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Men's Experiences Teaching Yoga in Australia and New Zealand:

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

In the West, the popularity of yoga has surged because of its physical, mental and emotional benefits. Yet in Australia and New Zealand, a gender gap persists, with men significantly underrepresented. One suggested reason for this, is the perception that yoga is feminine, which is believed to be a barrier to men's participation in yoga.

Research suggests many men face mental health challenges in silence and are less likely to seek treatment due to stigma and stereotypes associated with different expectations of dominant masculinities. Yoga has been shown to have many physical and mental health benefits and is recommended as an alternative wellness modality for holistic health. By understanding the experiences of male yoga teachers in a predominantly feminised occupation, this study seeks to explore how men navigate potential challenges to yoga engagement and related wellness practices. The findings aim to provide insights into the ways men can be better supported in engaging with yoga and alternative practices, for their mental and physical health.

To do this, the research takes a critical, qualitative approach, using reflexive thematic analysis to understand the unique perspectives of 15 male yoga teachers in Australia and New Zealand. The findings suggest men experience stigma and stereotypes when engaging in yoga but also that male yoga teachers enact varied and unique masculinities that help them navigate these challenges. This research also suggests yoga is a powerful tool for men's mental, physical and emotional health and is a recommended alternative wellness modality.

This research provides a unique and novel perspective with an under researched group of men, and sheds light on the discourses around masculinities, yoga and men in women-dominated occupations. The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform future interventions and initiatives aimed at addressing the gender gap in holistic wellness practices and mental health treatment. The implications extend to research and policy for supporting men's wellbeing and promoting inclusivity by addressing the stigma and stereotypes associated with masculinity and health promoting practices and care.

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Men's Experiences Teaching Yoga in Australia and New Zealand

Yoga, has its roots tracing back to India over three thousand years ago and was designed to be a multi-modal practice to alleviate suffering and bring about spiritual, mental and physical harmony for self-realisation (Basavaraddi, 2015; Capon et al., 2019; Feuerstein, 2012; Iyengar, 2006). In India it is also used as a tool for devotion, meditation, philosophy, and spirituality and has a wide range of practices, rituals and techniques for enhancing one's overall well-being (Feuerstein, 2012). Recently in the West, yoga has surged in popularity and research supports its efficacy as a way to improve one's physical, mental and emotional well-being, as well as in injury rehabilitation, healthy ageing and for various mental health conditions (Ciezar-Andersen et al., 2021; Ivtzan & Papantoniou, 2014; Jeter et al., 2015; Silveira & Smart, 2020; Suárez-Iglesias et al., 2022; Thayabaranathan et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2021).

In Australia, yoga participation doubled from 5% in 2008 to 11% in 2018, with one in ten people now practising regularly (Roy Morgan, 2018). In a 2019 New Zealand survey of 21,972 adults, 17% had participated in yoga over the previous 12 months with 25% of women and 9% of men trying yoga (Sport New Zealand, 2020). A comprehensive report from the US on yoga participation found 28% of yoga participants were male and this number had doubled from 4 million to 10 million between 2012-2016 (Yoga Alliance & Yoga Journal, 2016). However, men's participation in yoga remains relatively low compared to women's in these countries (Cagas et al., 2022a; Vergeer et al., 2017; Vergeer et al., 2018). In a 2018 Australian survey, approximately 89% of yoga participants were women however, it is unclear exactly how many men are practising yoga across Australia and New Zealand, with some other estimates as low as 1-3% (Cagas et al., 2021; Hinds et al., 2018; Vergeer et

al., 2017). One way to gauge yoga participation by gender is to consider who is teaching yoga. Whilst there is limited data on the percentage of yoga teachers that are men in Australia and New Zealand, a recent report in the US suggests only 13% of yoga instructors are men and this job has historically been dominated by women (Zippia, 2021).

In contrast to the contemporary Western expression, yoga in India was traditionally taught and practised by men, such as devout Hindu ascetics (saddhus) and Brahmin priests. Comparatively, women were less documented to have taught or practised yoga (Chakravarti, 1993; Gokhale, 2021; Parikh, 2015). However, more recently, in a national survey of 162,330 participants across India, approximately 12% practised yoga with roughly equal numbers of men and women (Mishra et al., 2020). Another smaller cross sectional study of 14,250 people in India showed 67.3% of practitioners were men between 21-44 years of age (Telles et al., 2017). This contrasts greatly to Australia and New Zealand, suggesting acceptability of yoga for men is based on societal and cultural differences and varies across countries.

Yoga has a gendered past and whilst it was traditionally practised by men in India, it was adopted into the West by colonial, middle-upper class, white women who were receptive to the teachings of yoga (Hassan, 2020; Musial & Mintz, 2021). However, some researchers have argued that the higher proportion of women practising yoga in the West is a barrier for Western men's yoga participation (Vergeer et al., 2017; Vergeer et al., 2018). Most research on the barriers and facilitators for yoga participation in the West are on women and reflect similar barriers to conventional sports, such as lack of time, cost, and the expectation of negative side effects, whilst some research suggests an aversion to eastern spirituality associated with yoga (Atkinson & Permuth-Levine, 2009; Brems et al., 2015; Cagas et al., 2021). Considering the low proportion of men practising yoga in the West

compared to India, it would be valuable to investigate what barriers exist for men's engagement in yoga. Men's perspectives such as those from experienced practitioners, including male yoga teachers, are under-studied, with very little research on male yoga teachers in Australia and New Zealand to date.

Consequently, this research will focus on Australia and New Zealand, as they have a shared history of migration, and close interpersonal connections (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d.). The 1973 Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangements (TTTA) allows free movement between the two countries and has resulted in similar cultural values with approximately 15% of New Zealand's population living in Australia (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d.). Because of my positionality as a New Zealand citizen who has lived in Australia for 14 years and practised and taught yoga for 13 years in various styles, this research will focus on male yoga teachers' perspectives in these two countries, to contribute to knowledge in this area.

Chapter overview

For this master's thesis, I conducted qualitative research using thematic analysis that looked at the lived experiences of 15 male yoga teachers in Australia and New Zealand. Data were generated through open-ended, semi-structured interviews to gain firsthand accounts of the barriers and facilitators these teachers had experienced in their yoga journey. I also sought to understand the potential obstacles for practising yoga that yoga teachers had witnessed in their male students, to further inform us on how we can support men interested in engaging in yoga. This study also addressed men's experiences working in a feminised profession, which has been described as 'feminised' due to the dominance of teachers who are women. This study was conducted with the aim to increase awareness in

this under-researched area and potentially reduce barriers and challenges for men in similar situations. To fulfill this, my overarching research question was ‘How do male yoga teachers in Australia and New Zealand account for their experiences practising and teaching yoga?’.

In chapter two, I will review the literature and explore the latest research on the benefits of yoga for men and its uses in the treatment of physical and psychological problems and for promoting holistic health. Additionally, I will examine the discourses around men’s health behaviours and the current masculinity research. I will critique the existing literature on men and yoga, highlighting areas that could be further explored and the significance of this thesis for addressing some of these areas. Chapter three details the theoretical foundations of this research, the methodology along with ethical considerations and my reflexive standpoint. Chapter four will present the analysis and findings where I weave the discussion through the analysis. Chapter five presents the core findings, personal reflections, strengths and limitations of the study and recommendations for future research. Chapter six provides the final conclusion.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Increasing research evidence points to the benefits of mind-body health for men. Mind-body health, or the connection between physical health and emotional health, recognises the importance of one's mind and thoughts on one's physical and overall well-being (Winter et al., 2022). Mind-body health is not just looking after the physical body through exercise, sleep and nutrition, but includes engaging in practises such as mindfulness, meditation and yoga. There is some evidence that demonstrates these practises can lead to better social interactions, self-regulation, coping mechanisms, and personal transformation (Gard et al., 2014; Hospital et al., 2022; Tolbaños-Roche & Menon, 2021; Winter et al., 2022). Research shows men in different countries are initially drawn to yoga for various reasons, including fitness, health promotion and stress reduction, and continue due to the positive effects it has on their physical and emotional health (Kidd & Eatough, 2017; Park et al., 2019; Parker, 2020; Telles et al., 2017). Because yoga has been shown to promote healthy behaviours in men, it is increasingly recommended as an alternative, holistic, wellness therapy (Borotikar et al., 2023; Krejčí et al., 2020; Watts et al., 2018).

Men with depression can be at high risk for suicide, have higher rates of substance use disorders and often have poorer help-seeking behaviours and higher dropout rates from mental health services compared to women (Affleck et al., 2018; Gough & Novikova, 2020; Rice et al., 2020; Seidler et al., 2018; Teese et al., 2023). Whilst this is a very complex and contextual situation, this behaviour has often been associated with the possibilities created through the various constructs of masculinity (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Rice et al., 2020;

Seidler et al., 2016; Seidler et al., 2020; Seidler et al., 2018; Seidler et al., 2021; Teese et al., 2023).

However, yoga has been shown to be an effective alternative treatment for men experiencing anxiety, PTSD, depression and drug-addiction, especially high risk individuals and those who cannot afford traditional psychological treatments (Burnett-Zeigler et al., 2016). For example, yoga significantly improved psychological well-being, self-esteem, cognitive-behavioural and executive functioning, and regulation of problematic behaviours in prison inmates through reduced reactivity and aggression, as well as reduced depression and stress (Bilderbeck et al., 2013). Research suggests men will seek help through different avenues if it is easily accessible, relevant and deemed appropriate, and yoga, as an alternative mind-body therapy, is showing promise as a complimentary lifestyle intervention and treatment for men's mental health (Burnett-Zeigler et al., 2016; Cagas et al., 2021; Englar-Carlson & Kiselica, 2013; Gough & Novikova, 2020; McIver et al., 2022; Seidler et al., 2016; Seidler et al., 2020; Seidler et al., 2018; Seidler et al., 2021).

Other research on yoga interventions with male war veterans and men in incarceration showed improved impulse control, positive affect, attention, flexibility, sleep, relaxation, pain reduction and mental well-being (Bartels et al., 2019; Kerekes et al., 2017), emotional control, stress management, reduced conflict (Barrett, 2017), reduced recidivism and hostile behaviours related to criminality (Toof et al., 2022), improved mindfulness and interoceptive bodily awareness (Mehling et al., 2018), and overall mental and physical health improvements (Hurst et al., 2018). Moreover, yoga was deemed to be an affordable and acceptable therapeutic intervention for crack cocaine users living with HIV and resulted in improved quality of life and lowered perceived stress levels without negative side effects (Agarwal et al., 2015). This suggests yoga is an accessible, feasible and effective health

intervention for a wide range of men with various mental and physical health conditions living in challenging environments. Therefore, yoga could be used as a cost-effective alternative to psychological treatments, which can be expensive, stigmatising and inaccessible for many men (Bilderbeck et al., 2013).

Whilst there has been substantial research on the effects of yoga for men's mental health and well-being in a variety of populations, there is very little research on the effects of yoga teaching for men. Men who commit to studying and teaching yoga are likely exposed to the long-term effects of yoga, and this is an important perspective that would help to inform us further on yoga's impact on men's wellbeing. However, these men must also navigate the potential stigma and social dynamics that come with being one of the few men in an environment that is predominantly women. Therefore, this thesis will look at male yoga teachers' experiences teaching yoga and their observations of how other men engage in yoga. Because this is an under-researched population of men, there is a lot we can learn from their perspectives. Therefore, to appreciate gender differences and men's health, the next section will look at the wider psychosocial discourses on gender, masculinity and men's health behaviours.

Gender Theory and the Construction of Masculinity

This next section will provide an overview of the scholarly constructs of masculinity in the literature which is relevant to the research that supports this thesis.

Gender

Gender was originally theorised in terms of biology and traditional gender roles, with men and women categorised at opposite ends of a dimension, known as socialisation theory (Risman & Davis, 2013). However, research has evolved to conceptualise gender as multidimensional based on personality, relationships and social structures, and has given rise to relational theory as a way to understand gender (Connell, 2009). Gender research has progressed from a focus on individual gender identity, and expanded to consider how gender is shaped by organisational structures and interactional processes (Risman & Davis, 2013). Much of the research into men's health behaviours in the West, including studies on men and yoga, found conformity to traditional masculine gender norms to be a salient factor in a variety of men's experiences (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Gough, 2006; Mahalik et al., 2007; McGraw et al., 2021; McIver et al., 2022; Rice et al., 2020; Seidler et al., 2016; Seidler et al., 2020; Sloan et al., 2010). Therefore, it is an important factor to be aware of and address when looking at men's engagement with exercise and therapeutic practises such as yoga.

