, but at the same, at the same time I think for a lot of guys who might were saying, there is a lot of pressure in this, in, in the gay culture or community or whatever... to not be bottom is to be like a woman, and so they really buff up and become really visibly masculine as a way to

## Study 2: Ethical Approval Certificate



### Certificate of Approval

<b>Reference Number</b>	ER/JPR21/5
<b>Title Of Project</b>	Identity and Lifestyle
<b>Principal Investigator (PI):</b>	Richard De Visser
<b>Student</b>	James Ravenhill
<b>Collaborators</b>	
<b>Duration Of Approval</b>	6 Months
<b>Expected Start Date</b>	30-Sep-2015
<b>Date Of Approval</b>	27-Sep-2015
<b>Approval Expiry Date</b>	31-Mar-2016
<b>Approved By</b>	Richard De Visser
<b>Name of Authorised Signatory</b>	David Reby
<b>Date</b>	27-Sep-2015

\*NB. If the actual project start date is delayed beyond 12 months of the expected start date, this Certificate of Approval will lapse and the project will need to be reviewed again to take account of changed circumstances such as legislation, sponsor requirements and University procedures.

**Please note and follow the requirements for approved submissions:**

Amendments to protocol

- \* Any changes or amendments to approved protocols must be submitted to the C-REC for authorisation prior to implementation.

Feedback regarding the status and conduct of approved projects

- \* Any incidents with ethical implications that occur during the implementation of the project must be reported immediately to the Chair of the C-REC.

Feedback regarding any adverse and unexpected events

- \* Any adverse (undesirable and unintended) and unexpected events that occur during the implementation of the project must be reported to the Chair of the Social Sciences C-REC. In the event of a serious adverse event, research must be stopped immediately and the Chair alerted within 24 hours of the occurrence.

For Life Sciences and Psychology projects

- \* The principal investigator is required to provide a brief annual written statement to the committee, indicating the status and conduct of the approved project. These reports will be reviewed at the annual meeting of the committee. A statement by the PI to the C-REC indicating the status and conduct of the approved project will be required on the Approval Expiration Date as stated above.

## Study 2: Ethical information sheet – first page of survey

### Welcome

Thank you for taking part in this study of people think about aspects of identity and lifestyle, including sexual behaviour.

The study is being conducted by the School of Psychology at the University of Sussex. The results of the study may be included in papers that are submitted for publication. Ethical approval has been acquired from the University of Sussex Sciences & Technology Cross-Schools Research Ethics Committee.

The questionnaire is completed anonymously and takes around 15-20 minutes to complete. Please make sure that you have sufficient time to complete the questionnaire in one sitting.

You must only complete the questionnaire if you are aged 16 years and over.

**Please note that once you have clicked on the ‘Continue’ button at the bottom of each page you cannot return to review or amend that page**

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. All information will remain anonymous and confidential. It will be stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher.

You can withdraw participation at any time by closing your browser. The data you have provided will be withdrawn.

The questionnaire **does not** require you to give your name, unless you would like to enter the prize draw. Details of the prize draw are provided at the end of the questionnaire. University of Sussex students can choose to receive 2 research participation credits for taking part, instead of being entered into the prize draw. If you are a student at the University of Sussex, choosing to either take part or to not take part in this study will not affect your marks, assessments or future studies.

If you have any questions about the questionnaire or would prefer to complete a paper version, please email [J.P.Ravenhill@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:J.P.Ravenhill@sussex.ac.uk)

**By clicking 'Continue' at the bottom of this page, you are consenting to take part in this questionnaire.**

If you do not wish to continue, simply close your browser.



[illegible]







### Study 3: Ethical Approval Certificate



#### Certificate of Approval

<b>Reference Number</b>	ER/JPR21/7
<b>Title Of Project</b>	Experiences as a Gay Man
<b>Principal Investigator (PI):</b>	Richard de Visser
<b>Student</b>	James Ravenhill
<b>Collaborators</b>	
<b>Duration Of Approval</b>	6 months and 10 days
<b>Expected Start Date</b>	25-May-2016
<b>Date Of Approval</b>	22-Jun-2016
<b>Approval Expiry Date</b>	31-Dec-2016
<b>Approved By</b>	David Reby
<b>Name of Authorised Signatory</b>	
<b>Date</b>	22-Jun-2016

\*NB. If the actual project start date is delayed beyond 12 months of the expected start date, this Certificate of Approval will lapse and the project will need to be reviewed again to take account of changed circumstances such as legislation, sponsor requirements and University procedures.

