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Non-Traditional Choices: The Construction of Masculine Identity Among Male Nursing Students

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Declaration

I declare that this Research Project is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary institution.

Abstract

This purpose of this project was to examine the experiences of five male nursing students, to uncover the challenges involved with reconciling the perceived feminine nature of their occupation with the demands of a traditional masculine gender regime. The research was based within a social constructionist epistemological paradigm, employing a critical theory interpretation and grounded theory methodology. Conducted through semi-structured interviews, the participant's accounts demonstrated the ways in which they modified, rejected and generally re-conceptualised dominant masculinities within the non-traditional setting. Their experiences were captured through three dominant themes; script assessment, self-authorship and authenticity. Emerging from these themes was a grounded theory of developmental gender authenticity, an iterative process of masculine identity construction that was similar for all of the men as they increasingly distanced themselves from the normative gender discourses with which they were formerly familiar. Traditional masculine practices lost most if not all legitimacy for the participants, as they committed themselves to authentic ongoing personal projects to reconstruct their gender identity to produce a progressively socialised self.

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Non-Traditional Choices: The Construction of Masculine Identity Among Male Nursing

Students

The processes involved in the development of any individual gender project are multiple and complex. Several key areas need to be explored to provide the backdrop for an in depth analysis of the mechanisms, costs and consequences of male nursing students' personal constructions of masculinity. This includes uncovering the structure of and developmental concepts associated with identity formation, specifically the construction of gender. As well as a thorough consideration of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, including changing definitions and manifestations, and examples of the diversity and influence of affiliated masculinities. However the very use of the term 'masculinity' denotes a number of important assumptions, and these need to be examined. Indeed exploring the narrative of masculine identity for male nursing students requires a thorough understanding and rationale for the utilised theory of the processes of gender identity formation.

Gender identities are contested because the right to account for gender is often claimed by conflicting discourses and systems of knowledge (Connell, 1995). Endeavouring to define a practically applicable and theoretically sound taxonomy of gender identity is thus a task at once laden with competing disciplinary perspectives. At one end of the spectrum, the biological sciences view gender as arising from the body through a delicate combination of genetics, hormonal differences, and physical characteristics (Tillman, 2006) with the implication of this perspective being that masculinity and femininity are two exclusive 'natural' programs, statically confined to men and women respectively. The alternative perspective held by some factions in the social sciences believe argues that the body is 'tabula rasa', a neutral canvas onto which the

symbols of gender are embossed, and are therefore susceptible to conscious transformation. Such a description ironically casts the debate in dichotomous terms, and this need not be so as there are suitable theoretical compromises. Determining an appropriate theory of gender identity should thus proceed with a consultation of the disparate orientations that exist on this notional continuum. Such an approach can consider and contrast the disciplinary diversity of meaning attached to key terms, to ultimately produce a synthesised and ideologically integrated understanding.

Biologically based theories construct gender development and differentiation as natural outcomes of the separate biological functions of males and females in the reproduction process (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). According to this perspective familial genes are considered the transmission agent of gender identity over generations (Rowe, 1994). Evolutionary psychology is a prominent biological theory that views gender differentiation as ancestrally programmed (Archer, 1996; Buss, 1995; Simpson & Kenwick, 1997). Psychological evolutionists take an extreme deterministic stance regarding the influence of nature, and are prone to claim evolved behavioural traits as cultural universals (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). This paradigm of evolutionary theory believes that natural selection, having created anatomical adaptations during the Pleistocene that are universal among humans, must have also developed equally widespread psychological adaptations (Buller, 2005). Accordingly, the mind still consists of these genetically specified 'mental organs' or 'modules' (Buller, 2005, p.9) each of which is functionally specialised at solving particular adaptive problems.

Applying this theoretical lens to the question of gender, evolutionary psychology claims that many contemporary gender differences, the very definitions of femininity and masculinity,

including social roles performed, displays of jealousy and aggression and the criteria for selecting and number of preferred sexual partners originate from hereditarily based sex specific reproductive strategies (Buss, & Schmitt, 1993). As a legacy of this common past, this theory posits that all women have come to invest more heavily than men in parenting roles (Trivers, 1972). Males in turn evolved into aggressors, social dominators and prolific maters because such behaviour increased their success in propagating their genes. Tiger (1969) proposed a theory of masculinity based on the evolution of gender roles from the hunter-gatherer era. This theory successfully captures the essence of evolutionary psychological accounts of gender, assuming that primitive men and women lived in groups and had very specific roles in order to ensure survival. The role of females included care and protection of the young and the home, while males hunted in groups. According to Tiger (1969) this need for homo-sociality whereby males bond and form groups, was carried forward and expressed throughout history within many social institutions such as politics and governments, militaries and education and religious institutions. Through these social institutions men have historically asserted and maintained their dominance over women (Tillman, 2006).

Evolutionary psychological accounts of gender have been thoroughly critiqued in recent years. According to Bussey and Bandura (1999) the claim that evolutionary psychology provides the solution to the origin of gender differences in social behaviour simply raises the regress problem. Specifically, why should men seek to maximise paternity at all? Moreover present day empirical evidence has found no hereditary differences between present day philanderers and monogamists, neither does the evidence suggest that men prefer young fertile-looking women or that women prefer richly resourced men as a result of different genes (Bussey & Bandura,

1999). The extensive cross-cultural and intra-cultural variability in male-female power relations and physical and sexual violence toward women (Smuts, 1992, 1995) rejects the idea that using physical force against women is the rule of nature. Nor can evolutionary factors explain large fluctuations in homicide rates over short periods of time that are largely correlative to levels of drug activities rather than to reproduction battles (Blumstein, 1995). This is compounded by the fact that variations in ecological selective forces promoted different adaptational patterns of behaviour, undermining the idea of two universally fixed gender-based human natures. Biologically determinist accounts of gender remain essentially hypothetical, as research cannot actually determine the environmental pressures operating during the ancestral era when differential reproductive strategies were allegedly developed (Buller, 2005).

Other analyses of gender differences from a biological perspective have focussed on hormonal influences and estimates of heritability. The search for a hormonal basis for differences in gender behaviour has produced highly conflicting results. Despite considerable research the influence of hormones on behavioural development and cognitive functioning remains unclear, and the causal link between hormones and behaviour has never been established (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Hormones affect the organization of the neural substrates of the brain, including lateralization of brain function, which is assumed to produce gender differences in cognitive processing. It has been reported that women show less lateral brain specialisation than do men, but the differences are small and some studies find no such difference (Bryden, 1988; Halpern, 1992; Kinsbourne & Hiscock, 1983).

Research on individuals from atypical populations with high levels of prenatal male or female hormones has concluded that hormonal influences cannot be separated from social ones

(Bleir, 1984). Although hormones may play a part in spatial ability, the evidence suggests that environmental factors play a central role in the observed differences (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Compared to girls, boys grow up in more spatially complex environments, and are encouraged to engage in activities that develop spatial skills. In accordance with social context, differences in spatial ability are not found in cultures where gender distinctions have little impact on children's activities (Fausto-Sterling, 1992).

Researchers working within the field of behavioural genetics have explored gender differences in terms of the relative contribution of environmental and genetic factors in given attributes (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Identical and fraternal twins raised separately in different environments have been studied for variations on a number of cognitive abilities and personality characteristics. The results of such studies, have demonstrated that genetic factors provide low to moderate influence on personality attributes. Most of the remaining variance is ascribed to non-shared environments unique to each individual (Plomin, Chipuer, & Neiderhiser, 1994).

The research that advocates a strongly biological account of gender has presented a number of significant shortcomings. The key implication being that human evolution provides bodily structures and biological potentialities not behavioural dictates. Developed evolutionary capacities set limitations that vary in structure and saliency across different areas of functioning, but in most domains the biology of humans enables a diverse range of cultural possibilities (Gould, 1987). The violent, passive, democratic and dictatorial societies that currently exist are testament to this (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). According to Bussey and Bandura (1999) the challenge remains to explain adaptational diversity within socio-structural commonality; how

contextual influences operate through biological resources in the construction and regulation of human behaviour in the service of diverse purposes.

It follows that any sound account of gender needs to acknowledge that humans remain fundamentally cultural entities, and that development does not occur in either a social or biological vacuum. Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1999) adopts an integrated perspective, explaining gender development through the concept of triadic reciprocal causation. In this model, personal factors in the form of cognitive, affective and biological events; behaviour patterns; and environmental events all function as interacting determinants that influence each other bi-directionally (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). This theory does not offer a determined exchange rate for reciprocal interaction, but instead emphasises the relative contribution of each of the constituent influences as contingent upon activities, situations, and socio-structural constraints and opportunities. Social cognitive theory of gender differentiation has significant parallels with another conceptual model that attempts to uncover the highly contested relationship between nature and nurture without partitioning the causal responsibility for the formation of individuals into additive components.

Oyama's (2000) developmental systems theory is considered perhaps the best attempt to synthesise human notions of inheritance and development. This theory views nature and nurture not as alternative influences on human development, but instead as developmental products and the processes that produce them. Oyama terms the process 'constructive interactionism' whereby each combination of genes and environmental influences simultaneously interacts to produce a unique and unpredictable result. Ontogeny is the result of dynamic and complex interactions in multileveled developmental systems. This theory, when

applied to the question of gender, suggests a model very similar to Bussey and Bandura's (1999) idea of triadic reciprocal causation.