Defining Masculinity

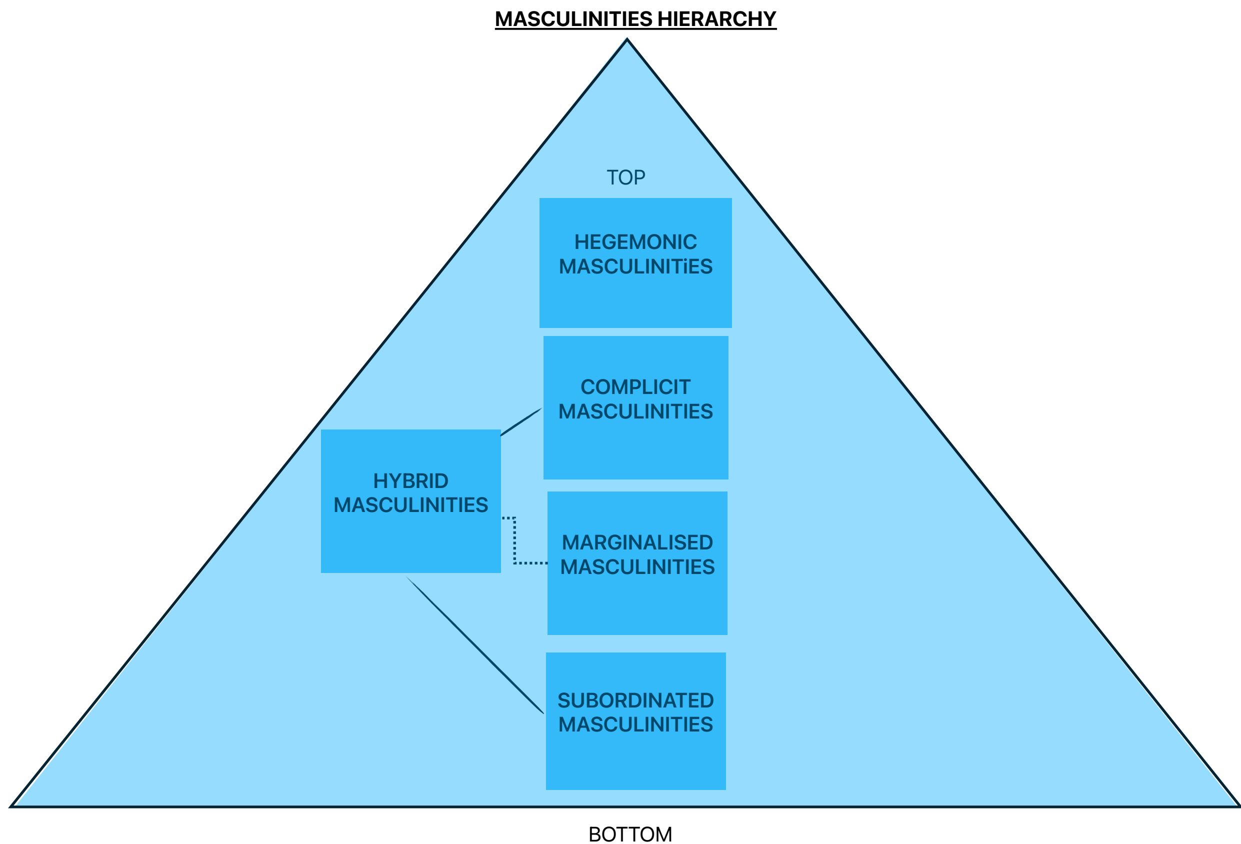
Masculinity is a social construct that is enacted and varies across cultures and it is important not to impose a singular definition of masculinity on men (Risman & Davis, 2013). This is because masculinity is not fixed in the body or personality of a person but is a combination of actions in relation to their social setting (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Measurements of masculinity are limited in that it is hard to define and there is not one essentialist concept that can define it (Connell, 2009). Recent research on Australian men suggests masculinity is not a unidimensional construct and quantitative global measures of masculinity such as the CMNI-22 instrument, (a shorter version of the 11-factor 96-item CMNI instrument) (Mahalik et al., 2005) do not capture the nuanced construct of

masculinity and provide limited explanations for men's health behaviours (McGraw et al., 2021). A large body of research on masculinity suggests it is open to changing social constructions, such as hierarchies, and multiple, collective and individual masculinities, and is also impacted by marginalised and subordinated groups (Connell, 2009; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Risman & Davis, 2013). In fact, the understanding of gender is constantly evolving with a contemporary focus on structural organisations and processes which perpetuate gender inequality and stereotypes (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Lupton, 2000; Risman & Davis, 2013).

In the extant literature, the discussion on men and yoga tends to focus on more traditional forms of masculinity as a barrier to men's health behaviours and engagement with yoga, whereas newer understandings of masculinities suggest male privilege (which is produced through the processes of hegemonic masculinity) actually allows men to engage in healthy behaviours such as yoga (Cagas et al., 2021; Cagas et al., 2022a; McIver et al., 2022; Motzkus, 2022; Musial & Mintz, 2021; Parker, 2020; Seidler et al., 2016). This is because male privilege allows certain men more access to resources and opportunities to engage in health promoting practices, and some scholars have argued certain men may engage in alternative behaviours, such as yoga, for personal gains to appear more 'open-minded' in order to gain status and power (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Musial & Mintz, 2021). Consequently, as masculinity is evolving and changing with the times, qualitative research can challenge conventional frameworks and provide novel insights into a person's individual expression of masculinity, without being limited by pre-defined constructs or measurements (Schofield et al., 2000; Waling, 2019a). Please see figure 1 below for an example of the various masculinities which will be discussed next, in their hierarchical order.

Figure 1

Masculinities Hierarchies



Hegemonic Masculinity

The concept of hegemonic masculinity (HM) was established when academics critically examined gender constructs, and feminists, in particular, started to critique theories of gender role socialisation and its limited approach (Connell, 2009; Connell & Ashenden, 1982; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Adherence to a particular version of hetero-normative masculinity, the most socially accepted form of masculinity at the time, is also known as hegemonic masculinity and is the culturally dominant way of being a man that reigns above women and other masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Gough, 2006; Ralph & Roberts, 2020; Ridge et al., 2011). Masculinities have been conceptualised in a number of different ways, including 'Open' and 'Closed' (Elliott, 2020a), 'Hybrid' (Bridges

& Pascoe, 2014), 'Marginalised', 'Complicit', 'Subordinated' (Connell, 2005), 'Positive' (Englar-Carlson & Kiselica, 2013) 'Inclusive', 'Orthodox' (Anderson & McCormack, 2018) and 'Toxic' and 'Healthy' masculinities (Waling, 2019a). HM legitimises patriarchy in our society, by perpetuating domination over marginalised and subordinated groups, such as women but also men (Connell, 2005, 2009; Connell & Ashenden, 1982; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Palmer et al., 2020).

Most conceptualisations of masculinities build on the foundation of HM and a lot of men's health research looks at the way men navigate ill health with certain types of masculinities such as HM aligned with different health outcomes (Connell, 2005; Courtenay, 2000b; Marcos et al., 2013; McGraw et al., 2021; Schofield et al., 2000; Terry & Braun, 2013; Wong et al., 2017). As men's health behaviours are often associated with traditional forms of masculinity, whatever the culturally dominant form of masculinity is at the time, some question whether continuously emphasising masculinity as a fixed characteristic is hindering how we understand men by limiting them to traditional notions (Waling, 2019b). For example, whilst research often links HM to unhealthy behaviours, not all men adopt this type of masculinity and it is important to understand alternative and emerging masculinities taken up by men, especially those engaging in healthy behaviours (Sloan et al., 2010). Oversimplifying complex social structures such as masculinity, impacted by the economic and geographical situation at the time, restricts our understanding of men to narrow theoretical models (Waling, 2023).

Multiple Masculinities

Masculinity is not a stable concept but rather multifaceted and changing (Connell, 2005; Maricourt & Burrell, 2021). According to Connell (2005), there are multiple types of masculinities that interconnect. Where HM is at the top of the gender hierarchy, below that

is ‘complicit masculinity’, which refers to men who may not actively embody or be able to embody hegemonic masculinity, but do not question or critique it and therefore benefit from the subordination of certain masculinities and women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Elliott, 2020b). Connell (2005) also describes a ‘subordinate masculinity’, which applies to men who have been subordinated below HM because of the assumption that this masculinity is a more feminine expression and therefore face marginalisation. This often includes men who are considered feminine or are gay, as they do not conform to heteronormativity and display effeminate qualities that may be considered ‘weak’ or ‘unmasculine’.

Also at the bottom is ‘marginalised masculinity’ which describes men who face social stigma and exclusion (such as poor, non-white, disabled men), from the dominant form of masculinity (wealthy, heterosexual, able bodied, white men) and this privileging of certain masculinities over others and genders represents the core of patriarchy (Connell, 2005; Elliott, 2020b). Some argue that the hierarchical gender order is too rigid to capture the nuances of men’s masculinities and its movements and labelling men as hegemonic is insufficient for understanding men’s fluid enactment of masculinity (Elliott, 2020a; Waling, 2019b). Nevertheless, it is important to remember that some masculinities hold more power than others, such as the dominant, normative form, which is why it is highly visible in research on men and prevalent in masculinity discourses and studies.

Hybrid Masculinity

Theorisation of hybrid masculinities seek to distance themselves from negative expressions of HM (such as active homophobia) to adapt to contemporary conditions, whilst still sustaining existing ideologies of inequality and power (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Ralph & Roberts, 2020). This is done by integrating aspects of marginalised or subordinated

masculinities into the identities of privileged men, such as white, heterosexual men to increase the appeal of their masculine embodiment. This practice, known as strategic borrowing, creates discursive distance from negative aspects of HM (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Elliott, 2020b). Because gender adapts with the times, hybrid masculinity theory is a useful way of making sense of the ways masculinities stay in flux, with men symbolically distancing themselves from older versions of HM, whilst fortifying existing social boundaries that replicate power inequalities in hidden ways (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014).

Emerging literature exploring hybrid masculinities questions whether they uphold or challenge gender and sexual inequality as they can often perpetuate inequalities even whilst challenging aspects of HM (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Elliott, 2020b). For example, Musial and Mintz's (2021) research on Canadian prime minister Trudeau, looked at how he positioned himself as a unique, new age, progressive, feminist, yoga practitioner to appeal to his followers and appear different to other men and his competitors. However, he still drew on hegemonic ideals for his own benefit and career advancement. Hybrid masculinity captures the way practising yoga may make him appear different to traditional men, yet he can still enact patriarchy through appropriation of yoga for his own means and personal gains.

Additionally, some research on hybrid masculinities is concerned with how men are incorporating aspects of subordinated identities into their self-concept. For example, in an effort to navigate feminised activities and occupations, some heterosexual men have been shown to justify their participation by emphasising their differences to misogynistic men. As they do so, they might also continue to distance themselves from femininity, which reiterates prevailing power and gender structures, rather than challenging them (Barber, 2008; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) suggest hybrid masculinity is just a variation of traditional masculinity,

as whilst it represents significant changes in power expressions, it does not challenge inequality (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). In contrast, Anderson (2009) argues these changes are a sign of a pervasive cultural shift where bolstering inequalities are lessening in men's identities and no longer structure men's relationships (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014).

However, when heterosexual, white men acknowledge that their masculinity is less meaningful than that of subordinated or marginalised men who have had to fight for their rights, they can frame themselves as outside of systems of privilege and inequality. This can fortify boundaries between groups which further entrenches inequality in hidden ways (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). Regardless of the debates and critiques of the HM framework and emerging masculinities, these concepts provide a useful anchor for understanding men's health behaviours.

Contemporary Masculinities

Whilst Connell's theorising lay the groundwork for understanding hegemonic masculinity, Elliott (2020a) developed the theory of 'closed and 'open' masculinity to explain contemporary masculinities, where some men may challenge harmful forms of masculinity whilst others may utilise them for their advantage (see figure 2). The terms 'closed' and 'open' masculinities help to avoid labelling men as 'hegemonic', which can sometimes be used as an archetype, a theory or a process itself.