**Please note and follow the requirements for approved submissions:**

Amendments to protocol

- \* Any changes or amendments to approved protocols must be submitted to the C-REC for authorisation prior to implementation.

Feedback regarding the status and conduct of approved projects

- \* Any incidents with ethical implications that occur during the implementation of the project must be reported immediately to the Chair of the C-REC.

Feedback regarding any adverse and unexpected events

- \* Any adverse (undesirable and unintended) and unexpected events that occur during the implementation of the project must be reported to the Chair of the Social Sciences C-REC. In the event of a serious adverse event, research must be stopped immediately and the Chair alerted within 24 hours of the occurrence.

For Life Sciences and Psychology projects

- \* The principal investigator is required to provide a brief annual written statement to the committee, indicating the status and conduct of the approved project. These reports will be reviewed at the annual meeting of the committee. A statement by the PI to the C-REC indicating the status and conduct of the approved project will be required on the Approval Expiration Date as stated above.

**Study 3: Consent form****Consent Form****Project Title: Experiences as a Gay Man****Project Approval Reference: ER/JPR21/7**

I agree to take part in this University of Sussex research project. I have had the project explained to me and I have read and understood the Information Sheet, which I may keep for records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:

- discuss my experiences of being a gay man, including talking about my attitudes towards and experiences of sex with other men
- have the interview audiotaped for later transcription

I understand that no personally identifying information will be attributed to anything I say during the interview in the analysis and reporting of the data collected.

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

I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

**Name:****Signature:****Date:**

**Study 3: Key interview questions***Key interview questions*

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How important for you is it be perceived by others as masculine?

Why is/isn't it important for you to be perceived as masculine?

How masculine do you see yourself?

What sort of assumptions do you think people make about your preferred sexual position?

Why do you think they make those assumptions?

How do you feel about the assumptions other people might make about your preferred sexual position?

How do you determine which position you take in a given instance of sex with another man?

How is the position you adopt in sex with another man related to how masculine you feel at the time, if at all?

How is it related to how masculine you feel more generally, if at all?

If you use dating / hook up websites / apps (e.g., Grindr), how do you like to be perceived by other users?

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## Study 3: Analysis process – Section of an annotated transcript (Jack: 1)

- 36 Yeah.
- 37 *How kind of muscular do you see yourself at the moment?*
- 38 Average. So other people always ~~see~~ have a nice body, but I don't feel like I do.
- 39 *Why not? What is it? What don't you like?*
- 40 I think it's just the world we live in today isn't it? Unless you have like abs of steel, nothing else really counts. It's like Instagram, isn't it?
- 41 People's perceptions of what's real and what should be. Like ideologies are all warped aren't they?
- 42 *So how much of a concern is that, how people kind of perceive you in terms of your body?*
- 43 Oh I'd say that definitely comes into practice quite a lot. I think, whenever I meet somebody or like there's a potential romantic interest, I - and it
- 44 sounds terrible - always like the idea that they're a bit uglier than I am. So it makes me feel better about myself. \*Laughs\* I couldn't go out with
- 45 anybody better looking than me cos I'd be too self-conscious. *need to have a better body than partner.*
- 46 *Oh really, so you like to go out that you feel a bit more, kind of more good looking?* *be a better body = less ugly*
- 47 Yeah! \*Laughs\* It sounds really cuntyish doesn't it? Sorry I'm not, sorry if I swear I've got quite a foul mouth at times.
- 48 *Oh, swear away, mate that's absolutely fine, don't worry about it.*
- 49 \*Laughs\*
- 50 *So how important would you say kind of muscularity is to you? Your own.*
- 51 It, yeah, I'd say it definitely... it's definitely a big factor. Like it me-, like I feel that... Cos I am quite a, I'm quite, I'd say I am quite feminine in
- 52 my, like, my voice and like nat-, like my natures and stuff, so I suppose that kind of counteracts it. But a lot of time I go on dates and things and
- 53 people always say that I'm quite nice looking till I start talking. \*Laughs\*
- 54 *Really? How does that make-, how does that make you feel when they say that? [00:10:43]*
- 55 Well I'm the kind of, I just laugh at everything, but I suppose deep down that's probably why I'm so self-critical.
- 56 Yeah. Yeah, so you said that you feel that you can be quite feminine in your voice and, and then I can't remember exactly the words you used, but
- 57 you, it, it was like, the way you are or something.
- importance of muscularity*
- top feminine does not match reality*
- muscle provides more control to overcome fem (e.g., voice)*
- Acquisition of perceptions of fem voice & physical body*