Both of these theories are somewhat broad and intricate. Fortunately Moschella's (2008) revised Aristotelian model of identity complements the key tenets of Oyama's (2000) developmental systems framework and Bandura and Bussey's (1999) social cognitive theory of gender differentiation in an efficient and theoretically applicable package. This model configures an identity structure that outlines the mechanisms, relationships and development of gender. It also simultaneously avoids replacing one set of coercive circumstances with another by sidestepping the trappings of both extreme constructionism and pre-determined biological essentialism.

Moschella (2008) proposes three levels of identity, the human, personal and social. The human level is the stable basis of identity, it represents the 'sense of self', a natural core identity of feeling, grounded in physical embodiment from an early age and independent of discursive social relations. This separate yet connected structure enables critical reflexivity, the capacity for individuals to resist dominant social discourses and forge personal identities that critique a given socio-cultural environment. This physical level contains biological influences and limitations that concurrently provide a firm identity anchor through the individual's association with these embodied realities and other corporeal processes such as procedural memory. The personal level reflects the more abstract dimensions of identity based in the mind. This is the fluid and socially constructed 'concept of self' that becomes self-aware through comparison with the human level 'sense of self'. It is this level that is most commonly referred to in discussions of identity. The social level refers to relationships and broader cultural structures,

those processes of socialisation that are continuously negotiated at the personal level. Personal identity operates as a nexus between the other two levels, influenced by both physio-biological preferences and the discursively defined social order. It is the ability to exercise choice and freewill at the personal level that removes the shackles of pre-determination and the extremes of essentialism and constructionism. By applying the division between human, personal, and social identity, gender identity can be understood as a feature of the personal level, slightly based in pre-discursively formed biological sex differences and physical endowment, but most strongly influenced in its personal expression by social dynamics and individual choice (Moschella, 2008). It follows that any given gender identity is highly contingent upon self and social awareness; so whilst a biological account of gender can explain sexual dimorphism it cannot justify the claim of two separate hereditarily based genders. However even this is tentative as Connell (1995) pointed out that the medical practice of gender reassignment pulls bodies into line with the false social ideology of dichotomous gender. Nor can biological perspectives explain the contextually varying ideologies of femininity and masculinity, or offer an adequate account of the complex and diversely resulting processes of their internalisation and reformulation on the individual level across the lifespan. Moschella's (2008) model offers an abstract foundation to which other theories can be attached and integrated to create a superstructure theory of gender development.

Such a structure implies a radically different account of gender, the narrative of which began with Bem's (1974) development of a sex-role inventory that treats masculinity and femininity as two independent dimensions, thereby making it possible to characterise a person as masculine, feminine or androgynous. This inventory gauges internalised societal sex-typed

standards of desirable behaviour for men and women by measuring the extent to which a person distances themselves from those characteristics that might be considered more appropriate for the opposite sex. In both psychology and wider society, masculinity and femininity have traditionally been viewed as bipolar ends of one continuum. The fallacy that a person can only be masculine or feminine, has perpetuated a sex-role dichotomy that precludes the possibility that many individuals might be androgynous; that is they might be both masculine and feminine, both assertive and yielding, both instrumental and expressive, depending on the situational appropriateness of these various behaviours (Bem, 1974). According to Bem (1974) strongly sex-typed individuals are motivated to keep their behaviour consistent with an internalised sex-role standard by avoiding or suppressing gender inappropriate conduct. For instance, a narrowly masculine self-concept is limited in the range of behaviours they can draw upon from situation to situation, likely to inhibit behaviours stereotyped as feminine. While a mixed or androgynous self-concept might allow an individual to freely engage in both masculine and feminine behaviours. The advent of this theory had tremendous implications, it recognised that human behaviours vary according to setting and that gender discourses are internalised social conceptions not externalised biological projections. As a result, a handful of major theoretical frameworks that emphasise the role of culture and environment in the individual development of gender identity have sequentially come to prominence in masculinity studies (Simpson, 2004).

The 'social relations' perspective, examined ways in which social practices were organised as sets of social relations (Connell, 1995). According to this framework masculinity can be viewed as a set of distinct practices or behaviours, including class and inter-familial

relationships as sites for the construction of masculinity (Simpson, 2004). This is similar to socialisation or learning theory (Bussey & Bandura, 1999) in which individuals imitate models or examples seen in their environment, responding to rewards for gender appropriate behaviours and punishments for gender inappropriate behaviours from peers and adults. As a result of these mechanisms of socialisation, individuals may develop cognitive networks or gender schemas to process thoughts and perceptions according to gender stereotypes and symbols in their environment. Due to the limitations of previous conceptualisations of masculinity, early work by Connell (1987) extended the 'social relations' framework, laying the foundations for much of the subsequent literature on masculinity. According to Connell (1995) gender can be viewed as social practice and masculinity as a configuration of that practice; though more importantly the personal expression and meaning of masculinity cannot be isolated from institutional contexts, such as the state and workplace. Connell (1995) posits that the relations of these additional dimensions make up a 'gender regime' within a context or institution, and that the concept of masculinity changes over time, the changes in turn reshaping the context in which the concept originally arose. Indeed more recently work on masculinity (Connell, 2005) has focussed on issues of complexity, ambiguity, and fluidity, defining the concept of masculinity as relational, situational and transformative. This 'post structuralist' perspective emphasises the dynamic and abstract nature of masculinity, how it is constructed and reconstructed socially and subjectively, and how in both of these domains multiple masculinities exist in relation to the dominant or hegemonic form (Simpson, 2004).

In concert with Moschella's (2008) model, this theory views gender identity as layered and developed through constant dialectical interactions between the individual and society.

Men's identity or sense of masculinity is thus largely a product of the personal interplay with society's traditional or hegemonic definition of masculinity. According to Connell (1995) at any given time one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally idealised, more socially central and associated with influence and authority in a given pattern of gender relations. The concept of hegemonic (normative, traditional and dominant) masculinity sought to uncover the multidimensional power based nature of gender relations, as expressed through the control of cultural institutions. Dominant masculinity exists as a historically and culturally mobile construct that does not necessarily correspond closely to the lives of any actual men (Connell, 1995). Often operating through exemplars, icons and institutions, it expresses widespread ideals about the nature of social existence, constructing shared institutional forms of intelligibility that become internalised on an individual level (Wetherell & Edley, 1999).

While the concept of hegemonic masculinity is fluid and transformative, there are a number of broad distinct features that characterise its present form. Bird (1996) reported that men used three shared meanings to perpetuate traditional masculinity. These meanings were emotional detachment, competition, and the sexual objectification of women. Edwards' (2007) normative behavioural definition refers to men being emotionally repressed, pursuant of power, control and competition, avoidant of affectionate displays and sexual interaction with other men, and defining personal success through work status and financial gain. Fear of femininity, misogyny and homophobia are the common strategies to reinforce the strict limitations on socially acceptable behaviour. Hegemonic masculinity is composed of such attributes as domination, aggressiveness, competitiveness, athletic prowess, stoicism, control and membership of the Caucasian race (Cheng, 1999).

In recent years this concept has attracted considerable criticism with accusations of irrelevance due to its considerable complexity and widespread and often inappropriate application. Essentially this already complex term is in a state of ongoing construction and this needs to be considered. In an effort to dispel ambiguities in usage of the term, and the danger of falling into a monadic worldview of isolated cultures and masculinities, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) propose that normative masculinity should be qualified by analysis at the local, regional and global level. The local level is constructed in families and inter-personal relations, organizations and communities. The regional operates at the level of the nation-state, reflecting cultural and political norms, while the global corresponds to international arenas including world politics and trans-national business and media. Global institutions influence regional and local gender orders, while regional gender orders provide cultural frameworks utilised in global domains and offer models of masculinity that may be enacted in local gender dynamics through every day practices and interactions. In any given local context there are disparate yet overlapping traditional masculinities that are represented by one symbolic model at the regional level. Multiple regional hegemonic masculinities are in turn symbolised by one dominant configuration at the global level. The power differential that exists between the three levels is not a simple top down hierarchy; rather there is considerable exchange within and between all three levels (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Demetriou (2001) stresses the need to avoid a dualistic definition of traditional masculinity and identifies two forms of dominance. Internal hegemony refers to the ascendancy of one group of men over all others, and external hegemony signifies men's dominance over women. Demetriou refers to the 'dialectical pragmatism' of internal dominant masculine

patterns. This term is compatible with Connell & Messerschmidt's (2005) framework and captures the reciprocal influence of structured relations among masculinities by which different masculinities appropriate from one another. This process of hybridisation involves ongoing reconfiguration and negotiation, ultimately producing the most effective strategy for external hegemony. Indeed a degree of overlap and camouflage between dominant and subsidiary masculinities is likely if ascendancy is to be successful (Courtenay, 2000).