Elliott's theory of closed masculinity aligns with Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic and complicit masculinities, where privileged men benefit from male power and patriarchy and maintain traditional, hegemonic ideologies. Closed masculinity is more closely aligned with regressive, patriarchal or traditional expressions of masculinity and can include 'toxic masculinity', 'orthodox masculinity' and even 'hybrid masculinity' (Elliott, 2020a). Similar to hegemonic masculinity at the top of the hierarchy, closed masculinity sits

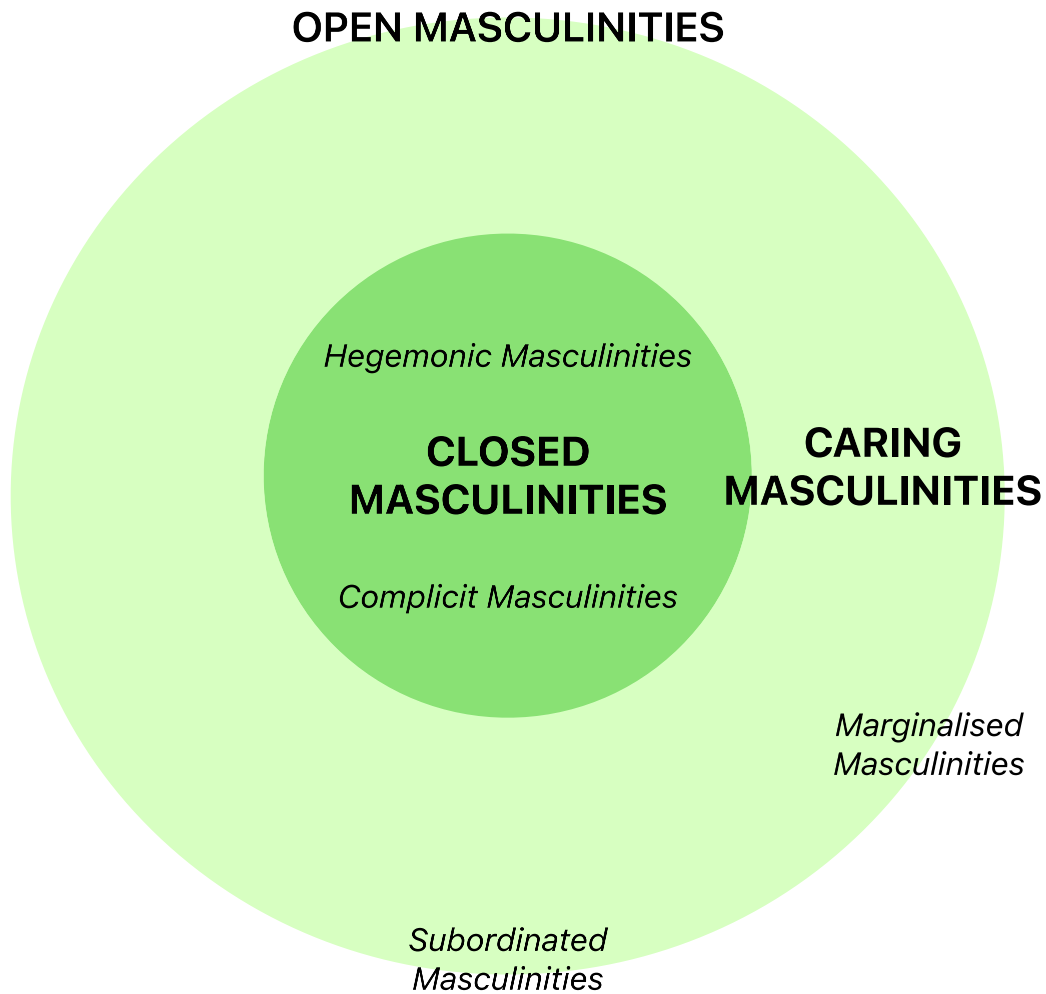
at the closed 'centre' of the masculinity framework with marginalised masculinities with less access to privilege at the more open margin (Elliott, 2020a).

'Open' masculinity refers to men who are more caring, progressive and egalitarian, who engage in behaviours resisting patriarchy (Elliott, 2020b). Similarly, 'caring' masculinity rejects dominating traits and embraces positive emotions and interdependence, which are usually associated with women and can be part of men's engagement with gender equality (Elliott, 2020b). These masculinities sit at the margins of the masculinity framework where it is expansive and offers possibilities for fluid and open expressions of different masculinities. The margin also includes Connell's (2005) marginalised and subordinated masculinities who have less access to power.

In contrast, closed masculinities are deep in privilege and dominance and less likely to shift from the closed centre towards the margin, however it is possible. For example, closed masculinities often benefit from various forms of privilege whilst still being open to expressing alternative, more open masculinities if it is in their favour and benefits them. Thus, the intersection of margin and centre shows there can be movement between men's masculinities, which addresses the issue of hierarchy which can sometimes be insufficient for understanding men's enactments of masculinity (Elliott, 2020a; Waling, 2019b). Consequently, this is a useful framework for understanding contemporary masculinities as the concepts of closed centre and open margin are broad enough to capture the complexities, movements, permeability and intersections in contemporary men's masculine identities. Please see figure 2 for an example of this below.

Figure 2

Elliott's (2020a) theory of Masculinities



Note: Connell's (2005) masculinities are italicised. Elliott's (2020a) masculinities are in bold font.

Precarious Manhood

Men who engage in healthy behaviours, such as seeking out social support, often draw on discourses informed by HM when making sense of these behaviours, which can include using rhetoric that accentuates gender differences and reinforcing autonomy and self-reliance (McKenzie et al., 2018; Sallee & Harris, 2011). This phenomenon is also known as 'precarious manhood', where societally, men are expected to protect and maintain these norms for example through engaging in activities such as aggressive, challenging and risky physical sports and heavy weight training (Courtenay, 2000b; Meeussen et al., 2020). Unfortunately, these men often face backlash from others when they engage in stereotypically feminine activities such as dance or nurturing roles and this may also apply to yoga (Courtenay, 2000b; Meeussen et al., 2020).

Challenges with Masculinity Theorising

It has been argued that the way masculinity has been theorised can limit its development as it constrains men's behaviours and causes conflict by focusing on negatives whilst neglecting men's strengths (Englar-Carlson & Kiselica, 2013; Kiselica et al., 2016; Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010). Moreover, only looking at the deficits of masculinity limits our perspectives and creates biases, stereotypes, and a knowledge gap in our understanding of men's healthy behaviours (Englar-Carlson & Kiselica, 2013; Lomas et al., 2016; Roberts, 2018). This is partly why hybrid and open masculinities have emerged to account for the positive characteristics of men, such as adaptive behaviours that promote strength, emotional expression, and skill sets, as well-rounded, resilient individuals (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Elliott, 2020a; Kiselica et al., 2016). Because there has been less research on what is working for men, positive masculinity approaches have recently emerged, that focus on the

strengths of men such as courage, gender equality and generative fatherhood that are transmitted across generations to benefit boys, men and society (Kiselica et al., 2016; Roberts, 2018).

Moreover, some argue that typologising masculinities into fixed categories fails to acknowledge men's subjectivity and agency in choosing how to relate and has become a scapegoat for men's behaviours (Waling, 2019a). Femininity and masculinity are shaped by our lived experiences, our culture, and societal factors like privilege and power, which means women and men will always have different experiences of gender. This also means men will enact various masculinities as they navigate the demands of everyday life and society in different contexts and through different relationships (Connell, 2005; Lomas et al., 2016; Smiler, 2004). Some suggest challenging stereotypes around HM and accentuating men's positive practises can be a way to dismantle patriarchy and promote healthier forms of masculinity (Roberts, 2018). This is because identifying and valuing men's strengths can help men feel valued, reduce defensiveness and enhance our ability to work on problems associated with HM.

However, Englar-Carlson and Kiselica (2013) suggest one implication in research promoting positive masculinity may be that those who are working to dismantle patriarchy and privilege may feel their work is being challenged or disregarded. This is because masculinity can still be positioned as something that men are victims of, rather than something they actively choose to engage in (Waling, 2019a). Additionally, focusing on the deficits of marginalised, working-class men can work as a diversionary tactic for the actions of elite men who can perpetuate patriarchy due to their position of power, and does not reduce the oppression of women (Roberts, 2018).

As this research aims to qualitatively explore male yoga teachers' experiences practising and teaching yoga, and how they experience their masculine identity, it is vital to be aware of the current debates and discussions around masculinity in today's social context, as this is a heavily contested topic. Not all men embody one stereotypical masculinity and there is often fluidity in men's expression and identification with the above masculinities, based on the social climate, environment and discourses of the time (Connell, 2005; Elliott, 2020a, 2020b; Waling, 2019b). It is also important to look at breaking down gender binaries rather than attributing traits and characteristics towards a gender, as gender can be culturally imposed and negotiated by the individual (Waling, 2019a). Whilst HM and traditional masculinities often arise in research on men's engagement with yoga, yoga teachers can be an example of men who enact positive masculine qualities such as emotional expression, personal inter-connection, caring, empathy and kindness. Therefore, this research seeks to understand the possibility of unique and varied expressions of male yoga teachers' masculinities, which intends to add to the limited discussion on this topic (Lomas et al., 2016; Parker, 2020).

Men's Health Behaviours

In this next section I will discuss the various health behaviours and outcomes associated with men's masculinities in the literature.

Traditional Masculine Norms and Health Outcomes

To date, a large body of men's health research suggests men's health behaviours are greatly influenced by traditional gender role norms, such as being less concerned about their health and being mentally and physically resilient (Cagas et al., 2022a; Courtenay, 2000b; Gough, 2006; Gough & Conner, 2006; Meeussen et al., 2020; Peralta, 2007; Sloan et

al., 2010). Some men have been found to defend these norms by avoiding help seeking and engaging in risky health behaviours such as drunk driving or avoiding doctor's visits (Courtenay, 2000b; Fisher et al., 2021; Peralta, 2007; Ridge et al., 2011).

Men who engage in traditional masculine norms have been found to display more health risk behaviours including high alcohol intake, illegal drug use, smoking, poor diet, avoidance of preventative care and suppression of emotions to reinforce their gender which is also shown cross-culturally (Mahalik et al., 2012; Mahalik et al., 2007; Marcos et al., 2013; Sloan et al., 2010). Because some versions of masculinity have been associated with fewer help-seeking behaviours, men who draw on these may experience more psychological and physical health problems than men who draw on other kinds (Mahalik et al., 2012). In contrast to this, a regular yoga practise is associated with healthier eating behaviours, less alcohol consumption, less smoking and more physical activity (Watts et al., 2018).

Sloan et al. (2010) interviewed men from England to explore the intersection of masculinity and men's health behaviours and asked "how would you define 'masculinity'?". This resulted in the men discussing their healthy behaviours and the stigma associated with these behaviours. When these men engaged in healthy behaviours considered feminine, such as seeing a doctor or eating healthily, they then emphasised other masculine forms of identity such as autonomy, rationality and self-control. The authors suggest this downplay of healthy decisions maintains HM and more research should recruit men engaging in healthy behaviours to further understand their negotiation of masculinity. As it is assumed that yoga teachers are engaging in healthy behaviours, it will be important to see if they rationalise their yoga engagement through reinforcing other forms of behaviours associated with HM.

Similar questions have been used in other countries to explore men's ideas of what it means to be masculine. Fazli Khalaf et al.'s (2013) exploration masculinity in a multicultural group of men uncovered a wide range of answers based on stereotypical and non-stereotypical gender norms. Harris III (2010) also assessed ethnically diverse men and asked "what defining characteristics would you use to describe what it means to be a man?" (p.302). It also uncovered a range of answers rich for exploration including being respected, working hard, as well as fears of being perceived as gay or feminine. However, recent qualitative research by Molenaar and Liang (2020) exploring young men's possible masculinities, found that these men did not necessarily identify with the characteristics of wanting a certain physical appearance, to be self-reliant, or have the desire for many sexual partners. This contrasts with stereotypical measurements of traditional masculinity, which use quantitative measurements to define adherence to masculine norms (Parent & Moradi, 2009). With this in mind, it would be valuable to investigate male yoga teachers' ideals of what it means to be masculine, to see how this compares to HM or contemporary masculinities.

Research shows yoga is perceived as feminine for many men and this can be a barrier to their participation, as it is constructed as going against traditional masculine ideals they feel they should portray (Barrett, 2017; Bilderbeck et al., 2013; Hurst et al., 2018). Sloan et al. (2010) suggest an important part of critical work is examining how men who engage in healthy behaviours construct their masculinity as less is known about this perspective. They argue the vast literature on HM and men's health only serves to promote stereotypes and we need a more sophisticated understanding of masculinity for men's health promotion. Moreover, gender stereotypes and attitudes of healthcare providers further contribute to the under-diagnosis and under-treatment of mental illness in men and

discourage men from seeking formal mental health services (Affleck et al., 2018; Broom, 2005). As the social context and culture of the environment can produce and reinforce certain health behaviours associated with certain types of masculinities, this research will address how men who engage in healthy behaviours such as yoga, construct their sense of masculine identity.