## Study 3: Analysis process – Section of an annotated transcript (Jack: 2)

- 58 Yeah, like, in my nature.
- 59 *In your nature, yeah.*
- 60 Yeah, the way I am. *I am in an embedded, stable part of details contrast with physique - temp. created*
- 61 *But what do you mean by that? Like what is, what is it that you're seeing in yourself that makes you feel like you're feminine?*
- 62 I just feel sometimes like people's grandmas trapped in a 22 year old male's body! \*Laughs\*
- 63 *\*Laughs\**
- 64 I am very, I have a very, like, smokes twenty a day and wears a lot of gold jewellery Nan's voice. But no, I'm just, I'm very in touch with my *working class older women!*
- 65 feminine side. I'm just... I don't know, I suppose I'm just more, I just probably have more feminine gestures than I do male, do you know what I
- 66 mean? I don't have a gruff voice, I'm not particularly... I don't really know how to word it, butch. *Be my understanding of more in terms of fem.*
- 67 *Right.*
- 68 At work, some, the bouncers where I work, the doormen call me Mincey! \*Laughs\*
- 69 *The doormen call you Mincey.*
- 70 Yeah.
- 71 *Does that bother you?*
- 72 No not really. It used to a little bit when I was younger, but I'm not worried about being feminine at all, that's just, you can't change who you are
- 73 do you know what I mean? You can change what you look like, but you can't change who you are. *admittedly, see 60.*
- 74 *So how does the being muscular kind of... how is it related to that feeling of femininity?*
- 75 I suppose it just counteracts it a little bit. Cos I know I can, like, lift weights and run and stuff like that, do you know what I mean? But I don't
- 76 think I'd ever feel comfortable, I don't know, \*affects deeper, gruffer voice\* "Are you alright love?" do you know what I mean? I just, it's just
- 77 not who I am as a person. *Awave of um (attempting to) - but I'll never be a male - but as I've never been male*
- 78 *Yeah. Is there an-, is there anything else? Like are there any other things about you that... that you think, "Oh I am quite feminine in that way?"*