Men construct and enact their own subjective definition of masculinity from these normative cultural discourses. Research conducted in New Zealand (Connell, 2005) explored changing cultural constructions of masculinity from colonisation to the early twentieth century, revealing that dominant masculinity was progressively shaped by government institutions to motivate early settlers to work and eventually to persuade young men to go and fight for their country. In America the seamless interplay between sports and war imagery serves a similar function today. Though it is important to note that despite environmental commonality, individual gender identities are never the same, they are contingent upon individual experiences, limitations and broader social group affiliations. Gender projects are therefore fractured and shifting as these multiple dynamics intersect. This decentralisation disperses gender identities amidst a variety of social relationships and cultural expectations (Gough & McFadden, 2001). Gergen (1991) conveys the idea of the 'saturated' self, a fragmented being assailed by complex cultural discourses that are both absorbed and negotiated. In this sense gender identity can in some respects be viewed as self as social process, as emergent and always in the process of formation in social interaction. While embedded in physicality and biological realities, gender identities are a predominantly fluid or multiple process influenced by

wider social identity; formatted and negotiated in relation to other people and in the context of prevailing values and beliefs (Gough & McFadden, 2001).

It follows that men are not permanently committed to a particular pattern or form of masculinity; rather they make 'situationally bound' choices from a cultural repertoire of masculine behaviour, or masculinities (Connell, 2005). These options vary, reflecting prevailing beliefs and values regarding gender, personal and family relationships, embodiment, institutional histories and economic forces (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Wetherell and Edley (1999) examined how men's diverse gender identities and behavioural practices are formed from common cultural maps. They suggest a 'psycho-discursive' understanding of masculine norms as defining a subject position in discourse that is taken up strategically by men in particular circumstances, emphasising that it is men's practical relationships to collective images or models of masculinity, rather than imitative reflections of them, that is key to understanding the diverse array of gender identities.

Men can tactically appropriate traditional masculinity when it is advantageous, or comfortably distance themselves according to their interactional needs. Due to their contested nature, masculine identities require renegotiation in every new context (Courtenay, 2000). Butler (1990) used the term 'performativity' to describe the constant and inescapable process individuals go through to socially construct their own gender in social contexts. Jefferson (2002) highlights Microsoft founder Bill Gates as an example, performing 'trans-national business masculinity' to business audiences, 'selfless' masculinity in philanthropic contexts, and a specific, knowledge-based, 'whiz-kid' masculinity to fellow computer enthusiasts. In this sense a particular 'masculinity' denotes not a definitive category of man but rather a way that men

position themselves, through practice over time (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Correspondent to varying degrees of self-awareness, the concept of self can seemingly become a personally chosen construct (Haywood, 1998). Endless masculinities can hypothetically be adopted as individuals navigate through diverse social environments. However, in reality possibilities of self-construction are far from infinite, as various mechanisms operate to oppress particular forms of expression. This is because reproducing internal and external hegemony creates differences and tensions between hegemonic masculinity and complicit masculinities, and oppositions between dominant masculinity and subordinated and marginalised masculinities (Connell, 2005). These interplays occur at the local, regional and global levels (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Gender identity as a product of socio-cultural forces is subject to strong censorship, and it is extremely difficult to take on subject positions within discourses which are either resourcefully (e.g. physically, socially, financially) impossible or define one as 'other' (Gough & McFadden, 2001). In the majority of cultures homosexuality, as well as femininity, provides masculinity with a repository of expelled features to be contrasted against (Cheng, 1999). Masculinity research demonstrates gender identities are always relational, constantly bound up with other projects and power differentials that limit personal choices (Hearn, 2004). In many societies subordinated and marginalised groups, often engage in 'protest', 'oppositional' or 'compensatory' masculinity (Courtenay, 2000). This is sometimes constructed in local working-class settings among ethnically marginalised men who claim the authority of regional and global dominant masculinities, but lack the economic resources and institutional agency (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Research in criminology has similarly shown how particular patterns of

aggression are often a result of the pursuit of hegemony (Cornwall, 1997). Cornwall (1997) refers to research on young Muslim men in Britain who engage a specific configuration of local traditional masculinity in dealing with Muslim women, wider society and encountered discrimination. Similar examples include 'managerial' masculinity based on coercive organisational power, the threat of punishment and the control of rewards among workers (Cheng, 1999). Protest masculinities have also been documented through research with gay and bisexual men who subscribe to culturally endorsed beliefs about masculinity to compensate for their invalidated social position (Courtenay, 2000). The radical re-enactment of hegemonic norms by subordinated men can serve as an effective avenue to societal power on the local level. However the complex processes of rejection, assimilation, and modification of the traditional norm usually serves to maintain its ascendancy while marginalizing other masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Organisations, including fields of study, function as potent sites for the reproduction, internalisation and subsequent reconfiguration of normative gender discourses (Tatum & Charlton, 2008). Just as a culturally dominant masculinity is likely to involve specific patterns of internal division and conflict, practices that construct masculine ideologies as actual interior gender identities are similarly accompanied by layering, complexity and possible emotional contradictions (Wetherell & Edley, 1999).

In Edward's (2007) study of college men's constructions of gender identity, participants conveyed the idea of a performative masculinity that was akin to wearing a mask, 'putting my man face on', in order to be seen as subscribing to the normative standards of male behaviour. The men were all aware that they did not fit comfortably behind this mask, either as a result of personal characteristics or broader social identities. The subsequent anxieties led them to

wearing the mask both consciously and unconsciously so they would maintain a perceptibly cohesive masculine identity. This had stifling repercussions as the men were repressing or masking aspects of their 'true selves'. Indeed an individual gender project is likely to generate compromise formations between contradictory desires and commitments or may reflect uncertain calculations about the costs and benefits of different gender strategies (Connell, 2005). Most men engage in context specific strategies and gender identities are often various combinations of complicit, resistant or normative practices.

Very few men meet the hegemonic standard, so for the vast majority, manhood is chronically insecure and a source of anxiety (Connell, 2000). This 'gender straightjacket' is stifling, often resulting in the personal denial of aspects of humanity that are not congruent with the normative definition. There is a significant loss of authenticity and autonomy as men display behaviours that do not represent their true-selves (Edwards, 2007). In many contexts these behaviours might include denial of vulnerability and weakness, displays of aggressive behaviour, physical presence and dominance, emotional control, embracing risk, smoking and alcohol consumption (Courtenay, 2000). According to Edwards (2007), men studying in a tertiary environment who feel this pressure to conform to traditional masculinity often begin to recognise the negative consequences for themselves and others and as a result of their compliance can begin to experience gender-role conflict. Trapped between this emphasis to measure up to traditional gender norms and the stress and pain of not measuring up they experience the 'paradox of masculinity' (Edwards,; Capraro, 2004b).

The anxiety attached to role conflict can be particularly acute for men in non-traditional occupations or study domains, whose relationship to normative masculinity is made precarious

by a perceived association with femininity. Cheng (1999) has identified typically masculine occupations, or areas of study, as including the military, law enforcement, construction and fire fighting, while contrasting feminine pursuits include nursing, social work, clerical or librarian work and teaching. Bradley (1993) suggests men who pursue women's work or study, strongly disrupt traditional gender discourses and are not seen as 'real men', and that it is easier for women to transition into male dominated fields, as 'compromised femininity' is a more socially acceptable female identity. According to Cheng (1999) ambitious women in masculine organisations must conform to specific forms of masculinity that create the impression they are professionally skilful and thus suitable for promotion.

Simpson (2004) has observed gender discourses, particularly dominant masculinity and 'emphasised femininity', are fundamental in promoting and sustaining the sexual division of labour and the societal definition of a task as either 'men's work' or 'women's work'. Guy and Newman (2004) reported that many occupations traditionally held by women require emotional labour. This emotive work role is thought of as natural for women, and includes such tasks as caring, negotiating, and empathising.

It is thus no surprise that Lupton (2000) found men in female dominated occupations fear feminisation and stigmatisation from other men, the 'gatekeepers' of the hegemonic norm. These challenges raise issues about how men configure the perceived feminine nature of their occupation with the demands of a traditional masculine gender regime. Simpson (2004) found that men in non-traditional areas, often undertake 'gender work' to reconstruct a masculine identity that has been destabilised by the femininely viewed occupation. These compensatory practices often include occupation relabelling, status enhancement and distancing from the

feminine. Simpson (2004) found this scenario can serve to reinforce role-strain as men draw on privileged discourses to overcome disadvantage associated with their minority status, but simultaneously feel comfortable with female notions of service and care. As has been demonstrated, the re-enactment of hegemonic norms by subordinated men can serve as an effective avenue to societal power, but such protest and compensatory masculinities ultimately reproduce dominant masculinity and thus conditions of inequality (Courtenay, 2000).

In this vein Donovan (1998) advocates caution as the same cultural and material factors that challenge dominant gender identities can also provide a space for normative masculinity to recuperate. A relatively new religious social movement in America promoting change and gender equality, the Promise Keepers project an image of enlightened development that actually hides an underlying basis of male privilege and power. Mechanisms of dominance often operate by obvious invisibility, removing a dominant pathology of masculinity from the possibility of questioning and censure. Indeed research on 'tokens', the term for men or women operating as a minority in a particular area, has demonstrated that while men and women experience minority status differently, the overall outcome is generally better for men as they often ride a 'glass escalator' (Williams, 2004) to positions of seniority and experience developmentally rewarding challenges that reinforce masculine conventions (Simpson, 2004).