Men and Mental Health

In Western societies, men suffer from higher rates of loneliness and typically do not use mental health services as much as women, which is believed to be heavily influenced by social norms and unconscious gender bias and the wider cultural discourse around masculinity (Affleck et al., 2018; Barreto et al., 2021; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015; Marcos et al., 2013). For example, in a systematic review by Seidler et al. (2016), conformity to traditional masculinity was related to increased experiences of depression and reduced willingness to seek out help. Some men have been found to manage their symptoms in silence until they become too overwhelmed, leading them to externalising expressions such as outbursts of anger, substance abuse and isolation, behaviours they perceive as more aligned with traditional masculinity (Magovcevic & Addis, 2008; Meeussen et al., 2020; Parent et al., 2019). Alternatively, they may internalise their symptoms through emotional inhibition, feeling like a failure, or somatic symptoms such as sensations of numbness (Magovcevic & Addis, 2008; Meeussen et al., 2020; Parent et al., 2019). Yoga can be used as a low-cost, alternative therapy for mental wellbeing as it has been shown to improve interoception and awareness of bodily sensations and this is associated with reduced hyper arousal, non-reactivity, improved psychological wellbeing and quality of life (Mehling et al., 2018).

Furthermore, a recent, large survey of 1907 Australian men sought to understand why men drop out of mental health services (Seidler et al., 2021). Dropout rates were higher

for younger, unemployed men with dominant ideals of traditional masculinity, and these men were more likely to drop out if they felt emasculated. They suggest there is a dearth of information on why men drop out of mental health therapy, so gaining more insights into how to support these men's needs is crucial for effective therapy delivery. Whitley (2021) suggests monocausal explanations for men's under-utilisation of health services associated with masculinity fail to acknowledge many more complex factors affecting men's engagement. These include external stigma associated with healthcare use, unwelcoming and unengaging healthcare environments for men and less 'action-based' informal approaches better suited for men. Additionally cultural, financial, geographical and educational barriers all impact on men's access to healthcare, especially those who are marginalised and subordinated.

Whilst men, and young men in particular, suffer from higher rates of loneliness than women (Barreto et al., 2021; Cox, 2021; Franklin et al., 2019; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015), a systematic review shows yoga provides a sense of meaning to life, connectedness and purpose to practitioners, which they received through their spiritual practice (Csala et al., 2021). Research evidence suggests yoga has the potential to improve gratitude for life and this increased as one's yoga experience lengthened (Ivtzan & Papantoniou, 2014). Similar research on men who regularly meditated showed connection and community were salient factors in their continued engagement in meditation, which they linked to the benefits of their spiritual practice (Lomas et al., 2016).

Given the connection between masculinity and adherence to mental health treatment, this may also be having an effect on men's engagement in yoga, which this research intends to investigate.

Men and Exercise

Exercise is an important health behaviour for men and playing sports is a socially accepted physical activity (Courtenay, 2000b; Sloan et al., 2010). Men who conform to traditional masculine norms tend to engage in physical activities that are competitive and promote strength and muscularity (Griffiths et al., 2015). However, men who attempt to embody traditional masculine norms such as dominance, emotional self-control and drive for muscularity have been shown to have higher exercise dependence, body dissatisfaction and muscular driven disordered eating (Chang et al., 2019; Dawson & Hammer, 2020; Griffiths et al., 2015). In contrast, yoga-exercising men have been shown to have a lower association with body dissatisfaction compared to gym-exercisers (Flaherty, 2014). Despite this, research suggests yoga is seen as a feminine physical activity for men who are new to yoga and is perceived as unsuitable for men that subscribe to traditional masculine norms (Atkinson & Permuth-Levine, 2009; Brems et al., 2015; Cagas et al., 2021; Cagas et al., 2022a; Hurst et al., 2018; Justice et al., 2016).

In contrast to the West, the majority of yoga practitioners in a large survey in India were men and their main reason for participating was for physical fitness, which suggests cultural conceptions of masculinity likely have some influence on the perception of yoga as feminine (Telles et al., 2017). Additionally barriers to yoga practice were said to be due to lifestyle factors for men and women in India, such as family and work commitments, with no mention of masculinity or gender stereotypes, which could mean these gendered norms are implicit (Dayananda et al., 2014). This Western concept that yoga is feminine, is likely because the qualities emphasised in the West in yoga of non-competition and self-care are associated with femininity (Cagas et al., 2021; Cagas et al., 2022a; Harris III, 2008; Webb et al., 2020).

Moreover, whilst traditionally Western, masculine sports are highly competitive, (Messner et al., 2000), Cagas et al. (2022a) found that long-term male yoga practitioners cited competition as one of the lowest motivators for their yoga practice and spirituality as the highest. Given these findings, more research is needed to explore the facilitators for male yoga teachers' engagement in yoga in this under-researched area, as it may provide further insights into ways to engage more men in practising yoga and shed light on the way yoga teachers navigate the complexities of practising and teaching yoga.

Additionally, whilst sport and exercise are positive health behaviours for men, there are some men who do not enjoy male dominated sports or exercise, especially activities that have an atmosphere that emphasises competition and aggression (Cagas et al., 2021; Cagas et al., 2022a). It is important to acknowledge that men are not a homogenous group and some men who do not fit male stereotypes of enjoying sport and exercise may miss out on the benefits of physical activity (Ashton et al., 2015; Cagas et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2017; Plummer, 2006). However, yoga can be a gentle to moderate way to re-engage in physical activity and can be an accessible modality for those recovering from injuries or physical challenges through its versatility and adaptability (Watts et al., 2018). Further, yoga shows promise as an alternative form of exercise for different types of men due to its individual and internally focused nature, with the added benefit of creating an atmosphere of acceptance, open-mindedness and community in a class setting (Cheshire et al., 2022).

Men and Spirituality

As a holistic practice, yoga has a wide range of psycho-spiritual benefits and research suggests spirituality is a salient factor in men's long term yoga engagement, but this is under researched in sport, exercise and yoga (Cagas et al., 2022b; Csala et al., 2021; Kidd & Eatough, 2017; MacDonald, 2013; Ronkainen & Nesti, 2019). A systematic review found

yoga is positively associated with spirituality, such as providing a sense of meaning and peace, hope, compassion, happiness and faith when practised regularly (Csala et al., 2021). Some authors have argued that further investigation into the effects of spirituality as a mediator between yoga and improved mental health is needed (Brownhill et al., 2005; Csala et al., 2021; McIver et al., 2022). However, spirituality has also been cited as a barrier to newer men's engagement to yoga who are unfamiliar or averse to it (Cagas et al., 2021; McIver et al., 2022). Therefore, future work could address these aspects and to what extent this influences yoga participation and men's experiences teaching and committing to a yoga practice. This may help us understand the ways yoga intrinsically motivates men to engage in and maintain a practice for their spiritual and mental well-being.

Doing Research on Men and Yoga

Compared to women, there is relatively little research on the benefits of yoga for men's well-being and almost no research on yoga teachers who are men. The majority of yoga studies are on participants who tend to be white, middle to upper class, middle-aged women (Capon et al., 2019; Park et al., 2015). A lot of the yoga research on men tends to focus on small, homogenous sub-groups such as university students, war veterans and those in prisons and investigates short-term interventions that focus on physical and mental health benefits (Bartels et al., 2019; Brems et al., 2015; Hurst et al., 2018; Kerekes et al., 2017). This does not account for the barriers, facilitators or experiences of every day men who practise yoga, or the experiences of long term practitioners such as yoga teachers. Capon et al. (2019) did a systematic review on yoga for mental health and noted a lack of male participants with only one study consisting of mainly men. Moreover, the small amount of existing literature on male yoga students' perspectives and experiences has focused on the beneficial experiences of yoga. However some studies demonstrate

challenges related to societal stigma and issues of masculinity, as well as feeling awkward as one of the only men in the yoga class (Cagas et al., 2022a; Joyce et al., 2022; Kidd & Eatough, 2017; McIver et al., 2022).

Looking at the benefits and barriers to long term yoga engagement for men, McIver et al. (2022) studied men who were engaged in a regular yoga practice. Benefits included social connection, physical and mental reset, increased self-confidence, and positive ageing. Barriers were that yoga is perceived as feminine and is socially unacceptable for men. Additionally, in a systematic review by Csala et al. (2021), the long term benefits of yoga were associated with an increase in self-transformation, connection, mindfulness and increased spirituality as the main motivators for practitioners. Considering male yoga teachers have a long-term practice, these factors may come up as motivators to their commitment and engagement in yoga, similar to the aforementioned studies. Many of the authors recommend further research is needed to investigate the challenges and barriers to men's yoga engagement (Joyce et al., 2022; Kidd & Eatough, 2017; McIver et al., 2022).

Not only is there a gap in research on everyday male yoga students, there is almost no research on men who have committed to the practice and teaching of yoga. One of the only studies on yoga teachers who are men, an unpublished thesis, used a "hybrid-realist tale" (Parker, 2020, p.283) methodology, incorporating narrative enquiry and evocative autoethnography to share rich descriptions of male yoga teachers' experiences in New Zealand. Parker highlighted how yoga taught these men to embody alternative forms of masculinity, such as emotional intelligence, and resist hegemonic forms of masculinity, but also highlighted the challenges these men faced such as exclusion and even violence for not engaging in traditionally masculine behaviours. Whilst this novel research from New Zealand is one of the first to provide unique insights into New Zealand men's experiences teaching

yoga, Parker highlighted more research is needed on male yoga teachers. This includes further examination of how they overcame barriers and stereotypes to practising yoga as men, accounting for variation in ethnic backgrounds, and examining how these men foster positive mental wellbeing beyond yoga, into their everyday lives. Based on the literature in this area, this research will build on past qualitative research on men's engagement with yoga, men's drop out of mental health care and standards of masculinity in yoga, work, education and sport (Bevis et al., 2018; Cagas et al., 2021; Csala et al., 2021; Fazli Khalaf et al., 2013; Joyce et al., 2022; Kishida et al., 2018; McIver et al., 2022; Palmer et al., 2020; Seidler et al., 2018; Simpson, 2004).

Men, Masculinities, and Teaching Yoga as a 'Feminised' Profession

The persistence of gendered occupations has been normalised in society due to alleged biological differences and societal expectations of gender roles (Huppatz & Goodwin, 2013; McDowell, 2015). This plays out in the workforce, where certain roles are seen to be more suitable to stereotypical characteristics of men (assertive, competitive, aggressive, rational) or women (supportive, people-focused, caring, empathic) (McDowell, 2015; Meeussen et al., 2020; Pullen & Simpson, 2009). A job is classified as feminised (female dominated) when more then 70% of staff are women and this is common in education, nursing, caring roles and yoga teaching (Huppatz & Goodwin, 2013; Pullen & Simpson, 2009; Simpson, 2004; Vergeer et al., 2018). One's occupation is a large part of one's identity and there is increasing gender diversity in occupations traditionally associated with gender stereotypes (McDowell, 2015). Whilst recent research has primarily focused on women in jobs dominated by men, there is a lot less research on men in jobs dominated by

women, possibly due to an increased focus on women's issues in gender studies (McDowell, 2015; Meeussen et al., 2020; Simpson, 2004).

There is growing evidence that men face more stigma for working in feminine domains such as healthcare and education, despite more flexible attitudes in society, to women working in more masculine domains (Bhana & Moosa, 2016; Meeussen et al., 2020; Meeussen et al., 2019; Moss-Racusin et al., 2022). Research suggests men's masculinity comes under scrutiny and can be challenged when they enter feminised occupations and men's responses to this often involve reinforcing their masculinity by emphasising careerist motives or retitling their position to 'manager' or 'business owner', which are more aligned with masculine associations (Lupton, 2006).

On the other hand, 'the glass elevator' has still been shown to exist, where men are more likely to be promoted to senior positions over women with the same experience and qualifications (Turkmen & Eskin Bacaksiz, 2021). Men in feminised jobs can enact alternative masculinities by embracing feminised behaviours such as nurturing and caring roles, which is a challenge to HM, however these men can often feel judged and face backlash (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Lupton, 2000; Pullen & Simpson, 2009). For example, studies show male primary school teachers faced high levels of stigma from families and friends for taking on a nurturing, predominantly female role, where their sexuality was questioned, and this was negotiated by reinforcing masculine activities such as playing or coaching sports or enforcing discipline to appear as 'real men' (Bhana & Moosa, 2016; Cushman, 2005; Mills et al., 2004; Palmer et al., 2020). Research also suggests this is done to avoid being seen as a sexual predator towards children and protect one's reputation, however this positioning perpetuates and reinforces HM in the workforce (Bhana & Moosa, 2016; Cruickshank et al., 2020; Mills et al., 2004).

In understanding the implications for men's non-traditional career choice on gender identity, Simpson's (2004) research focused on how friends and family, reacted to men's career choices, as well as strangers. When asked what a typical example of someone in their profession looked like, the men generally described a woman. This brought up discussions of incongruencies with their self-identity which they solved by recasting their job through emphasizing their masculine characteristics to others. The questions brought up interesting discussions around stigma and judgement from others and a need to assert their masculinity. However, it also brought up discussions of women being impressed with the men's caring role and the satisfaction they got from their work. Additionally, Parker (2020) found that male yoga teachers in New Zealand faced resistance from others because they embodied alternative forms of masculinity such as kindness and non-violence which is counter to stereotypical, precarious forms of manhood (Meeussen et al., 2020). These past studies suggests it is difficult for men to construct their identity as traditionally masculine when doing feminised work, and challenging society's perceptions of masculinity by having a feminised occupation, can often result in negative reactions from others.