## Study 3: Analysis process – Section of an annotated transcript (Jack: 3)

- 312 When you're in, like, a gay bar, or when, I guess if you're working, how do you think the other gay men perceive you?
- 313 Well this is, going back to the voice thing, we had a drag queen in a couple of weeks ago, and he said that \*laughs\* a thing that, he said, "Looks
- 314 like Tarzan" - this was about me - "and sounds like Jane!" \*Laughs\* And that kind of stuck. So I think, they all think, like, they all think that I'm,
- 315 like whenever we're-, whenever I come in that, whenever they come in, that I'm going to be a bit like, I don't know, sort of...I suppose
- 316 masculine as such. But then when I start talking and when they get to know me after a couple of, like, a few weeks or a few evenings, it's like,
- 317 "Oh," they're perception of me is totally different. *appears like Tarzan, but in more like Jane.*
- 318 Yeah. When, when they look at you, do you, what, what sexual position would, do you think that they'd assume that you take?
- 319 Literally everybody thinks, everybody always looks at me and says, "bottom." And I would never disclose that to anybody at my work, so I just
- 320 say to them, like, "You'll never know anything about my sex life and nor will I ever go home with any of you either! Because of that pure fact."
- 321 Like I feel like, I feel like especially on a gay scene, if one person knows something about you, everyone knows it. *before a couple weeks? After*
- 322 Right. It travels, news travels quickly! \*Laughs\*
- 323 And I quite, to be fair I quite like the idea of a few rumours going around about me, I wouldn't, but I would never answer them, do you know
- 324 what I mean? I would never disclose the actual answers to what was being said. *I like being talked about*
- 325 Yeah. So....
- 326 \*Laughs\* I'm a bit of a headfuck really! [00:35:15]
- 327 Why, why do you think they think you're a bottom?
- 328 I suppose just cos the way I am. Yeah, like, who I am as a person, like I've always got Britney Spears on and I'm always miming away \*laughs\*
- 329 so I suppose it's not, it's not exactly the butchest of actions is it? \*Laughs\*
- 330 When you are, like, when you meet guys which do you prefer? Which do you prefer, which sexual position?
- 331 I actually prefer to top.
- 332 Oh right, ok.
- 333 But that's what I mean, I think people are so quick to jump to assumptions about me that it's just like, do you know what I mean? It's not, most of
- 334 the time it's not even really asked, people just assume. *b/c there is so much evidence of top*

### Study 3: Analysis process – Example of coding process from Excel (Jack)

A	B	C	D	E
16	503	gay identity: tribe identities categorising		
17	285, 286, 302, 310	gay scene: fun but not essential		
18	62, 261, 262, 264, 280	identity: older than age		JH had to grow up quickly to look after his dad which he did seemingly single-handedly.
19	65	mas traits: fem gestures		
20	51, 52, 60, 62, 64, 65, 72, 120, 151	mas traits: fem identity		Fem identity - stable; physique (mas) - temporary, worked. See also 73. Character of an older, working class woman. Unconcerned with fem identity? Uses mus.
21	51, 52, 64, 127-129, 133, 135, 196	mas traits: fem voice		Awareness of fem voice affects JH deeply. Uses humour to overcome the negative feelings associated with a fem voice. See 128, 120, 133, 135; voice sufficient
22	31, 32	mas traits: frequent gym		
23	175, 203, 204	mas traits: not afraid		
24	316	mas: perceived as mas (appearance)		
25	25, 412, 416	mas: big body		
26	585, 586, 601, 602	mas: camp is genuine, not performative		
27	150, 408, 412, 413	mas: enjoys being perceived as ma Because people hold prejudice against camp men (see 413)		
28	469	mas: enjoys power / control of withholding sex?		
29	79, 80, 82	mas: fem = makeup, grooming		
30	328, 329, 516	mas: fem interests		
31	219, 220	mas: fem traits from a young age		
32	152	mas: muscular = not gay		
33	40, 412, 416	mas: muscularity culturally importa		Appearances do not match reality - a recurrent theme.
34	52, 73, 314-316	mas: muscularity provides mas ca		Overcomes voice to an extent. But see 73: only appearance can change, not who JH is. Appearance does not match reality
35	508	mas: no fem / twink appearance		Because JH doesn't have a strong gay identity, despite being so identifiably gay
36	66, 75-77	mas: not butch		JH's understanding of mas as outlined by his preference for mas men in 19. "Uncomfortable" being mas (76)
37	413	mas: prejudice against camp men		
38	254, 255, 586, 587, 613, 624, 625	mas: restricted emotionality		JH uses humour as defence. Appearance doesn't match reality.
39	75	mas: sporty		
40	653, 658	mas: uses humour instead of mas		
41	151, 157, 158, 188, 196-198, 333	others' perceptions: underestimate JH, probably because he's fem. Gay men not taken as seriously, especially if they're identifiably gay.		
42	19, 21, 23	relationships: orthodox mas appearance attractive		
43	472	sex: always with condom		
44	456, 459, 537	sex: anal sex not the most important		
45	440	sex: had sex young		Laughter here (440) and 447 might indicate that JH is not happy about these experiences when he was a teenager
46	232	sexual orientation: not large cliffs b		Sexual preference the only difference between straight and gay men - but JH has a lot of the stereotypic qualities of gay men
47	137, 164, 212	sexual orientation: perceived as ga		Resigned yes - used to people asking if he's gay after speaking. Would like to change voice (141)
48	127, 135	sexual orientation: perceived as str		Voice gives away gay identity; cannot be overcome by physique
49	319, 333	spl: assumed bottom in real life		Because there is so much evidence of femininity
50	426, 428	spl: assumed top on dating app		Appearances do not match reality. In real life, assumed bottom. (Although JH has a preference for top)
51	375	spl: bottom = inferior		
52	328, 329, 333	spl: bottom = more fem (others' perceptions)		
53	359	spl: bottom = submissive		
54	445	spl: bottom = younger		
55	372	spl: bottom for a bigger (more mas) man		
56	377	spl: bottom role to please top		
57	442	spl: bottom when younger		
58	240, 241	spl: bottom line for fem mas, mas		