Thus it seems an important task to uncover processes of masculine identity construction that do not reproduce broader structures of inequality. Renold (2001) conducted research in a primary school setting where male 'academic achievers' were bullied due to their 'effeminate' qualities, or their investment in non-traditional notions of masculinity. Reflecting the intersecting and hierarchical nature of masculinities, a number of boys eventually managed to

configure and transform their gender identity to become more socially acceptable. In some cases this was through successfully engaging in compensatory practices, such as sports and displaying more aggressive behaviour. However some boys also managed to carve out 'resistant' masculinities that did not undertake 'gender work' and strongly transgressed dominant masculine beliefs and behaviours.

However Connell (1995) believes that if a number of men have some connection with the hegemonic project but do not actively practice normative masculinity, this requires a way of conceptualising their specific situation beyond being 'resistant'. According to Connell (2005) this can be done by recognising another relationship between groups of men, the relationship of complicity with the hegemonic project. Masculine gender projects constructed in ways that still realize the patriarchal dividend are complicit in this sense. Tillman (2006) explored the meaning of masculinity for recent male baccalaureate nursing program graduates in the US. Reflecting Renold's (2001) study, Tillman concluded that the men in the study had an overall *complicit* meaning of masculinity, personally rejecting the oppressive and dominating normative standards of masculinity, but essentially recognising and benefiting from patriarchal practices.

Due to its dynamic and fluid nature, there is never a unitary crisis of masculinity (Donovan, 1998). However crisis *tendencies* in gender power relations represent a direct risk to incumbent dominant masculinities through the possibility of structural transformation (Edwards, 2007). Based on his research of men in nursing, environmental activism and teaching, Connell (1995) believes these tendencies are most clearly illustrated in the lives of men who live and work in settings where traditional masculine practices have lost most if not all legitimacy. These men have often committed themselves to authentic personal projects to separate

themselves from the mainstream masculinity with which they were formerly familiar, and reconstruct their gender identity to produce a progressively socialised self (Connell, 2005). Like any configuration of masculinity these are not monadic structures, they are still likely to be subject to patterns of resistance, complicity and dominance depending on the context. The fundamental difference is that the hegemonic norm is not actively pursued, it becomes an inadvertent or marginal feature of one's gender identity, and this represents a self-directed masculinity beyond overall complicity.

Research has indicated that men who challenge masculine roles experience themselves differently. Moving towards Bem's (1974) concept of androgyny, men sense they can potentially redefine their own gender identity and embark on a journey of self-authorship (Tillman, 2006; Edwards, 2007). Simpson (2004) believes that when males are performing gender and care giving concurrently, they are actively constructing a new and more positive sense of masculinity. The men in Tillman's (2006) study perceived that their meaning of masculinity had influenced their nursing education experiences and in turn their nursing education experiences had influenced their meaning of masculinity by helping them develop 'affective caring' and integrating this type of caring into their meaning of masculinity. However the question remains as to what this specific process of gender construction entails.

A number of researchers (Harrison, 1994; Koshkarian, 1999; Tillman, 2006;) have recognised the importance of more qualitative approaches to men's identity development and the need for new theoretical models that explore the ways in which individual men modify, reject and generally re-conceptualise dominant masculinities. Edwards (2007) refers to a small number of studies that have directly approached men's identity development through a

gendered perspective; Koshkarian (1999) produced a conceptual model based primarily on racial identity development models and a critical perspective on men and masculinities. This model of male feminist identity development has five distinct stages; conformity, ambivalent awareness, feeling distress about sexism, loss and integration, and feminist action; Harrison's (1994) model for male gender consciousness development also included five levels similar to racial identity models; pre-exposure, conflict, pro minority, immersion/emersion, and internalisation; and Harris (1995) constructed men's identity development using a factor analysis for men's response to a survey which asked men how the influence of messages from traditional masculinity changed over their lifetime.

Although psychological and developmental perspectives on men are available and provide useful theoretical guidelines, they have not effectively contextualised men's experiences in a critical gender lens (Edwards, 2007), and this is crucial as a way to begin to understand and address the complexity of gender issues facing men and women. There is currently a need for a developmental gender identity perspective put forth that is based around research on men in non-traditional study domains. This is an area in need of exploration, for while there is scholarship on masculine identity development in the university context (Edwards, 2007; Tatum & Charlton, 2004), this has not been specified to men in courses traditionally perceived as 'feminine'. Moreover the literature on men in non-traditional careers is both fragmentary and incomplete (Simpson, 2004; Tillman, 2006), essentially failing to illuminate how men successfully navigate and ultimately construct overwhelmingly positive masculine identities.

This path of inquiry entails discovering those crucial developmental differences that exist

between men that consciously resist dominant gender scripts and men that do not. This can be done by determining how men in non-traditional domains construct their personal meaning of masculinity in interaction with the dominant societal definition of masculinity.

Methodology

Theoretical Orientation

Gender identity is the product of a broad network of social influences operating interdependently in a variety of societal subsystems. Human evolution provides bodily structures and biological potential that permit a range of possibilities rather than dictating a fixed type of gendered behaviour (Buller, 2005). It follows therefore that this research is appropriately grounded within a Social Constructionist framework. According to this epistemology, the institutions constituting publicly available systems of intelligibility precede every person, and as such culture is most appropriately viewed as the source rather than the product of human thought and action (Crotty, 1998). Social Constructionism recognises that people are born into a world of meaning, that all reality as meaningful reality, is socially constructed (Gergen, 1999). As inherently social beings of diverse ethnic, gender and class complexions, individuals do not actually engage with the world but rather sedimented cultural meanings. These meanings are taught in a complex and subtle process of enculturation, ultimately coming to authoritatively define subjective notions of reality, or 'mind-forg'd manacles' (Crotty, 1998, p.59).

The melange of cultures and subcultures into which people are born provide meaning that simultaneously creates guidelines and limitations based on individual social group affiliations. Indeed sets of cultural directives not only harness specific modes of interpretation,

but also perpetuate disparities in the agency of particular power structures. As such a Social Constructionist orientation should be wedded to research that is not merely descriptive but challenging, reading an environment in terms of conflict and oppression and seeking to bring about positive emancipatory change (Crotty, 1998). This is precisely the objective of Critical Theory, the tenets of which suit this project for a range of reasons.

To appreciate these reasons one of the principal architects of modern thought and Critical Theory must be consulted. Marx's Hegelian inspired concept of 'dialectical materialism' and 'historic materialism' casts societal forms and regimes as representations of stages in human self-understanding (Daniel & Sabia, 1988). A dialectical interpretation denotes reality and thought as multifaceted interaction forever in conflict with itself (MacKinnon, 1982). Marx conceptualised this as a historically contingent 'class struggle', with the notion of an interacting thesis and antithesis leading to a liberating synthesis; widely conceived as an equality-based socialist system. However Marx's insights are also highly applicable to an analysis of the gender identity formation of men in atypical domains.

According to Marx what human beings are, depends on the material conditions of their relations of production, their means of subsistence. This provides a definite form of activity for individuals, a way of expressing their life, and it is through such action that they can become 'fully human' (Arendt, 2002). A determinate mode of production, or industrial stage, is always bound up with a contingent determinate mode of cooperation or social stage (MacKinnon, 1982). The multitude of productive forces accessible to people determines the nature of society; social being determines consciousness. This means that those who hold economic hegemony are able to shape the perceptions and viewpoints of those who do not (Daniel & Sabia, 1988),

and this is a relationship that permeates the totality of the subject's existence. Marx believed the subsequent state of 'false consciousness' creates a deep-seated alienation, a process by which a person becomes a stranger to themselves (Arendt, 2002). Bound up with this process in capitalist contexts, is the condition whereby people also become strangers to their work. Indeed according to Crotty (1998) what ought to be an expression of their very being becomes merely instrumental, a means of subsistence, a direct consequence of which is that they are alienated from others as well. There exists a potential case for an elitist driven economic imperative underlying masculine organisations, and thus many cultural manifestations of hyper-masculinity that ultimately function to alienate men from their work, each other and themselves.

Forced by the distress of this 'inhuman situation', Marx believed the only solution is self-emancipation, or revolution. Freire develops this line of thought with the idea of conscientisation, a form of critical thinking that discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and people, perceiving reality as process and transformation that results in a state of increased consciousness (Freire, 2001). According to Freire (Freire & Freire, 2004) the historic task of humans is to become more fully human through action and reflection in fellowship, a process known as dialogue. Dialogue is essential to developing critical consciousness and liberation.

The process begins with problematisation, whereby the individual engages in a consciously critical confrontation with their predicament (Freire & Freire, 2004). The critical insertion into the reality of their circumstances allows the state to be perceived not as the outcome of sheer fate, but merely as limiting and therefore challenging; they are called to transform reality in process (Freire, 2001). Freire believes that intentional consciousness is

already an active intervention into reality, critical reflection upon the world is action to transform it (Freire & Freire, 2004). Authentic action must include reflection, when the two are united they become creative and mutually illuminate one another (Freire, 2001). This is praxis that leads to conscientisation.