Moreover, masculinity can become more visible when it is challenged, and this becomes evident for researchers when men enter traditionally feminine jobs and embrace stereotypically feminine qualities in order to fit in with the dominant discourse of their work environment (Lupton, 2000; McDowell, 2015). For example, male nurses have been found to embrace a non-hegemonic identity which aligned with the workplace context predominantly consisting of female nurses (McDowell, 2015). This is an example of where gendered norms can be undone by moving away from society's constructs of what it means to be 'normal' and instead, participate in 'feminised' behaviours to reinforce one's nurse role and identity (Butler, 2006). However, there is still less research on men who work in

'women's jobs' and how they navigate society's expectations of them, compared to research on women (McDowell, 2015). Yoga teaching is an occupation that is predominantly conducted by women in the West, so in this study it would be valuable to investigate how yoga teachers who are men, construct their identity and masculinity in a feminised role, as there is little research in this area. Understanding male yoga teachers' experiences in a feminised environment also requires us to address recent events that have arisen in the public eye regarding prominent male yoga teachers, sexual allegations and the #MeToo movement which I will discuss next.

Male Yoga Teachers and the #MeToo Movement

Yoga is often presented as a tool for healing, to help support survivors of trauma and to create a space for connection, empowerment and strengthen resilience for mental health (English et al., 2022; Rousseau et al., 2019). Trauma informed yoga is now an important part of yoga teacher training and valued in the yoga space (Rousseau et al., 2019). Whilst yoga is a tool for holistic wellbeing and can be a way for people to find a sense of community, connection and spiritual guidance from a significant teacher (also known as a guru), it has the potential to be harmful. In recent times, the #MeToo movement has brought to light how the yoga scene can foster sexual assault, trafficking, sexual misconduct and trauma, similar to sports, politics, business and in society (Rousseau et al., 2019).

The #MeToo movement arose in 2006 with Tarana Burke, who brought a voice to racial and ethnic minority women and marginalised communities (Waling, 2019b). In 2017 a social media movement started with the hashtag #MeToo by actress Alyssa Milano who shared her experiences with convicted sexual predator Harvey Weinstein (Waling, 2019b). This movement has resulted in renewed discussion around the various forms of sexual

violence, which includes certain grey areas of coercive sexuality and sexual violence, such as unwanted sexual comments, contact, touch, coercion and pressuring, where one person has not given consent (Gavey, 2019; Maricourt & Burrell, 2021; Pickens, 2021).

In Matthew Remski's (2019) book, 'Practice and All Is Coming: Abuse, Cult Dynamics and Healing in Yoga and Beyond', he tells the stories of women assaulted by Ashtanga guru Pattabhi Jois and other well-known teachers, as well as the history of contemporary yoga and the risks of adopting it as a lineage which normalises cult-like dynamics. Other prominent gurus who have been accused of sexual misconduct and assault include Bikram Choudry who founded Bikram yoga, John Friend founder of Anusara yoga, Kausthub Desikachar grandson of Krishnamacharya, Swami Satchidananda, Paramahansa Yogananda, Sathya Sai Baba, Swami Muktananda, Amrit Desai, Osho, Rodney Yee, Manouso Manos and many more (Black, 2020; Lucia, 2018; Remski, 2019).

Flood's (2019) research on men's responses to the #MeToo movement highlighted the difficulty some men reported in being able to respond to it appropriately. In Flood's research, some men were reported to have framed the #MeToo movement as exaggerated and that men were unfairly accused of inappropriate behaviour. In fact, many men have been found to hold beliefs that the #MeToo movement has resulted in an increase in false allegations by vengeful women, unfairly accusing men of sexual assault, and that many women exaggerate claims against men to prove their case (Banet-Weiser, 2021; Lisak et al., 2010). These men were said to feel victimised and had to tread carefully around women, claiming the 'real' threat is men being automatically and unfairly accused of being a sexual predator in interactions with women, because of the few sexual deviants who have gained attention, when the majority of men are good (Banet-Weiser, 2021; Maricourt & Burrell, 2021). Focusing on men as perpetrators has resulted in backlash including claims the

#MeToo movement has gone too far and that violence against women is the problem of other men who are perpetrators and not all men (resulting in the #NotAllMen hashtag) (Maricourt & Burrell, 2021).

However, the #MeToo movement offers a potential challenge to HM, by asking all men to listen to women's stories of victimisation and change their behaviour (Flood, 2019). Moreover the #MeToo movement has sensitised men to women's experiences of sexual violence and resulted in shifts in men's behaviours such as patriarchal ways of dating, flirting and interacting (Maricourt & Burrell, 2021). For example, many men have shown solidarity with female victims of gender-based violence by actively fighting against gender disparities and sexual violence, as has been seen in the online #MeToo movement (Nazareno et al., 2022; Rios-Gonzalez et al., 2024). However, men can also experience isolation when they act against aggressive and dominant masculinities, as misogynistic men tend to find comfort in male only spaces where they will not be challenged and can ostracise these pro-feminist men (Ramon et al., 2013).

New Alternative Masculinities (NAM) has been used to describe men showing solidarity with victims and intervening as proactive allies, whilst displaying the strength and courage to stand up against misogynistic men (Aubert & Flecha, 2021; Nazareno et al., 2022; Ramon et al., 2013). Moreover, NAM have worked to combat and reject these misogynistic masculinities by acting in solidarity with women in eliminating non-consensual interactions and gender based violence (Aubert & Flecha, 2021; Nazareno et al., 2022; Ramon et al., 2013; Rios-González et al., 2021).

Relevance and Importance of the Research

In summary, masculinity framed interventions for encouraging help-seeking are most effective when targeting specific sub groups of men, as their needs may be different to the dominant group (Gough & Novikova, 2020). With men suffering from high levels of depression and suicide, it is important we find ways to support their mental well-being. Yoga with its wide ranging, holistic benefits to mental and physical health is an important therapeutic tool for men. Unfortunately, men face stigma and barriers to attending yoga, which research shows is mainly due to traditional masculine stereotypes and the perception that yoga is feminine (Cagas et al., 2020, 2021; McIver et al., 2022).

Based on the analysis of the past literature, it is evident a gap exists on male yoga teachers, as most studies involving men and yoga typically concentrate on yoga students or participants engaged in short-term research interventions (Capon et al., 2019). Male yoga teachers are unique in that they engage in a practice that is dominated by women in the West, and is considered by many as a feminine activity (Cagas et al., 2021; Parker, 2020; Vergeer et al., 2018). Understanding and addressing the needs of under-represented men such as yoga teachers, may provide fresh insights into how to reduce stigma for other men's engagement in yoga (Isacco, 2015). These insights may be helpful in supporting diverse men and finding new ways to reduce potential barriers to yoga participation, feminised activities, alternative therapeutic modalities, and to gain a deeper understanding of men's experiences in feminised roles.

Furthermore, by exploring the impact of yoga engagement on men's mental and physical wellbeing, and by understanding how teachers have overcome societal stigma and the discourses that enable and constrain masculinity, we may discover novel ways to design

interventions to support a variety of men. Understanding how yoga teachers perceive their masculinity and how this impacts their experiences, would add to our understanding of how to support men whose practices and worldviews may diverge from traditional masculinities. This research has the potential to inform future interventions for men seeking alternative mental health support, which may have positive effects on men's wellbeing, relationships and society as a whole.

Research Questions

To gain a deeper understanding of the barriers men face to practising yoga, it is valuable to explore the experiences of an under researched group of men, such as yoga teachers. Therefore, the overarching research question will ask:

What are the experiences of yoga teachers who are men, in regard to the facilitators and barriers to their yoga practice and positionality as a man in this occupation?

Chapter 3 – Methodology

This chapter provides an outline of my critical, qualitative interview project, including its methodology, research design, analysis and practical considerations. This research takes a broadly critical, exploratory approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2021b; Braun & Clarke, 2022), investigating male yoga teachers' experiences in the 'feminised' environment of yoga. Rather than being experiential, this critical orientation accounts for the men's experiences in light of masculinities and yoga, which is done by critically interrogating patterns in the men's language, using semi-structured interviews and an inductive approach to coding with reflexive thematic analysis, which is suited to a constructionist epistemology in an understudied topic (Terry et al., 2017). The benefit of qualitative research using semi-structured interviews is that it allows for deep reflection and unique perspectives that may not arise through quantitative research such as surveys and questionnaires (Pittius, 2014).

Theoretical Perspectives

In this section I will describe the rationale for my critical approach and the theoretical underpinnings that informed my choice of reflexive thematic analysis. A critical perspective looks at the way social systems construct meaning and offers further insights beyond those expressed by participants (Byrne, 2021). Critical orientations theoretically understand that language helps to create, rather than reflect our reality and looks to investigate common patterns of meaning, whilst also respecting that experiences, thoughts and the feelings of the person are reproduced subjectively and interactionally through the wider social context (Braun & Clarke, 2014a; Byrne, 2021; Terry et al., 2017).

Critical Qualitative Research

The majority of previous research on yoga in clinical and health psychology has employed quantitative research methods, focusing on particular physical or psychological factors within specific groups (Kidd & Eatough, 2017). While this research is useful for explaining phenomena using statistical data, research on the personal experiences of men teaching and practising yoga is lacking. Qualitative enquiry is a complementary approach to quantitative enquiry as it can address some of the harder to measure complex constructs of masculinity and can enhance our concepts of masculine ideology (Isacco, 2015). Qualitative studies are useful for giving a voice to marginalised men to examine the complex masculinities that can differ between groups (Isacco, 2015). Past studies support the use of qualitative methodologies including semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis as an effective way to understand men's experiences teaching and practising yoga (Park et al., 2015). For example, in a systematic review looking at factors affecting yoga practice, Park et al. (2015) recommend future research should use more qualitative methods with less dichotomous questioning.

Open-ended questions are ideal for exploring masculine ideology as it is a complex and changing construct that develops with the times (Isacco, 2015), and this flexibility can help us understand the sometimes messy and contradictory experiences of individuals and discover things we had not initially expected (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The rigour of qualitative research is not based on its validity, reliability or generalisability like quantitative research, but rather its credibility, in that the interpretation a researcher makes represents a plausible explanation (Burr, 2015). Therefore, relevance and resonance are prioritised over quantitative measures of rigour, as a criterion for assessing the quality of an inquiry

where the research aims, theoretical and methodological assumptions and method all work together (Braun & Clarke, 2021b; Yilmaz, 2013). Qualitative research is useful when attempting to gain first-hand knowledge of a topic with limited resources (Neergaard et al., 2009). Given that the concept of masculinity in male yoga teachers has not been fully explored, and this research attempts to more fully understand the experiences of men, a qualitative approach appears fitting (Fazli Khalaf et al., 2013; Isacco, 2015).

Ontology

According to Braun and Clarke (2022), relativism is an ontological position that conceptualises reality produced through people's interactions, and is what this research is grounded on. Taking a relativist position means arguing that there is not a true, singular reality out there and accessible through our observations. Within relativism, multiple realities are acknowledged so the key is not to find which assumption is objectively true, but rather which is the best fit to the phenomenon being studied (Yilmaz, 2013). Further, according to Guba (1981), much of qualitative research is based on the belief that there are multiple realities that will diverge rather than converge as we understand more about the phenomenon. Research taking a relativist perspective, is invested in the consequences of meaning making, rather than trying to find a singular truth within the data to make claims about a universal reality. Knowledge is contextual and produced in our relationships and will vary between people, contexts and timeframes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This ontology aligns with critical frameworks for understanding masculinity, that see it as both the producer and product of social structures, rather than a set of characteristics that one possesses and can be objectively measured (Connell, 2005; Walker & Roberts, 2018).

Epistemology

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge and gives context to the research design and the assumptions one makes (Crotty, 1998). Epistemology is often conceptualised at the start of the research but can be revisited during data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology sees knowledge as socially constructed where meaning is created through exchanges between people and their interpretations as they engage with the world (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1985). Those drawing on constructionist epistemologies argue that what we know of the world is not a true reflection of reality or truth, but rather a continually produced construction of societal discourses and meaning making, that reflect current knowledges and are subject to change as our knowledge evolves (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Gergen, 2015). Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest a relativist ontology aligns well with a constructionist epistemology as knowledge is produced by our understanding of the world and how we justify this through claims of knowledge and our interpretations. Theoretical assumptions lie on a continuum and constructionism acknowledges that there is a bi-directional relationship between language and experience (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This approach also asserts that within research, knowledge is co-constructed between the researcher and participants in a collaborative, reflexive process (Yilmaz, 2013). Constructionism emphasises that our culture, use of language and relationships influence the way we view the world, including the construction of masculinities (Gergen, 2015; Potter & Robles, 2022). For example, pro-feminist scholar Levant (1996) states there is no single masculinity, rather multiple masculinities based on our social constructions of class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, upbringing, etc (Connell, 2005, 2009). Rather than a set of characteristics that can be measured to find the extent of

masculinity one possesses, masculinities are sets of social practices that men move between in different contexts and between different relationships (Walker & Roberts, 2018).