Sheet1

### **Study 3: Analysis process – Example of a Participant Profile (Jack)**

#### **Participant Profile: Jack**

##### **Summary**

Jack is a 22 year old single gay man. His preferred sexual position is versatile and he is mostly versatile during sex. Jack has no gay tribe identity.

##### **Detailed character profile**

The phrase that captures Jack's experiences is 'appearances don't match reality'. Jack identifies as "quite feminine" (51): he has feminine interests (e.g., "fashion" (516)), conveys feminine behaviours (e.g., "got Britney Spears on... miming away" (328)), and, most notably, has a feminine voice, described by Jack as a "smokes-twenty-a-day-and-wears-a lot-of-gold-jewellery Nan's voice" (64). However, "[his] interior and exterior are quite contrasted" (116): he "feel[s] sometimes like people's grandmas trapped in a 22 year old male's body" (62). Jack goes to the gym "a hell of a lot" (31-32), and being muscular is important to Jack because it "counteracts" (52) the femininity conveyed by his voice and through his "natures" (52). In fact, Jack is perceived as "masculine" (316) by others on first sight – "looks like Tarzan" (313-314) – and people may even think "[he] was straight" (127); but only "until [he] start[s] talking" (135), when his voice gives away his gay identity.

Although Jack's muscularity affords sufficient masculine capital to avoid being perceived as gay in terms of appearances only, it cannot overcome his feminine voice. The femininity conveyed by his voice may be more closely aligned with his sense of identity, since "inside [he] feel[s] a lot more feminine than [he] appear[s] to look" (120). Even though Jack claims that he is "not worried about being feminine at all" (62), if he "could change one thing it would be [his] voice" (141): he "hate[s] it so much" (141), and it is one of the reasons why "deep down [he is] so self-critical" (55). For example,

“other people always say [he has] a nice body, but [he] do[es]n’t feel like [he] do[es]” (38). Jack is aware that even though his body affords a masculine appearance, his voice reveals his true identity, so it might be that he feels let down by his muscularity for not doing the job it’s supposed to do, and doesn’t see it as sufficiently muscular / masculine. This is particularly pertinent when it comes to masculinity in the context of attracting other gay men.

His dislike of his voice may not be because it sounds feminine per se, but rather that it activates people’s stereotypes of gay men and therefore he is immediately identifiable as gay: “as soon as I open my mouth people are like, ‘Oh my God, are you gay?’” (137). Not that he has a problem with being gay – he has “always been comfortable with being gay” (307) – but what Jack doesn’t like is that straight people (particularly straight men) “underestimate” (15) him as soon as they identify him as an “effeminate” (157) gay man. They assume that he is only interested in “shopping” (197) and “nightclubs” (197), and underestimate other really important parts of his identity, such as his “intellect” (198). As an effeminate gay man, Jack claims that straight people see him as an “underdog” (155), although that’s not how he experiences himself. The consequence of being underestimated is that feeling “overlooked” (188) is one of the three most salient words he uses to describe himself. Even gay men “have a thing against camp gay men” (413).