Freire posits that people have the capacity to emerge from their situation, reflect upon it and intervene, and that this situated freedom comes to represent a potent form of self-creation (Freire, 1985). Essentially human beings have no nature; they are beings in the process of becoming, in a similarly unfinished reality. This is a uniquely human project, an ongoing enterprise that contains self-directed transformational possibilities. Indeed according to Sartre (Kaufman, 1963), humans are constantly confronted with their freedom; it is the one thing over which they have no control. If there is only a history of humanity, there cannot be a history for humanity (Freire, 1985), and thus inherent human creative responsibilities should be directed towards overcoming barriers to humanisation. Dehumanisation comes to represent all forms of subjugation and exploitation, and the process of liberation can only be effective when it occurs in fellowship through ongoing dialogue and self-scrutiny that creates positive change both for the oppressors and the oppressed (Freire & Freire, 2004).

According to Freire (Freire, 1985) it is paramount to recognise the very subtle forms oppression may take. Overwhelmingly, biological accounts of people, such as Social Darwinism, have had extremely adverse impacts upon human society, giving rise to intellectually nourishing claims for inequality including racism and sexism. As has been demonstrated, biological accounts of gender such as that proposed by evolutionary psychology ultimately cannot support the notion that humans are a fixed species created from millions of years of natural selection

(Buller, 2005). Indeed according to Buller human nature is a superstition. Individuals and their gender identities are not a product but a work in progress, and whatever properties humans may now possess 'psychological or otherwise, universal or not, are but radically contingent and momentary stages of that same work in progress' (Buller, 2005, p.480). Bussey and Bandura (1999) have a similar view, believing people contribute to their self-development and bring about social changes that define and structure gender relationships through their agentic actions within interrelated systems of influence.

Such a thoroughly potentialist view of humanity strongly parallels the values of both a Freire and Marx based interpretation of Critical Theory. However as possible life trajectories are far from infinite due to mechanisms that operate to oppress particular forms of gender-based expression, there is a need to better understand those forces and the processes in which they might be overcome. Such an understanding should be guided by Adorno's negative dialectics; attempting to use the concept non-conceptually, not as an instrument that dictates meaning, but as a provisional marker of description (Horkheimer, Adorno, & Noerr, 2002). According to this logic, instead of building a theoretical system, Adorno suggests delineating a constellation, a temporary structure whereby there are no claims to conceptual completion (Horkheimer, Adorno, & Noerr, 2002). With this in mind it is useful to think of any understanding of gender construction as a constellation; a fluid and contingent process, subject to any number of explanatory frameworks, the actual richness of which can only be truly appreciated on an individual experiential basis.

To create such a constellation entails a thorough consideration of the relationship between broader social conditions and individual constructions of gender identity, as well as an

appreciation of the subjective nature of social research (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded Theory is a qualitative research methodology that builds an explanation of social phenomena by explicitly connecting context to the actions, interactions and consequences being studied (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Reflecting the tenets of the Social Constructionist epistemology, these structural features can be thought of as a 'conditional matrix' (Corbin & Straus, 1998) that becomes an integral dimension of the theoretical explanation of phenomena.

Grounded Theory does not conceive of social phenomena as static, but rather continually changing in response to evolving conditions, indeed social actors are seen as always having, though not necessarily utilising the means of controlling their life trajectories through selective responses to conditions (Charmaz, 2006). Again this potentialist ideological underpinning is well matched with Critical Theory. The construction of gender for men in non-traditional domains remains largely unexplored, and demands a concept building method that formulates a new and theoretically expressed understanding of this process. However the credibility of Grounded Theory lies not only in the capacity to generate theory but also in rigorously grounding it in data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This is done using a non-mathematical process of interpretation that uncovers concepts and relationships and organises these into an explanatory scheme. Through this method, data collection, analysis and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another, and are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action (Corbin & Strauss, 1998).

Research Design

The research employed qualitative methods through the use of semi-structured individual interviews. The use of interviews provides the researcher with detailed explanations of processes in specific contexts and allows greater opportunity for detailed understanding of the issues (Gough & McFadden, 2001). This uncovers subtle themes that would otherwise be constrained in other approaches, enabling the participant's idiographic experiences in relation to the research questions to properly manifest. The interviews were conducted in a relaxed conversational format, the importance of which cannot be underestimated as the theory that emerged from the data is heavily based in and driven by the original accounts of the participants (Charmaz, 2006).

Grounded theorists share the sentiment of many other qualitative researchers that the normative canons of 'good science' should be retained, albeit moderated to ensure the veracity of qualitative research and the complexities of social phenomena (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Ergo the procedures of grounded theory are designed to produce an integrated set of concepts that develop a rigorous theoretical explanation of social phenomena under study. While Corbin and Strauss (1998) encourage some degree of predictability with regard to certain circumstances, this project is situated within Charmaz's (2006) framework that recognises all social research as subjective encounters; radically contingent upon actors and the environment, making results impossible to reproduce.

It should also be stated that the use of prior literature in qualitative research in general and grounded theory methodology specifically requires a delicate balance (Edwards, 2007). On the one hand the researcher cannot be constrained by the literature in a way that clouds or

hinders creativity in the interpretation of the data gathered (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). On the other hand, qualitative research cannot be conducted without the conscious or unconscious use of underlying theoretical perspectives. The aim of any research is therefore to develop 'theoretical sensitivity' to the data (Edwards, 2007).

Participants

The participants consisted of five male University of Notre Dame nursing students. To ensure diversity of candidates and data, no other criteria was imposed for selection. The resulting sample was of Caucasian ethnicity, aged from 18-35.

Materials

An information sheet outlining the purpose and aims of the study (Appendix A) was given to the participants along with a consent form (Appendix B) for the participants to sign to ensure that they understood the purpose and aims of the research and their role within the procedure. The consent form also detailed the use of an audio recording device that was used to augment notes taken during the interview and to ensure transcription accuracy. The semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix C) used a number of stimulus questions that were open ended, designed to elicit a broad range of in-depth responses based around the men's values, beliefs and experiences as they pertain to the construction of gender identity. These conversational prompts were developed through an analysis of the themes that have emerged from the literature and include questions such as "What attracted you to nursing?", "Describe some of the major influences on your ideas about masculinity?" and "How would you define traditional ideas of masculinity?"

Procedure

Participants were accessed using a snowball method as well as advertising the study through emails via the school of nursing at Notre Dame, Fremantle. The interviews were conducted in a private room in the St Teresa library. This provided a suitably comfortable and quiet environment, free from interruption for the duration of the on average 40 minute interviews. The participants were told they were able to withdraw at any time from the research without prejudice. The interviews were transcribed verbatim over the following weeks, with a copy was sent to each of the participant's to ensure content accuracy.

Data Analysis

In keeping with the standards of Grounded Theory, the first step in the data and analysis stage was immersion and incubation (Walter, 2010). Immersion included transcribing and repeatedly listening to the interviews, while incubation occurred during and after, with the focus being analytical interpretation, generally making sense of the data. The data was read numerous times and divided into meaningful analytical units, including divergent information. Thematic analysis was used to explore the presence of themes, both predetermined and those that emerged within the data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

Having sorted through the data and coded them into issues, the analysis then explored the relationships between these codes. Coding was used to identify similarities in experience between participants, whilst retaining the unique aspects of individual cases (Creswell, 2003). While there were clear patterns across the group of men being studied, there were some elements that did not entirely fit within the framework being developed. Upon further analysis of these deviant cases, the differences were found to be minor, with strong underlying

commonalities that were found to be characteristics of broader processes, and thus did not challenge the major themes of the data.

As the basis of grounded theory is theoretical sampling, coding commenced with the collection of the data. Theoretical sampling guides the research process by ensuring continual analyses as the data is obtained (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Throughout this process, writing memos both during and after interviews facilitated research clarity and direction. Data collection ceased upon theoretical saturation; when no new information on any particular issue or theme emerged. Grounding concepts in the reality of data thus gave this method theory-observation congruence or compatibility (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Authenticity of results was maintained by triangulating findings between member checking, journaling and differing cases (Charmaz, 2006). Member checking entailed summarising participant interviews and clarifying that the information was a genuine representation of their experiences (Creswell, 2003). Throughout this process the research supervisor ensured appropriate direction of analysis and interpretation.

Findings and Interpretations

The research yielded three leading themes and seven subsidiary issues. Essentially these themes represent stages in a developmental model of gender authenticity for individuals in non-traditional domains. It is important to keep in mind that these categories are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary, often over-lapping features of a broader process. The participant's described an iterative pathway beginning with the idea of script assessment, a feeling of social displacement that arose from personal incongruence with traditional gender discourses. The sense of alienation, facilitated by a range of ongoing transformational

processes, motivated the men to create genuine relationships beyond social role-playing. Script assessment represents the beginning of the pursuit of self-authorship, which in turn is part of a broader process of authenticity, however all three stages of development are constantly operational and interacting. Indeed authenticity is not a state, but is rather maintained by the ongoing awareness of a developmentally rewarding life-path, and a corresponding feeling of self-determination and personal fulfilment, augmented by a commitment to positive change.

While a number of themes and issues find resonance with the literature, some striking points of contrast were apparent. The choice to pursue nursing represents the most tangible expression of the men's unique personal narratives and their commitment to a new form of masculinity that integrates a range of positive characteristics. The journey of transformation that emerged strongly parallels Freire's concept of conscientisation (Freire & Freire, 2004) as the participant's essentially discover and combat obstacles to their humanisation.