Contemporary forms of masculinity can work to reproduce sexual, gender, race and power inequalities whilst also masking them (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). Whilst societal constraints in masculinity are evolving, these shifts have maintained existing systems of power evidenced in the flexibility privileged groups can afford, such as heterosexual, white men, whilst withholding privileges to outside groups (Anderson, 2009; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). Qualitative enquiry using a constructionist lens can allow the deconstruction and analysis of ideologies of masculinity, whilst working to unpick harmful gender norms and create more equality between the researcher and participant (Gergen et al., 2015; Isacco, 2015). This epistemological standpoint aligns with the purpose of this research, which looks at how the men experience their masculinity, through their social interactions and knowledge, and how this has impacted on their engagement in yoga, with the flexibility to uncover new understandings of these men's masculine identity (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The Study

In this study I conducted individual, semi-structured interviews with 15 yoga teaching men in Australia and New Zealand to capture rich qualitative data of the men's experiences in line with a social constructionist perspective. I treated the interviews as a form of meaning making and social exchange between myself and the participant and analysed the way men constructed their masculinity through their relationality, sense of identity and experiences in the yoga world.

Saturation and Sample Size

Saturation is not consistent with the values of reflexive thematic analysis because meaning is generated through the researcher's interpretation of the data and therefore judgements on when to stop analysis is subjective (Braun & Clarke, 2021c). Adequate sampling size does not depend on the sample number, but on the quality of information, so that it is sufficient in providing rich data of the phenomenon (Levitt et al., 2017). It is suggested 6-15 interviews are sufficient for a small project such as a masters or unpublished dissertation, assuming it is a homogenous group and rich in data (Braun et al., 2018; Guest et al., 2006; Terry et al., 2017). A range of 5-50 participants is common in qualitative research with it depending on factors such as data quality, scope of study, method and study design (Dworkin, 2012; Guest et al., 2006). In similar qualitative research on yoga participants with in-depth interviews, sample sizes ranged from 5-21 (Bevis et al., 2018; Kidd & Eatough, 2017; Kishida et al., 2018; McIver et al., 2022; Spadola et al., 2020). By ensuring my participants come from similar demographics and cultural backgrounds (New Zealand and Australia) it will ensure characteristics are fairly homogenous, to allow for a richer dataset (Guest et al., 2006).

In terms of sample size in qualitative research, Malterud et al. (2016) discuss 'information power' as a tool for estimating a good sample size, as opposed to power calculations which determine sample size (N) in quantitative research. They discuss how to decide this, based on whether the study aim is narrow or broad, so that a broader study aim requires a bigger sample as the phenomenon of interest is wider. Specificity of the target group also has an impact, as participants holding specific characteristics in a small subgroup require a lower sample. Past research on the subject, and supporting theories, also provide

more information power and specificity. The quality of the interview determines information power, as unclear communication between researcher and participant can result in ambiguous dialogue. An interviewer who has more experience on the subject will be able to ask relevant questions. As I have many years of experience teaching yoga, and will be targeting a small, unique, subgroup of men around a very specific topic, this research question should have high information power and a smaller sample size was deemed adequate.

Recruitment

In similar research on men, the authors recruited potential participants through friends and colleagues, and this was found to be advantageous as men generally do not choose to participate in research voluntarily (Cagas et al., 2021; Simpson, 2004). Purposive sampling is important for studying a small group to obtain detailed information and gain an in depth understanding of their experiences and the topic (Yilmaz, 2013). Therefore, in my research, participants were recruited through my yoga connections and from registered yoga websites such as Yoga Australia and Yoga New Zealand as well as the New Zealand and Australian Yoga Teacher Facebook groups (Yoga Australia, n.d.; Yoga New Zealand, n.d.; Yoga Teachers New Zealand, n.d.). Snowball sampling where men recommended other men, was also used to identify any more yoga teachers available for an interview. The criteria for the participants can be found in table 1:

Table 1

Eligibility Criteria for Participants

Criteria
Identifies as a man
Over 18 years old.
Has taught yoga for at least one year.
Has completed a minimum of a 200-hour yoga teacher training
Available for a 30–90-minute Zoom or Skype call.
From Australia or New Zealand

Identifying as a man is subject to one's gender identity and shaped by the social construction of gender. Adhering to my epistemological standpoint of constructionism, this means anyone who identified as a man, is suitable. Being non-binary or gender fluid would not be suitable as this research specifically asks questions around men's experiences of their masculinity and gender identity. Being aged over 18 is important as adolescents will have different experiences to men as they come to terms with their masculinity. A minimum of a 200-hour yoga teacher training was deemed necessary as this is the minimum requirement to be registered as a provisional or foundational teacher with Yoga Australia, Yoga New Zealand and Yoga Alliance (Yoga Alliance International Official, n.d.; Yoga Australia, n.d.; Yoga New Zealand, n.d.). To ensure teachers had enough experience it was decided they needed to have been teaching for at least one year, as very new teachers will have less exposure to the realities of teaching.

Participants

Participants were recruited between October-December 2023. A flyer was created (see appendix A) and sent to yoga associations to share on their Facebook page, as well as E-mailed to yoga teachers through my yoga community connections. Participants opted in by contacting me directly using the contact information on the flyer. Once a potential participant had confirmed they would like to participate, an information sheet, demographics form and an informed consent form were sent (see appendix B). Participant demographics were obtained to ascertain eligibility and included their age, ethnicity, country of origin, location, length of teaching yoga, length of practising yoga, style of yoga teaching as well as the usual ratio of men to women in their classes.

Once they had responded with the completed forms, a convenient time was organised to interview. In exchange for their time, a $30AUD (approximately $32NZD) supermarket gift card was offered as compensation for their time and to promote inclusivity without being large enough to incentivise participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013). A total of 15 men were interviewed due to the amount of funding available and time constraints on a first come basis. However, 25 men contacted the researcher suggesting this was an important topic that male yoga teachers were open to discussing. Interviews ranged between 45- 90 minutes and the average length of the interviews was about 60 minutes.

Videoconferencing Software

Interviews were conducted either as a video call or audio call depending on the situation and the participants' preferences, because this was practical for interviewing men across Australia and New Zealand. Zoom videoconferencing software was initially decided upon as this has been shown to be more satisfactory then comparable interview methods

such as face-to-face or via telephone because it is easy to use, cost-effective and has high security and data management (Archibald et al., 2019). Skype was added as an option later, because it is free and does not have a time limit, whereas Zoom's free account has a 40-minute limit which resulted in having to schedule another meeting with three of the participants.

Previous research has found that challenges with videoconferencing software include establishing rapport and observing subtler body language and visual cues, which may be especially important when discussing sensitive topics (Alkhateeb, 2018; Gray et al., 2020; Khan & MacEachen, 2022). However, the accessibility, low cost, flexibility and efficiency also allows for enhanced communication to discuss personal topics. Additional benefits include not having to travel for an interview, being able to conduct it at a convenient space and time for the participant and also making it safer for the female interviewer, when interviewing male strangers (Khan & MacEachen, 2022). If the interview was conducted through video-call, only the audio recording was used to transcribe the data, and the video recording was deleted immediately post-interview.

Pilot Interview

A pilot interview was conducted to test the interview questions. One male yoga teacher, a friend of mine, went through the same process as the participants would. The interview was conducted via Zoom, transcribed using Otter.ai software and discussed with my two supervisors. After this initial interview, the questions were adjusted slightly to facilitate focused answers. Allowing more time to expand on answers and probe a little deeper into participant's experiences was also recommended by my supervisors.

Interview Process

I began by introducing myself and giving a brief overview of my research and then started with my opening question. Active listening during the interview included nodding and affirming sounds such as ‘yes’ and “uh huh”, and repeating what I heard them say or asking them to elaborate further on interesting, underdeveloped topics. I kept input to a minimum to avoid influencing their discussion and the semi-structured nature of the interview meant whilst I was guided by my questions, I also went deeper on topics that were important to the participant. The first interview was listened to by my supervisors, and they gave feedback for improving my open-ended interview style. After one particularly difficult interview, a debrief was conducted with my supervisors and advice about how best to proceed in the future was offered.

Interview Questions

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as they offer flexibility with broad topics and a sense of direction, but also the chance for participants to explore important topics through conversation which can uncover novel information (Galletta, 2013). Open-ended questions allow for deep reflections and the generation of ideas, whilst further prompting can encourage elaboration and clarification. Such open-ended questions are useful for obtaining information from participants' individual perspectives with less influence from the researcher (Yilmaz, 2013). Whilst the research questions were used as a guide during the interviews and literature research, new ideas, questions and themes developed and evolved during the data collection and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2014a). Percy et al. (2015) suggest that when the researcher has a pre-understanding of the topic and aims to comprehensively

describe it from the participants' perspective, semi-structured interviews are recommended.

My interview schedule was designed to cover key aspects and language informed by the literature review. This included questions based on previously mentioned research on men, yoga engagement, health behaviours and masculinity by Fazli Khalaf et al. (2013), Cagas et al. (2021); McIver et al. (2022); Seidler et al. (2018); Simpson (2004) and Sloan et al. (2010). My opening question began with *"Why were you initially drawn to yoga?"* to open up the discussion. Galletta (2013) recommends that the opening question is broad and the most open-ended, to establish a level of comfort and allow the participant to speak from their experience. During the interview I listened carefully and probed when necessary to ensure the narrative was clear and noted any junctures in the story that needed further investigation (Galletta, 2013). The final part of the interview focused on revisiting data that came from earlier questions if further clarification was needed or a particular theme related to the topic needed to be explored. I finished with the closing question 'is there anything else you would like to say or comment on that I have not asked about?' which was helpful in ending the interview with the participant in control of any final words or thoughts and also to give a sense of control over the subject matter to participants (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001). Questions related to #MeToo and sexual misconduct in the yoga scene were not in the schedule but often brought up by the men at this stage. Please see appendix C for the full interview schedule.

Ethics

The Massey University code of ethical conduct for research, teaching and evaluations involving human participants (2017) and Te Ara Tika Guidelines for Māori

research ethics (Hudson, 2010) were used as a guide to design and conduct my research. As a student of Massey University, it was important that this research acknowledged and honoured Te Tiriti o Waitangi's principles of partnership, participation and protection, which was applied to this research by keeping participants' privacy safe, respecting their autonomy and also being aware of the need to honour Māori tikanga (customs and protocols) if any of my participants were Māori (Hudson, 2010; Waitangi Tribunal, 2016).

I gained informed consent by providing enough information about the research with the potential risks and benefits involved in a flyer initially, followed by a more in-depth information sheet. The participants had the option to remove themselves from the research at any time or stop answering questions during the interview and I ensured there was no coercion involved through the opt-in process of recruitment. If a potential participant did not respond after first contact, they were not contacted again, to ensure autonomy and the freedom to easily withdraw. They were informed of how the data was stored securely and used and were offered a copy of the transcript for review before analysis. All identifying information was removed from the transcripts, and confidential data was shared with only my two supervisors on a password protected hard drive (Butler-Kisber, 2018). The study was screened for high-risk ethical considerations using the Massey University Human ethics screening tool and due to the nature of the project and process, was categorised as "low risk" and therefore the project was lodged as such, using the low-risk notification process. Additionally, as previously mentioned, the whole process was screened through a pilot interview with a male yoga teacher and refined accordingly.

Data Storage

The audio data was immediately transcribed using a password protected Otter.ai account that only my supervisors and I had access to. The transcription was edited manually into intelligent verbatim (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I replaced participants' names with pseudonyms and anonymised any identifying features. All files were backed up on a private password protected Drop Box and One Drive account that I owned. After the interviews were transcribed, only the audio and transcripts were kept as a backup. At five years post completion of the thesis, all audio files and transcripts will be destroyed permanently.