It is likely that his pursuit of muscularity is an attempt to be seen in a world where effeminate men are not taken seriously, even though (contrary to others’ beliefs) his actions are not performative: “I’m just being myself” (586). Being perceived as gay “get[s] a bit dull” (222) because the stereotype it activates puts Jack in “confines” (223) where he feels “stuck” (223), because once he is known to be gay, people see “the gay

kid” (192) as his main identity, where really that’s just a “part of who [he is]” (192-193).

To deal with his knowledge that people will automatically assume that he is gay, Jack actually uses his gayness, via camp humour: he “make[s] a joke out of it” (143-144). Jack uses humour to deal with occasions when he might need to come across as more masculine. Because he knows that his voice will belie his sexual identity in any attempts at appearing anything by gay, he instead *uses his voice* as part of his humour: he “can get away with anything” (658) because “people are too busy laughing... to decipher or go any deeper” (660). Jack is not a victim of his effeminacy – he has agency in constructing context-contingent identities by *deploying* his effeminacy. It seems that Jack has learned that humour can serve at least two purposes: it helps him deal with the negative implications of his highly identifiable gay identity; and it defuses situations where he knows other people will determine his sexuality. The problem is, using his gayness only reinforces his sense of marginalisation.

Jack’s understanding of masculinity is in terms of hegemonic masculinity: “a man’s man” (19) is described as a “builder” (23) who has “big shoulders, a big chest... and a bit of a belly” (19). Although Jack feels feminine on the “inside” (120), he knows that he can attempt to acquire this masculinity, in appearance at least, by exercising for muscularity. However, he also recognises that “you can change what you look like but you can't change who you are” (73), and he would not feel “comfortable” (76) embodying hegemonic masculinity via other behaviours, because “it’s just not who [he] is as a person” (76-77). Appearances can be deceptive. This is useful knowledge for Jack in terms of attracting romantic and sexual partners. His Grindr profile picture is of him in “a vest at the gym” (408), which he chose because he knows it appeals to men who “want a bloke that looks like a bloke” (416), and provides the opportunity to avoid

being perceived as effeminate. He also knows that he is probably perceived as a top by men on social media, because he equates tops with masculinity and his photo is “a masculine image” (428) – “It’s the gym, it’s sweaty men” (428; 430) – in keeping with Jack’s perspectives on definitions of masculinity. However, in real life, Jack knows that people assume that he is bottom, “just ‘cause the way [he is]” (328), doing things that are not “exactly the butchest of actions” (329), showing that he is aware that others make the association between bottoming and femininity. Online, with only information about his appearance, Jack is assumed to be top, but when more information is available (i.e., his behaviour, his interests) the assumption is that he is a bottom. Appearances don’t always reflect reality.

Jack is versatile but prefers to top because it “feels better” (344). He is quite a dominant top, and this is because Jack has firm beliefs about tops being dominant and bottoms being submissive, and when he is engaged in sex, he “take[s] on that role” (358) and will “follow that pattern” (359-360). His beliefs about the gendered nature of topping and bottoming therefore guide his actual behaviour. Bottoming is reserved for someone “special” (340), which may be because when he bottoms he feels “inferior” (375) to his partner; it may be for this reason that he will only bottom for someone “bigger than [him]” (372) – the partner has to have a more masculine appearance than Jack for bottoming to be acceptable, which is interesting because Jack does not have a masculine identity outside of his appearance. (Masculinity is all appearance-based for Jack because it is his appearance exclusively that affords the possibility of accessing something resembling hegemonic masculinity). Additionally, bottoming to Jack is about “pleas[ing]” the top (377), hence the partner would need to be “special” (340).

Jack bottomed when he was “young and the big blokes [he] was meeting were so much older” (445): bottoming is therefore reserved for times when partners are older

and are bigger (i.e., are more masculine in the terms that Jack understands it). For Jack, sexual self-label is not that important, and that is largely because “it’s not all about fucking” (456): “there’s a lot more than penetrative sex” (459).