Table 1

Themes and Issues to Emerge from the Research

Themes	Issues	Exemplars
Script Assessment	Dominant Paradigms Social Incongruence	<i>Stoic is the best word</i> <i>I just don't fit in well</i>
Self-Authorship	Genuine Interaction Transformative Processes	<i>I've been a chameleon</i> <i>My role models were female</i>
Authenticity	Life-Path Internal Agency Promoting Change	<i>Years in the wilderness</i> <i>I'm where I should be</i> <i>It's about positive examples</i>

Script Assessment

The notion of script assessment emerged prominently from the data as the participants engaged in authentic reflection and critical thinking (Crotty, 1998). All of the men demonstrated a very conscious understanding of the broader social context in which they were located. This acute sense of awareness was conveyed through a clear articulation of the dominant gender scripts that attempted to influence their construction of self. The men also described states of alienation, a feeling of social incongruence that was especially salient in situations when traditionally masculine behaviours were expected. This social sensitivity and corresponding sense of displacement presents a crucial developmental milestone on the path to individual authenticity.

dominant paradigms.

Configurations of dominant masculinity have been proposed to reside in broad social structures; circulating through reciprocally influencing local, regional and global levels (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) in an effort to maintain internal and external hegemony (Demetriou, 2001). These abstract dwelling, contextually contingent masculinities are internalised on a unique individual basis, and subsequently enacted through tangible behavioural displays and beliefs. Both identity-bound and macro-systemic masculinities are fluid and transformative entities; however a number of characteristics generally define their current hegemonic manifestation. The participants discussed these societally dominant conceptions of masculinity, which were strongly consistent with those found in the literature.

I guess if I had to describe masculinity in three words it would be; power, strength, arrogance. Dominic

Well, in society, it's almost seen as that you've got to be stoic, strong and like, you're supposed to be, not emotionless, but you hide them. Stoic is the best word for it. Neil

Cheng (1999) states that hegemonic masculinity is composed of such attributes as domination, aggressiveness, competitiveness, athletic prowess, stoicism and control, while Bird (1996) reported that men used three shared meanings to perpetuate traditional masculinity. These meanings were emotional detachment, competition, and the sexual objectification of women (Tillman, 2006; Bird, 1996). While the participants rejected these definitions of masculinity on a personal level, they were able to clearly articulate them which indicates the degree to which these definitions are known and therefore available as components of individual construction.

I would say drinking, being able to drink a lot, which I tried, binge drinking. Probably, you know, the standard thing of conquering as many sexual conquests as you can, you know, sports as well. Damien

In many contexts hyper-masculine behaviours might include denial of vulnerability and weakness, displays of aggressive behaviour, physical presence and dominance, emotional control, embracing risk, smoking and alcohol consumption (Courtenay, 2000). Males often use health beliefs and behaviours to demonstrate masculine ideals that culturally validate and empower them. However the health risks associated with any given masculinity will vary according to whether a man is enacting a hegemonic, subordinated, marginalised, complicit or resistant form (Courtenay, 2000). It is paramount to consider the rationale behind men's

utilisation of these behaviours. Any number of personal motivations could impel men to engage in them. Jonathan believes for some this might include their use as defence mechanisms;

I think it's built in, it's like a shield, you don't want to expose yourself to being hurt, you want to put yourself up on this pedestal to be this person that most of the time your not. I can puff my chest out more so I'm bigger and better than you.

In a similar vein, Edwards' (2007) normative behavioural definition of masculinity refers to men being emotionally repressed, pursuant of power, control and competition, avoidant of affectionate displays and sexual interaction with other men, and defining personal success through work status and financial gain. The strong compatibility between the participant's ideas about traditional masculine discourses and those found in the literature suggests a high degree of self and social awareness. This also seems to reinforce the idea of gender identity as layered and developed through constant dialectical interactions between the individual and society (Connell, 2005). It follows that the participant's constructions of masculine identity are largely a product of varying congruency with these socially dominant gender discourses.

social incongruence.

The catalyst for increasing awareness of the processes of masculine enculturation seems to have stemmed from a strong sense of social displacement. Indeed generally, very few men meet the hegemonic standard, so for the vast majority, manhood is chronically insecure and a source of anxiety (Connell, 2000). For some of the men a sense of discomfort was apparent from an early age;

I've always had that tendency even in blokey situations...I've always tended to be very sensitive. It's going to sound wrong, even an effeminate male. Neil

The general hanging around with a bunch of guys is not really my thing, I've got one close male friend and that's it. But blokey blokes I just don't fit in well with. Damien

While for others it became temporarily prominent at certain times;

I guess I came from a very strong sporting culture, but I found that I sort of struggled a bit in the sense that it became this big pack mentality. I really distanced myself from that.

Dominic

If you are pushed into footy there are a lot of those same role models there, but I've never really clicked in that environment either. Jonathan

This seems to confirm Edward's (2007), observation that men who feel this pressure to conform to traditional masculinity often begin to recognise the negative consequences for themselves and others, and as a result of their compliance can begin to experience gender-role conflict. Trapped between this emphasis to measure up to traditional gender norms and the stress and pain of not measuring up they experience the 'paradox of masculinity' (Capraro, 2004). Unlike the men in Edward's study, the participants actively sought to reduce the behavioural dissonance, and thus their sense of social incongruence became part of a process of problematisation whereby the men engage in a consciously critical confrontation with their predicament (Freire & Freire, 2004). Indeed the procedure of script assessment is significant as the participants start to reflect and intervene in their own situation. Motivated to avoid the 'paradox of masculinity' by personal influences that shall be examined, the men critically insert themselves into the reality of their circumstances, perceiving their state not as the outcome of sheer fate, but merely as limiting and therefore challenging; they are called to transform reality in process, to pursue self-authorship (Crotty, 1998).

Self-Authorship

The ongoing practice of authentic reflection and critical thinking inexorably propels the participants towards the desire for self-authorship; to consciously navigate life choices free from discursive pressures, and simultaneously configure their own sense of identity. According to Freire (Freire & Freire, 2004) intentional consciousness is already an active intervention into reality, critical reflection upon the world is action to transform it. Authentic action must include reflection, when the two are united they become creative and mutually illuminate one another (Crotty, 1998). Possessing an intimate knowledge of personal dispositions and societal expectations immediately functions as a comparative exercise; any incompatibility between the two can only be resolved through either debilitating self-compromise or the pursuit of self-authorship. According to Damien *'it's about making the right choices'*. This is praxis that leads to conscientisation, or developmental gender authenticity.

genuine interaction.

Essentially the participant's experiences of social incongruence with normative definitions of masculine conduct served as a conduit to the recognition of the need for genuine interaction between men. In a study of college men's constructions of gender identity, participants conveyed the idea of a performative masculinity that was akin to wearing a mask, 'putting my man face on', in order to be seen as subscribing to the normative standards of male behaviour (Edwards, 2007). This idea was partially confirmed in the present study as two participants conceded that their behaviour was subject to change in certain circumstances;

In some scenarios, you just sort of shut down certain expressive elements, just a little more blunt maleness. Damien

I've also got guys friends I wouldn't dare open up with. All my life I've worn masks, I always have. I've been a chameleon. Neil

However the men indicated that these character slips tended to create a strong sense of personal discordance and were thus avoided if possible.

You have to be genuine, not all made up. It's a lie to be putting across something that's not you. Jonathan

It becomes something that you show other people and people get tired of it.

It's not natural, more societally natural. Dominic

The men in Edward's (2007) study were all aware that they did not fit comfortably behind this mask, either as a result of personal characteristics or broader social identities. The subsequent anxieties led them to wearing the mask both consciously and unconsciously so they would maintain a perceptibly cohesive masculine identity. This had damaging repercussions as the men were repressing or masking aspects of their 'true selves'. None of them were able to take off the mask completely, though they were able to identify a number of critical influences in their lives that had helped each of them begin to remove the mask in certain circumstances and move towards being their own man. The fundamental difference with the present research is that the participants suggest that they are, at this point in their lives, completely aware of the times when they are acting and have made concerted efforts to reduce the behavioural dissonance.

This awareness and desire for genuine interaction seems to derive from the identification of a stable, more authentic basis of identity in themselves and others. For Neil this was one of the primary motivations for pursuing a nursing career;

I just feel that I get the true self of that person when they are sick, and I find that honesty beautiful. They're allowed to let themselves show, and I like rewarding that with my care.
Neil.

While for Dominic the observation of 'true selves' was a result of competitive swimming;
Different people on pool deck but just before a race, just before, you saw people for who they were. There's sort of a quiet, a calm, and you see people. Dominic.

For Jonathan, noticing seemingly 'unnatural' developmental changes in certain male friends served to increase his understanding of the role-playing aspects of masculine gender identity; role-playing that inadvertently shuns and suppresses more authentic personal characteristics.

I've had friends that I was really close to and I've seen them progress to be this person puffing their chest out and acting up and it's not who they are at all.

It is possible the basis for genuine interaction could be the inter-personal recognition of Moschella's (2008) human level 'sense of self', the natural core identity of feeling, grounded in physical embodiment from an early age and independent of discursive social relations. The inclination for genuine interaction is one of the significant motivations the men revealed as being central to their life choices. However this fundamental desire or awareness is not characteristic to all men, it seems to be the product of specific ongoing transformational processes that guide the participants on the path to self-authorship.

transformative processes.