Analysis

Thematic Analysis

A critical approach to understanding the data generates patterns and themes of meaning by understanding that language creates one's reality rather than simply reflecting it (Byrne, 2021; Terry et al., 2017). The researcher acknowledges these meanings, whilst also respecting that experiences, thoughts and feelings of the person are reproduced subjectively and interactionally through the wider social context (Braun & Clarke, 2014a; Byrne, 2021). Thematic analysis (TA) is an umbrella term for a group of similar methods used for analysing qualitative data and is not a methodology, ontological or epistemological framework or a theoretical position (Braun & Clarke, 2013). TA is suited to various forms of qualitative research such as surveys, interviews, focus groups and textual data, which makes it useful in exploring men's experiences. It is particularly suited to a constructionist perspective when the researcher takes a bidirectional understanding of language as part of the production of experience and meaning (Byrne, 2021). It brings attention to the constructive role language plays in creating meaning by finding patterns of language known

as themes (Braun & Clarke, 2014a). Participants may also express issues with different levels of intensity, which helps the researcher decide what is more meaningful. By using a constructionist epistemology, the researcher acknowledges that reoccurrence of themes is important but also that the meaningfulness constructed by participant and researcher is important in the coding process (Byrne, 2021). Data is co-constructed between participant and researcher in a reflexive process, which is key for quality control (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The researcher interprets how the person's words create their particular reality, rather than simply mirroring a reality that is out there to be discovered (Terry et al., 2017).

Reflexive TA

One version of TA, called reflexive TA, is focused on identifying patterns of meaning (themes) through Big Q analytic methods using non-positivist frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2021a, 2023). Big Q refers to a qualitative approach with theoretical flexibility and independence where analysis is creative. This is set in contrast to small q orientations that retain a positivist stance focused through elements such as coding reliability (Terry et al., 2017). Although there is no strict qualitative paradigm from which it comes, the Big Q approach is suited to a wide range of theoretical frameworks including a social constructionist perspective, as it sees researcher subjectivity as a resource and themes and meanings as contextually situated (Braun et al., 2018).

Reflexive TA can be used in different frameworks to address questions such as people's experiences and perceptions of a topic. The researcher plays an active role in interpreting patterns of meaning and knowledge production to gain rich understandings of the topic (Braun et al., 2018; Byrne, 2021; Percy et al., 2015). As reflexive thematic analysis is a relatively easy to learn qualitative analysis, and is not committed to one theoretical approach, it is useful for those not experienced in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke,

2014b). It has a set of clearly defined phases and doesn't rely on microanalysis, or technical knowledge of language and can be used to analyse most forms of small and large data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2014a). Reflexive TA is not a strictly linear process but can move back and forth between several phases which include data familiarisation, coding, theme development and revision as outlined below (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017).

The following six phases of reflexive thematic analysis are outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013); Braun and Clarke (2014a); Braun and Clarke (2021a); Percy et al. (2015); Terry et al. (2017).

1. ***Getting familiar with the data*.** This is the foundation of good analysis and is the first opportunity to actively engage with the dataset. I transcribed, read and re-read the interviews whilst taking notes and writing down initial thoughts and future avenues to explore. I also noted any patterns in the data whilst keeping the research question in mind and a reflexivity journal.
2. ***Creating codes.*** Here I immersed myself in the data and coded the interesting parts to create the building blocks of the data set. Coding was done organically, and evolved as I came to understand the data through an inductive approach. I often re-read the transcripts and tagged any data relevant to the research question using a sentence to describe the meaning of that piece. Only meaningful sections were coded to capture the essence of the data so I did not have to re-read the interview. This way I reduced and organised the data which was very helpful later on in theme development.
3. ***Constructing candidate themes.*** This involved organising codes into groups (themes) of commonality and overlap and collecting all the relevant data around each theme. A theme consisted of a central organising concept that told a story in relation to the other themes

and research question. This phase ended with a thematic map using Miro software which represented the relationship between codes and themes figuratively.

4. ***Reviewing and developing themes.*** This involved checking if the themes aligned with the data to determine good fit. When they worked together, the themes were reviewed across the dataset and in relation to the research question. It was important here not to confuse the questions as themes, but to look for patterns across the dataset and this meant some themes were discarded and others created. Saliency is more important than frequency when creating meaningful themes which relate to the research question. This phase was finalised with a definitive set of themes.
5. ***Naming the themes.*** I outlined the definitions of each theme, and analysed and refined each theme so that it told a coherent story about the data. The theme names captured the central concept or essence of the theme. This was followed by revisiting any data that didn't fit the first categories to see if any more themes could contribute to new understandings, using supporting arguments.
6. ***The final report.*** This was my last chance to analyse the extracts of data, find good examples, connect the analysis back to the research aims and questions, and write up a summary of the themes. This phase also occurred during analysis, and provided a clear, compelling story.

Inductive Analysis

Inductive analysis tends to be aligned with a constructivist approach, where themes are developed from the codes and are not anticipated or planned, but are an outcome of the analysis, being subjective to the communication of the participant and the interpretation of the researcher (Byrne, 2021; Terry et al., 2017). This is an organic, flexible process and will develop more depth with repeated engagement with the data (Terry et al.,

2017). It doesn't assume the researcher is free of preconceived ideas, as this will come from the literature research, the theoretical frameworks, intersection of the data and the researcher's skills and experience (Terry et al., 2017). However, it means the data will not be scrutinised for pre-planned themes or codes, and themes will not simply 'emerge' from the data, waiting to be found, as is often stated in research citing Braun and Clarke's (2006) first popular paper on TA (Braun & Clarke, 2021b; Braun et al., 2018; Terry et al., 2017). As the analysis is subjective and interpreted by the author, codes cannot be right or wrong but rather they will be stronger or weaker and quality is driven by depth of engagement (Terry et al., 2017). My orientation to coding was through an inductive approach, where I worked from the foundation of the data, analysing it 'bottom-up' to develop codes and find themes and meanings from the participants' interviews staying close to the data (Braun et al., 2018; Terry et al., 2017).

Coding

Semantic coding is the level at which meaning is coded for and is explicit, remaining close to the surface and the participants' language (Braun et al., 2018). This is not to say that it is superficial or simply descriptive (Terry et al., 2017). However, the researcher does not go deeper than what the participant has said and this can be called descriptive analysis as it presents data in the same way as it has been communicated (Byrne, 2021). The alternative is latent codes, which go deeper and often look for hidden meanings and underlying assumptions and can often be quite abstract (Braun et al., 2018; Byrne, 2021). At the beginning stages of analysis and for those new to coding, it is often done at the semantic level, which I chose to start with, but can develop to latent level analysis as one becomes more experienced (Terry et al., 2017).

Data Analysis

I edited the transcription of each interview whilst listening to the audio and made notes when there were interesting points in the interview, such as when I noticed the teacher had made an assumption or was trying to make sense of an experience or an emotional topic had arisen. Whilst doing that I also maintained a reflexivity journal and recorded how I had felt about the interview and how I could have improved on my interviewing techniques for the next one. Several participants had requested a copy of the transcript before I could use it. I emailed it to them and provided two weeks to make any changes, which none of them requested.

I then immersed myself into the data by exporting the Otter.ai transcripts to Word documents and re-reading and editing each one. I removed minor speech hesitations, stutters and repeated words to aid readability and in some quotes, I cut out non-relevant parts using […] as a signifier. I also kept a separate Word document for each participant to summarise ideas related to the research questions and patterns across the dataset. This was the beginning of my familiarisation.

After re-reading all the interviews and feeling as if I had a good understanding of the data, I then created codes using the comments function in the Word document by highlighting important text and writing a code in the comment column. Following my supervisors' guidelines, I made sure not to be overly enthusiastic and create themes too early on by cherry picking out ideas to suit my preconceived notions, but rather stayed open minded and curious to what participants said (Terry et al., 2017).

Because I was using an inductive approach for this under researched topic, coding evolved from a semantic surface level and evolved to more latent codes as I discovered commonalities and understood the data more. For example, codes started on the semantic level staying close to the participants' words, such as "macho men don't like yoga", and as

time progressed, I was able to find points and commonalities that went to a more latent level as my understanding deepened, such as “yoga is seen as a feminine activity and a threat to some men’s masculinity”. At the end of this phase I had a total of 592 codes.

The next stage was to look at my codes using the Miro.com software to create a visual code board and start to cluster together shared ideas across the data to create patterns of meaning, based on the research question (Terry et al., 2017). Some codes were discarded, and others used more than once as they applied to different clusters. I colour coded each code according to the participant and was able to move the codes around on the board to cluster common ideas together. After reviewing the cluster of codes, I was able to find a common idea that encompassed the codes and wrote a few sentences to cover the central organising concept of each cluster. Some codes that captured the meaning of other codes were promoted to provisional themes, as a way of collapsing codes into a central organising concept (Terry et al., 2017). Each theme was distinctive and coherent so that it told a convincing story about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

I also had subthemes, where a larger theme was broken down into important aspects that had their own central organising concept. In the end I had about seven themes with subthemes and needed to reduce them down further. This was a very difficult process but I eventually minimised them down to three main themes that covered all the concepts. I did this by removing some ideas that did not translate across the data set and looked for overarching ones that did. I wrote a very short paragraph to describe the ideas in each theme in a simplified way. It was also important for me to avoid imposing my own set of assumptions and expectations on what to look for but rather, remain inductive and open to what was being said so that themes from the research stayed close to the data (Braun &

Clarke, 2019). Quality control focused on reviewing themes through reflection, reflexivity and a thorough and systematic approach, which I will now discuss below (Terry et al., 2017).

Reflexivity Interviewing Men

In promoting methodological integrity, Levitt et al. (2017) explain that to stay reflexive, it is important to stay transparent about how one's perspectives can influence the collection of data. Braun and Clarke (2019) suggest that in order to stay reflexive, a process of continuous self-awareness must occur throughout the research process. This includes questioning one's biases and assumptions whilst being open to alternative perspectives. Limiting one's influence by explaining one's position and how one's perspective may have impacted on the data is important (Levitt et al., 2017). Based on research by Sallee and Harris (2011), men tend to express themselves differently and be more mindful or avoid certain topics when interviewed by a woman compared to a man. This has methodological implications I was aware of, as my positionality as a woman researching men may have had an impact on their comfort level and responses, especially with regard to masculinity.

Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) suggest the interview can be a threat to some men as their personality and masculinity can be exposed as the interviewer controls the questions. In the study by Sallee and Harris (2011), some of the potential benefits were that some men did not emphasise masculine norms as much when describing masculinity to a female researcher, compared to a male researcher, where they exaggerated masculine behaviour. Pascoe (2012) also found young men would behave respectfully in one-to-one interactions but show sexist, aggressive, homophobic behaviours in their peer groups. In research by Sloan et al. (2010) they suggest men may be more open to talking about their masculinity when free from the opinions of other men, which may require them to exaggerate their masculine behaviours. Therefore, in my study, individual interviews were

conducted to create rapport and lower threat. I also stated my positionality as a yoga teacher in the information flyer; to show I was an insider and had a nuanced understanding of the topic and that I was interested in learning about men's perspectives without trying to get any specific answers from them. One-to-one interviews meant privacy was ensured for open discussion and provided a safe space for addressing unexpected topics (Galletta, 2013).

Another implication is that the participants may be answering in a way that replicates societal expectations of yoga teachers in order to fit a standard or identity (Potter & Robles, 2022). Being aware of how my questions may have led the participant to answer in a way that they believe they should, and being receptive and open to alternative answers, whilst being non-directive was important, so I did not seek to confirm my own perspectives. I found that the men were open to talking to me. Using broad, open-ended questions and non-leading language helped me to be non-directive, whilst allowing for uninhibited responses to emerge (Sallee & Harris, 2011).

I did find that some men may have minimised questions by giving very short answers and did not wish to elaborate, but I felt it was due to nervousness or a lack of insight in regard to that question. Some of the men may also have exaggerated rationality and control when accounting for their experiences. For example, one participant asked me why I would ask such a 'strange' question about masculinity. To lower the threat and give support for my question, I made a broad statement about the literature supporting my study and why I had asked that question. With this understanding and academic reasoning behind my questioning, he was much more open to discussing the topic of masculinity. In this way, by minimising threat and appealing to men's more rational, autonomous side, I accounted for the way gender enactments bias people's accounts and adjusted the interview accordingly

(Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001). Checking for clarity by asking participants what had not been asked, was also useful to enhance the quality of the research (Levitt et al., 2017).

Moreover, past research on men in feminised occupations suggests men who predominantly worked with women were used to communicating with women, where one interviewee said they would feel more threatened talking about personal subjects with a man (Pullen & Simpson, 2009; Simpson, 2004). Additionally, a woman's standpoint, which is influenced by her experience in marginalisation and gender dynamics, may provide a more sensitive and appropriate lens to investigate a sensitive subject with (Pullen & Simpson, 2009). Piloting the interview questions with a male yoga teacher friend was also useful to ensure the appropriate questions were asked (Bone, 2013). Finally, being aware of the latest developments in research and how my background and experiences may have impacted on my approach to the research and data analysis helped me to stay reflexive in my thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

From a constructionist perspective, the concept of researcher bias is not as relevant in reflexive TA, as objective knowledge is not possible and knowledge is generated through a collaborative process between researcher and participant (Braun & Clarke, 2021b). I journaled my thought processes as the interviewer, especially immediately after an interview to show how my interpretations had evolved and how my gender may have impacted on the interviewee (Butler-Kisber, 2018). Similar work by Cagas et al. (2021) also used a reflexive journal when doing qualitative interviews with men documenting the lead author’s position as a man. Transparency contributes to credibility as it allows the readers to clearly see the process from start to finish and can persuade them that the research is trustworthy (Butler-Kisber, 2018). Therefore, I thoroughly documented all my decision making so others could critically assess my work (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun et al., 2018).