Jack “do[es]n’t get why” gay men have tribal identities because they are an example of how gay men “generalise each other” (503) – Jack does not like it when “people are so quick to jump to assumptions” (333) about him, so it follows that he would not want to belong to a group about which there is a “stereotypical assumption” (504). He claims that he cannot be a twink because he does not have the feminine physical characteristics associated with being one, and consequently doesn’t really know “where [he] fit[s] in” (486).



### Study 3: Analysis process – Table of participants from Excel

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	Formula Bar				N	O	P	Q	R
1															Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
2	Beliefs about masc	Carl	Evan	Mike	Geoff	Rob	Arman	Craig	Adam	Ross	Dale	Pete	Ben	Andy	Reza	Ryan	Jack	Sahib		
3		Plural	Traditional	Plural	(Prob) traditional	Traditional	Traditional	Traditional	Plural	Traditional	Plural / traditional conflict	(Prob) plural	What men do	Y traditio sal	Traditional	Plural		Y traditio sal	Opposite of fem	
4	Masc identity	Masc (athletic)	Masc	Masc	Fem	Masc	Masc (appearance)	Strong masc	Neither masc nor fem	Masc and fem	Masc	Neither masc nor fem	Fem (flamboyant)	Strong masc	Mr Inbetween	Fem (camp)	Fem and masc (appearance)	Strong Fem		
5	ance	Masc - Low	Masc - high	Masc - low	Fem - low	Masc - high	Masc - low	Masc - High	Low	Masc - high; Fem - low	Masc - Mostly low	Low	Fem - high	Masc - very high	Masc - mostly low	Fem - fairly high	Masc - high	Fem - very high		
6	Perceived as	Masc (straight)	Masc	Masc	Masc	Masc	Masc	Masc	Masc	Masc	Masc	Masc	Fem	Masc	Fem	Fem	Masc	Fem		
7	Perceived as							Fem					Fem		Fem	Fem	Fem	Fem		
8	Easily identifiable?	No		Yes - voice	No	No	Masc	Yes - voice	No		No	No	Yes - voice, flamboyant	No	Yes - (voice), No camp	Yes - voice	Yes - femininity	Yes - femininity		
9	Feels "	Masc	Masc	Masc	Fem (camp)	Masc	Masc	Masc	Masc	Masc	Masc	Masc	Fem	Masc	Fem	Fem	Fem	Fem		
10	Physique	Avg / short	Avg	Avg	Strong / big	Musc	Musc	Chunky	Avg	Slim	Musc / big	Avg	Slim	Stocky	Slim	Slim	Musc	Slim		
11	Tribe	Bear	(Daddy)		(Bear/cub)	Wolf		Bear		(Other)	Bear/cub	Radical fierce	Twink	Cub/bear	(Twink)	(Twink/kloster)		Twink		
12	TIBW prefer	Vars	Top ("vars")	Top	Bottom	Vars	Vars	Bottom	Vars	Vars	Top	Vars	Bottom ("vars")	Top	Top	Vars	Top ("vars")	Bottom		
13	TIBW actual	Mostly top	Mostly top	Mostly top	Mostly bottom	Mostly top	Mostly top	Mostly bottom	Vars	Mostly top	Mostly top	Mostly top	Mostly bottom	Mostly top	Mostly top	Vars	Mostly top	Bottom		
14	Perceived as	Bottom	Top	Bottom	Top	Top and bottom	Top	Top	Top	Top	Top		Bottom	Top	Bottom	Bottom	Bottom	Bottom		
15	gender present		Top		Bottom			Vars		Top							Top (Grindr)	Bottom		
16	Endorses t/b stereotypes?	No	Yes / no	Yes / No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes		
17	Topping is _	Neither		Neither	Neither	Musc	Musc	Musc	Musc	Musc	Musc	Neither	Musc	Musc	Musc	Neither	Musc	Musc		
18	Bottoming is _	Neither	Neither	Neither	Neither	Neither	Fem	Musc & Fem	Musc & Fem	Musc and Fem	Musc	Musc & Fem	Fem	Musc & Fem	Neither	Neither	Fem	Fem		
19	order	11	2	3	14	5	10	16	13	7	1	9	15	6	4	12	8	8	17	