One of the key research findings was the idea of transformative processes, with each of the participants describing important events, role models and on-going experiences as being fundamental to the formation of their sense of identity and subsequent life direction. Reflecting the iterative nature of the developmental journey, these processes provide formative influences that imprint distinct sets of values upon the participants, which in turn serve to create a sense of social incongruence with dominant gender paradigms. Sometimes these influences provided participants with positive examples of masculine conduct to be pursued, while others were negative guidelines for behaviour to be avoided. The journey towards authenticity through conscious self-authorised choices is indissolubly bound up with the influence of transformative processes.

The foremost commonality expressed by the participants was that familial influences were the dominant vehicles of transformative change.

I think I've got my masculinity more from my mum than my dad, her feminine sort of masculinity. Dad was always involved with domestic duties... There are no female and male roles. Just what needs to be done.

I actually grew up with my mum and my sister. My main role models were females. Neil.

My father isn't hyper blokey. He just has this quality that I like, this individuality...I also have a very strong mother. Dominic.

All of the participants had very strong mother figures, and most had somewhat atypical, positive masculine role model fathers. This seems to confirm the 'social relations' perspective whereby masculinity can be viewed as a set of distinct practices or behaviours, including class

and inter-familial relationships as sites for the construction of masculinity (Simpson, 2004). In conjunction with socialisation or learning theory (Bussey & Bandura, 1999), in which individuals imitate models or examples seen in their environment, these frameworks highlight the importance of close relations for drawing upon repositories of gender conduct. For Damien the task of fatherhood had positive repercussions for his life trajectory.

It's the best thing that ever happened to me. It changes your perspective. The person that I am and the person I decide to be, means something to someone. Before I didn't mean much to myself, I was self-destructive.

Jonathan believes extended familial influences to have been important;

The only male cousins I have, I idolized them as kids, they were always into their surfing and rugby but they're a lot like me, they're a lot softer, they don't have that hard wall in front of them so they are always fairly open.

However for Neil and Jonathan, some familial influences were negative in experience but innately positive in learning.

My grandfather came to live with us and he just frustrated the hell out of me. Because my mum was female she couldn't tell him what to do. One of the few people I never got along with, he was very old school. Jonathan.

My Dad, he taught me what not to be in a man. He was an alcoholic wife beater. Not a very nice person at all. Neil.

Research by Tatum and Charlton (2008) on how college men view and define masculinity, suggested that participants' definitions of masculinity were predominantly based on negative ideas that occurred before attending college. An important difference with the

present study is that Neil and Jonathan were able to use negative experiences and ideas constructively, as a contrasting point of reference to be avoided in their own configurations of masculinity. Damien was the only participant to refer to a significant transitional influence beyond the family.

I saw a teacher doing it once (crosses his legs) when I was really young. It's strange but at that age I decided I'd do that, I'd be a man who was quite happy not to be worried about what people think.

This example also differs in a temporal sense, being more of a 'critical incident' (Edwards, 2007) that ignited an immediate conscious alteration in personal reality, as opposed to being an ongoing, subtler operating influence. While all of the participants agreed that peers and experiences during school years, such as playing sport, sculpted their ideas about masculinity, these factors seemed to build awareness of cultural gender schemas or dominant paradigms, remaining somewhat peripheral to the catalysts of self-renovation that lead to authenticity.

Authenticity

The journey of developmental authenticity is not a linear evolution made up of departmentalised sequential levels. Rather it is an iterative process, comprised of constantly interacting, generally forward moving forces that are unique for each individual, yet bound together by a number of broad commonalities. This process does not result in an end state but is rather ongoing, as constructions of self and individual life trajectories are never static entities but always subject to change and re-negotiation. Maintaining developmental integrity requires mindful evaluation in the midst of change, with a view to continue moving towards, and living in

line with, the tenets of personal authenticity. The participants have all traversed this developmental journey to differing lengths through manifold subjective processes. The idea of consciously following a distinct life-path and the corresponding feeling of increased internal agency, are perhaps the two most salient manifestations of authenticity.

life path.

For two participants, the choice to become a nurse followed a personally unfulfilling time studying engineering. For the two oldest participants the road to nursing was a more winding path, replete with bouts of depression and substantial drug and alcohol abuse.

All of my crazy behaviour was about wanting to fit in...It's been a long torturous journey... I spent years in the wilderness. Damien.

I just didn't know where I was, especially growing up, it took me a long time to find out who I am and to be happy with who I am... I'd fight like you wouldn't believe. Neil.

Both men suggest that years spent in confusion were a result of internal struggles, of coming to grips with their own masculine identity.

I was brought up to express but society wanted me to suppress... I had a lot of anger issues when I was younger. Neil.

This idea is also strongly supported by Jonathan;

I didn't really get my sense of masculinity until I broke up with my girlfriend and gained some independence. It helped me resolve a lot of anger issues.

The participant's conveyed a strong gravitation towards feminine perspectives and company, often from an early age and continuing into their tertiary studies. As has been

previously discussed this is possibly a result of strong mother figures and atypical masculine role models that counter-balanced dominant socio-cultural discourses.

At an age you were supposed to hang around with the boys I would sit at lunchtime with a bunch of girls. I enjoy the company of the female perspective. Damien.

I have a lot of female friends, and even with some guy friends I tend to be very chatty and emotional, hit the deep and meaningful. But it's not an act. It's who I am. Neil.

This inclination towards feminine and in some cases spiritual viewpoints, seems to be the primary driver of authentic life direction for the participants, impacting multiple dimensions including their interpretation of masculinity, feelings of social alienation and the desire to work in an interactive caring environment.

There's definitely a caring aspect, you've got to have empathy towards people... Interacting with people is what I really enjoy. Dominic.

I suppose I actually like caring for people, I like that aspect, that side of life, more of a lover, not a fighter, so to speak. Neil.

The participants believed men studying nursing possessed a number of distinguishing features. This strongly supports Evan's (2004) observation that men who follow this path do not subscribe to normative definitions of masculinity. While an orientation towards caring and interaction figured prominently, the most overwhelming commonality the men shared seems to be a strong sense of personal confidence and deliberated life direction;

You meet guys that are fairly sure of themselves...even the young guys... they might have done something else so it's a conscious choice to do nursing. Dominic.

They're aware that taking a course in nursing might not be the socially kind of dominant path. They don't care. I think it's possibly self-reflection and self-growth and even just understanding where you want to be in life. I kind of always knew I wanted to be a nurse. Neil.

This suggests that the personal expression and meaning of masculinity cannot be isolated from institutional contexts such as educative environments and the workplace; that for the participants, the choice to pursue nursing is a core developmental feature of reaching authenticity and augmenting their sense of self-determination.

internal agency.

The participant's growing sense of internal agency functions as both a cause and effect of their unique life trajectories, and along with vocation represents the most tangible form of authenticity. This internal agency is apparent through the men's formation of a secure identity and overall lifestyle stability.

I've definitely grown and I feel like I'm closer to where I should be and where I want to be. Neil.

Nursing is a degree and you work as a nurse, so there's no ambiguity, that's who I am.

Dominic.

Now I'm happy with who I am. Jonathan.

This ongoing developmental journey culminated for all of the participants in a very particular way. According to Neil;

The biggest thing is I've gone from following the societal norm of masculinity to creating my own norm... I might not fit the masculine ideal of society, but I fit my ideal of masculinity.

The self-directed configuration of gender identity is a fundamental aspect of achieving and maintaining internal agency, representing the most significant dimension of authenticity for individuals in non-traditional domains. This re-construction was similar for all the participants.

What you want to see in masculinity is that arrogance turns into self-belief and that power becomes individuality, and that strength is the ability to ignore the rest. Just be who you are. Dominic.

I believe that men can take the best of those feminine characteristics and the best of the masculine, and that women can do the same. Damien.

Such constructions of masculine gender identity emphasise a kind of positive individualism, based on ignoring the need for social proof of masculinity whereby recognition and self-approval is sought from peers and cultural stereotypes. Simpson (2004) found that men in non-traditional areas often undertake 'gender work' to reconstruct a masculine identity that has been destabilised by the femininely viewed occupation. These compensatory practices often include occupation relabelling, status enhancement and distancing from the feminine, a scenario that can serve to reinforce role-strain as men draw on privileged discourses to overcome disadvantage associated with their minority status, but simultaneously feel comfortable with female notions of service and care. However none of the participant's indicated they engaged in 'gender work', or that they felt their chosen path forced them to be disingenuous to their 'true selves' in any way. Indeed this strong sense of individuality is

accompanied by a pervasive notion of coming to centre, a balancing or re-alignment of gender identity.

It's about stages of self-insight and awareness. It's about moving towards androgyny in a sense, while maintaining individuality. A lot of masculinity is really unhealthy and needs to be better balanced. I think caring is far nobler than being stoic.

The men seem to be moving towards Bem's (1974) concept of androgyny, sensing they can potentially redefine their own gender identity, and perform a range of behaviours in different settings without discomfort. According to Damien;

I think you can use the same terms for masculine and feminine but with a subtle shift in emphasis. There's a feminine emotional strength that is so powerful. Then there is the masculine strength that is more about moving things and motivation and building.

This supports Simpson's observation (2004) that when males are performing gender and care giving concurrently, they are actively constructing a new and more positive sense of masculinity. The men in Tillman's (2006) study perceived that their meaning of masculinity had influenced their nursing education experiences and in turn their nursing education experiences had influenced their meaning of masculinity by helping them develop 'affective caring' and integrating this type of caring into their meaning of masculinity. All of the participants conveyed an appreciation of the transformative power of a combination of those constructive features of masculinity and femininity, especially in allowing men to be more empathetic and emotionally expressive. The men also indicated that their sense of gender was void of exclusive boundaries, operating more on a continuum with negative extremes at both ends that should be actively avoided.

promoting change.

The capacity and willingness to promote change is the final component of developmental gender authenticity for people in non-traditional domains. According to Freire (Freire & Freire, 2004) the historic task of humans is to become more fully human through action and reflection in fellowship, a process known as dialogue. Dialogue is essential to conscientisation and liberation. In this vein the men expressed a number of insights from their experiences, based around changing societally dominant conceptions of masculinity that were inherently negative, and also attracting, understanding and augmenting men's positions in atypical fields such as nursing, for which there is a substantial need (Williams, 2004). Part of these suggestions included avoiding the reproduction of dominant masculinity, while also combating the often-undermined position of men in nursing.

All of the participants believed that the social image of male nurses was subject to novelty and even ridicule, and that they had to thoroughly justify it as a choice of career. For instance Jonathan was called 'gay' when he told people of his chosen career path. This is not surprising as fear of femininity, misogyny and homophobia are the common strategies to reinforce the strict limitations on socially acceptable behaviour (Cheng, 1999). The foremost recommendation to combat this cultural stigma was the implementation of more progressive male role models in a number of areas. Jonathan believes these examples should begin in the tertiary setting;

I think if there was a male lecturer in nursing or one of the more caring based units might make a big difference, just to get more of that perspective, just to show that you can be a masculine person and still be caring.

Damien applies a similar rationale to broader social contexts, suggesting that effective role models need to be masculine to have a wide-ranging impact;

For me it's about masculine role models saying it's OK to have these feminine qualities and teaching our kids.

While more masculine role models in non-traditional areas could be beneficial, it could be interpreted that this reinforces dominant ideals. Perhaps it should be acceptable for men in atypical arenas to be more 'feminine' because they are occupying a predominantly female domain. There should be no reason why positive male role models cannot demonstrate alternate forms of masculinity in a range of professions.

According to Dominic, the need for a range of positive male role models, especially in fields such as nursing and education, reflects the limited and often negative masculine cultural archetypes that men can idolise and appropriate from;

I would steer away from things that I don't like without a real knowledge of where to go.

This is reflected by Tatum and Charlton (2008) who found men view the majority of adoptable masculine discourses as negative. They also observed that men perceived college experiences as generally reinforcing such negative discourses. In the present study however, the men overwhelmingly enjoyed their experiences studying nursing thus far, believing their personal sense of masculinity had been positively impacted. Though most features of the degree were innately constructive in terms of promoting developmental gender authenticity, there were some negative structural elements the participants felt it necessary to highlight. Damien found tutorials conducive to expression but believed there was an issue of gender

specific language use in classrooms such as 'she' and 'her' and 'girls'. Essentially, being a minority seems to be something of a 'double-edged sword' for the participants;

It varies. Sometimes in class I feel very much singled out and almost like my opinion doesn't count just because of the sheer weight of female numbers. Neil.

Though according to Dominic this can be a good thing;

It's sort of accepted that you'll stand up and say something and as long as you have got that self-belief, that ability to justify what you're saying, then it's sort of accepted, and it's definitely encouraged by the lecturers.

Unsurprisingly research on 'tokens' has demonstrated that while men and women experience minority status differently, the overall outcome is generally better for men as they often ride a 'glass escalator' (Williams, 2004) to positions of seniority and experience developmentally rewarding challenges that potentially reinforce conventional masculine behaviours (Simpson, 2004). While the participants were aware that men were sometimes fast-tracked in nursing, they indicated it had not occurred in the tertiary setting nor was it a personal motivation to pursue nursing.

The reproduction of gender inequality in areas such as nursing certainly needs to be avoided. Masculine gender projects constructed in ways that still realize the patriarchal dividend are complicit in this sense. Tillman (2006) found that male nurses had an overall complicit meaning of masculinity, personally rejecting the oppressive and dominating normative standards of masculinity, but essentially recognising and benefiting from patriarchal practices. However none of the men in the present study seemed to participate in a relationship of complicity with the hegemonic project. Instead they conveyed a strong sense of balance,

especially in reference to developmentally rewarding challenges; suggesting that these experiences were good for their individual sense of masculinity but did not extend into the environment to create adverse impacts for other nurses. Indeed the key direction for change put forth by the men was the normalisation of men in nursing;

There's no difference between a male nurse and a female nurse, but we get called a male nurse. I do the same work, I sit the same classes, the same exams, yet I'm a male nurse.

Neil.

An integral component of the participant's path to humanisation is self expression through nursing, unlike Marx's alienated proletariat (Arendt, 2002), these men have come to know themselves and other men through the experience of highly purposeful and rewarding work. The men's 'social relations of production'; the positive connection between their consciousness and their form of subsistence is a key dimension of the transformational journey.

It seems that traditional masculine practices have lost most if not all legitimacy for the men, as they have committed themselves to authentic personal projects to reconstruct their gender identity to produce a progressively socialised self. Essentially separating from the mainstream masculinity with which they were formerly familiar, and going beyond Renold's (2001) schoolboy's resistant masculinities. Though as Connell (2005) observes, like any configuration of masculinity these are not monadic structures, they are still likely to be subject to patterns of resistance, complicity and dominance depending on the context. The fundamental difference is that the hegemonic norm is not actively pursued, it becomes an inadvertent or marginal feature of one's gender identity, and this represents a self-directed masculinity beyond overall complicity. At this point it is worthwhile considering that Adorno

believes authenticity becomes a lie the moment it becomes authentic, that is in reflecting on itself, in postulating itself as genuine (Crotty, 1998). Therefore the ongoing nature of these authenticity seeking gender projects, and the demands of constant self-directed supervision, cannot be underestimated.

Discussion

Historically, scholarship in the realm of social inquiry has adopted an andocentric orientation that not only failed to explore women's experiences, but also men's experiences as gendered beings (Edwards, 2007). However, in recent years there has been a steady increase in writings on men and masculinity. Critical men's studies have focussed on deconstructing the gendered experiences of men in an increasingly diverse range of settings. Though being a young domain of study, there has been a tendency to overlook issues concerning men in non-traditional roles. While there is scholarship on masculine identity development in the university context (Edwards, 2007; Tatum & Charlton, 2004), this has not been adequately specified to men in courses traditionally perceived as 'feminine'.

The literature on men in non-traditional domains is both fragmentary and incomplete (Simpson, 2004; Tillman, 2006), essentially failing to demonstrate how men successfully navigate and ultimately construct overwhelmingly positive masculine identities. In response to the lack of psychological and developmental perspectives that view gender identity through a critical framework and a growing need to understand how individual men develop their gender projects in a range of settings, this study has endeavoured to uncover the processes of masculine identity formation for men pursuing nursing. This channel of inquiry entailed determining how men in non-traditional domains construct their personal meaning of

masculinity in interaction with the dominant societal definition.

The grounded theory of developmental gender authenticity that emerged from the research conceptualises an iterative process of masculine identity configuration that was similar for all of the men. Moving through the interactive layers of script assessment, self-authorship and authenticity, the participants demonstrated that they had committed themselves to authentic ongoing personal projects to reconstruct their gender identity. The permeable and environmentally bound nature of the transformational process towards humanisation indicates that this journey demands constant negotiation and maintenance. Maintaining developmental integrity depends upon conscious evaluation in the midst of change, with a desire to continue moving towards, and living in line with, the tenets of personal authenticity.

In keeping with the tenets of Charmaz's (2006) interpretation of grounded theory, this theory is not a universal model of development for persons in non-traditional areas. It indicates a broad range of processes that might provide useful parallels or insights with other perspectives. However this does not diminish the value of the study as it fills a research gap, demonstrating a process of masculine identity construction that is thoroughly positive; integrative of a diverse range of characteristics that do not reproduce broader structures of inequality. Research focussing on constructions of masculinity has tended to focus on negative manifestations and implications associated with being a man (Tatum & Charleton, 2008; Courtenay, 2000; Cheng, 1999), even within the non-traditional setting (Simpson, 2004). The present study differs significantly; it marks a pathway for positive self-renovation despite normative conventions that attempt to control and suppress alternate forms of gendered expression. This highlights that self-aware men have the capacity to resist dominant gender

discourses and consciously direct their own gender identity and life-path.

Within the field of nursing potential research could take this perspective further by exploring men's experiences in other atypical domains; determining if there are substantial differences and if so, why. Also the situational performance of masculinity by female nurses could provide an interesting counter study. However while masculinities perspectives (Connell, 1987, 1995, 2005) are useful for investigating the subtle dimensions and developments of individual gender projects, it seems new frameworks emphasising the role of societal structures are required to fully understand and combat other gender related issues such as the health gap between men and women.

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