In the next chapter I will report on my findings and interpretation of the data following Braun and Clarke's (2013) qualitative research recommendations. To do this, I combined the results with my discussion, which is then followed by a longer concluding discussion where I will summarise my results, evaluate my study and provide suggestions for future research.

Chapter 4 – Findings

This analysis investigated the male yoga teachers' experiences and perspectives teaching as men in what they described as the 'feminised' environment of Western yoga. Following Braun and Clarke's (2013) qualitative research recommendations, my process of analysis was done by combining my results with the discussion as I told a coherent story about the themes and across the data. I did this by threading literature through my analysis and connected my research questions back to the findings and discussion.

Three themes were identified that reflected the men's experiences in yoga: Theme 1: Men who do yoga must navigate the different expectations of alternative and dominant masculinities; Theme 2: "The fact that it's portrayed as a female orientated thing stops men from doing it"; and Theme 3: Male yoga teachers are very conscious of their masculinity in a feminised space. In the next section, each theme is elaborated on using illustrative quotes.

Participant Characteristics

Most of the participants identified as 'Caucasian' or of a white, European descent, besides one who was from Chile, one who was Caucasian/Burmese and another who was a 'blended' ethnicity from the United States. This was unintentional as I selected participants on a first come basis and they were self-selected, but was likely because of the high European, white populations in Australia and New Zealand (Environmental Health Intelligence New Zealand, 2018; O'Neill., 2024). Most of the men taught Ashtanga vinyasa or Hatha yoga, however a few taught other styles such as restorative, flow, power, seniors and yin yoga. Sexuality was not questioned because as an additional variable, this may have limited the participant sample and went beyond the focus of this research, however it was noted as a characteristic of a participant if mentioned. This choice was informed by past research on masculinity by Simpson (2004), who chose not to explore this sensitive topic as

it would require a deeper exploration into sexuality and went beyond the research question. Two of the participants explicitly stated they were gay, whilst more then 50% mentioned they were heterosexual in conversation during the interview. Four participants were living in New Zealand and 11 in Australia and their ages fell between 31 and 57 with the length of teaching yoga between 1.5–23 years and years practising yoga between 5–33 years. Table 2 below provides a list of the participants aged 31–57 with their associated pseudonyms and relevant demographic information.

Table 2

Male Yoga Teacher Demographics

Participant	Age	Years teaching yoga	Years practising yoga
Hayden	38	1.5	5
Richard	34	4	10
Keenan	38	4	10
Lee	31	5	7
Jonathan	55	5	33
Liam	40	6	8
Steve	54	7	28
Rowan	42	8	10
James	43	8	10
Wayne	47	10	22
Dave	47	12	25
Travis	41	15	20
Andre	57	19	28
Simon	42	20	25
Lukas	43	23	24

Note: Pseudonyms have been used to ensure teacher anonymity. Age has been included in quotes in brackets.

Theme 1. Men who do yoga must navigate the different expectations of alternative and dominant masculinities

Many of the teachers spoke about challenging societal stereotypes and embracing a unique and alternative masculine identity which they argued was made possible through the practices developed in yoga. They rejected many dominant masculine norms when comparing themselves to other men and in some ways, the masculine positions they described could be seen as counter-hegemonic, as they often described the practices of yoga as bringing about gender dissolution and the destruction of patriarchy.

For example, many described themselves as being “in touch with their feminine side” (Andre, 57) being quite comfortable showing ‘sensitivity’, embracing ‘softness’ and expressing their emotions in general. They said they felt comfortable being around women in a feminised occupation and environment and made comparisons to masculine stereotypes to position themselves as different. Some men used terms such as ‘macho’, ‘bloke’ and ‘alpha’ to describe traditional masculinities that are competitive, egotistical, and have a self-absorbed focus on building strength and looking muscular. Wayne (47) spoke to these issues explicitly:

> “Maybe I was attracted to the feminine energy, as well, in terms of that softness. And as I said, I was never really into the gym, and that sort of real masculine testosterone, or testosterone fuelled, sort of alpha approach to fitness and strength. So maybe it was just like, yeah, I prefer this because it's, it's less competitive. There's no real ego

stuff going on here. It's more just yeah, it's a softer approach. And it's something that I preferred.”

Similarly to Wayne, many of the men positioned yoga masculinities as more emotionally ‘open’ than traditional masculinities and this openness was seen as outside of social norms. Whilst comparing themselves to other men sometimes reinforced hegemonic ideals (Connell, 2009), the men spoke passionately about how yoga challenges traditional masculine norms to be stoic and tough as exemplified by Andre and Travis:

> “ The men that have made the effort to become spiritually evolved, you can notice it, you know, those men are not afraid to give you a hug, you know, a proper yogic hug, you know, they're not afraid to look at you in the eyes and speak with love and to be really, really open to dialogue, you know” (Andre, 57).

> “With most of my close male friends, like we ended conversations with "cool, love you man, talk to you later", you know, and we say that, and that’s seen as a weird thing” (Travis, 41).

In the excerpts above, the teachers described being emotionally ‘open’ whereas some men might be ‘afraid’ or believe it is ‘weird’ to express love. Many of the teachers also described how yoga encouraged non-competition, self-care, slowing down, stress-reduction, healing, and connecting to one’s inner self which contrasts to the qualities identified in HM (Connell, 2005; Elliott, 2020a). This all had a positive impact on the men and their relationships, which Andre emphasised helped him when going through a tough time in his life:

> "Because it influenced me and for the good and it made a massive change in how I felt emotionally and mentally and all of that" (57).

Rowan also spoke to how yoga helped him in many aspects of his life including his mental health:

> "It helps me with depression, and it helps me with anxiety. It also helps me with my stress, it helps me with my relationships, it helps me with my communication" (42).

Often the teachers argued that these aspects of yoga had changed their lives and made them 'better' men. In the past many discussed how they would have dealt with challenges through negative coping habits such as angry outbursts or substance abuse, but instead, yoga had helped them process life's challenges in a positive and healthy way. For example, Andre noted:

> "It was a really good thing for me to do it. It helped me find clarity. And it helped me strive to be healthier, and to be a better man, really, you know, it was something that I pretty much needed to do" (57).

However, for some of the men, adopting a yoga practice and lifestyle resulted in judgement or stigma from other men who felt threatened or uneasy with this new behaviour and lifestyle change. Rowan talked about how he used to engage in heavy drinking with his friends but since adopting a yoga practice, had far more control over his health and had changed his habits for the better. He argued that this was seen as threatening to his friends who were said to feel insecure about his behaviour changes because he was 'bettering' himself:

> ” Ah, look, I mean, the power of the herd is big, you know, to be questioned by a person, to show up differently in front of a person that you've always showed up one way in front of, and they expect you to, so you know, for me it was a lot of, you know, ‘Rowan is the crazy, Rowan is the crazy gym animal that can slam a million beers on the weekends and have a mad fucking time. He's a party animal’, you know? And so, to be known as that character, and then to be turning up and going, ‘yeah, just two or three beers for me tonight, guys and I'm out of here’, they would look at me like what? And so the psychology, my understanding is the psychology of a human is that okay, ‘well, if Rowan, if crazy old fucking Rowan has gone and changed his ways. Then that's calling […] If I [...] sitting here don't like anything about the way that I drink on the weekend, and I've just watched old crazy old Rowan go and change himself well fuck, I better man up and fucking change myself or better bring Rowan back into the pitfall’. So that, because otherwise ‘Rowan is going to look too good. You know, he's made the change. And I haven't. And I haven't been able to pull myself out of this pit of whatever, depression and anxiety’” (42).

Rowan making the change is a source of ‘competition’ for his friends who do not like to see him improving more than them, and this competition is associated with traditional masculine norms (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Harris III, 2008). This aligns with research by Lomas et al. (2016) who found men who engaged in eastern meditation practices often faced an identity conflict with traditional masculinity and experienced marginalisation from friends who were unsupportive of the behaviour changes these men made. Those men enacted alternative masculinities by expressing emotional vulnerability, kindness and a reduction of substance abuse, which could result in teasing and ostracisation from their

social groups still engaged in these behaviours. Rowan's reduction of alcohol intake and 'partying' also resulted in him being treated differently by his friends who were unsupportive of the changes he had made and thus he faced marginalisation from the group.

Similarly, Lee spoke to this and described how yoga masculinities are likened to 'gay' and 'feminised' masculinities, which contrasts to 'tradie culture' he positioned at the centre of Australian masculinity:

> "There's like the stigma, obviously, some, especially in Australia, that seems to be maybe because it's a very tradie culture. And it's not even a yoga thing. But it's more of like, if you're not doing what the rest of the guys are doing, it's going to be easy for people to like, make fun of you or rip on you or anything […] So it's like that in the culture with anything but then more so in a masculine dominated culture. If you're doing something that could be perceived as feminine, or like, you know, gay back in the day, that was more of like a thing that people would rip on each other about, it's like, would almost be a joke for someone to be doing yoga as a guy" (31).

Here we can see that yoga is an example of a less socially accepted activity because it deviates from the centre of masculine 'tradie' norms and is perceived as feminine or gay. In Rowan and Lee's excerpts above, straying from the centre of HM resulted in teasing and social exclusion from friends. Hayden also spoke to the 'sexism' in tradie culture in New Zealand and why many men will not do yoga because it is perceived as feminine:

> "The typical tradie attitude […] there's a lot of like racism and sexism and kind of homophobia and everything in those spaces" (38).

Many of the teachers positioned yoga masculinities as associated with 'gay' and 'feminised' qualities, outside of the centre of "masculine dominated culture" which ties into Elliott's (2020a) concept of open masculinity, outside of the closed, centre of hegemonic masculinity. This is similar to Connell's (2005) subordinated and marginalised masculinities and in both cases, these masculinities are positioned as being on the margin, alongside LGBTQIA+ people and 'alternative' masculinities. However, as a site of resistance and radical possibility, being at the margin can offer a new perspective to resist hegemony and imagine alternative new realities, which the teachers appeared to advocate for and embody (Elliott, 2020a; Hooks, 1989).

This can be seen in the discussion with Keenan, who engaged in a counter-hegemonic discourse to describe the positive qualities yoga can facilitate, but also how these qualities are not generally encouraged in men in our society:

> "Yoga is about non-competition, it's gentle, it's introverted, it's reflective. And these are not qualities that people think get them far in a society that rewards the more aggressive qualities within a person" (38).

Keenan, Lee and Rowan all spoke to how some traditional masculine qualities such as aggression and competition are rewarded in men, whereas the non-competitive qualities of yoga which have benefitted the men in many ways are not applauded in our society. Interestingly, some of the men appeared to make sense of their unique masculine identity by comparing themselves to what they were not. In this case, a closed, hegemonic type of masculinity associated with competitiveness and machoism was used (Wetherell & Edley, 2014). This was further elaborated on by Keenan:

> "It's so endlessly fascinating that the masculine energy which exists in both men and women […] it's really congratulated and applauded in our society, is this energy of the doer and the striver and the achiever and this sort of energy that's out there, not afraid to sort of step in front of somebody else to get one's own successes. I believe that that energy, and the competitive nature, I think that those energies, it's not just applicable to men, and I see it definitely in women, too, especially because the patriarchy sets it up that women often have to abide by certain characteristics to succeed within business or society, or to be taken seriously in some situations. And yoga is the complete antithesis of that" (38).

Comparable to the teachers in my study, Lomas et al. (2016) also found that men who adopted a meditation practice faced many challenges as they navigated the conflicting worlds of positive masculinity in their meditation community, with the wider social context that encourages traditionally masculine behaviours associated with more hegemonic norms. This stigma was also apparent in James' experience:

> "The group of friends that I kept in touch with from high school in my twenties and whatnot, were still very rugby and cricket oriented. I would say it's probably the easiest way to put it. And so they were like, 'What are you doing that for?' And [...] it's always I think the stigma itself is like a defence mechanism, particularly from the mainstream male. This is something I don't understand. So, I'm going to mock it" (43).

Both in James and Lee's narrative they describe men as 'mocking' and 'ripping' into other men who do yoga because they are deviating from traditionally masculine activities.

As described by James, activities considered ‘normal’ for men such as rugby and cricket are arguably in the ‘sports centre’ of HM (Elliott, 2020a; Messner, 2002; Messner et al., 2000). The sports ‘centre’ tends to be occupied by the wealthiest, most visible sports athletes and is a site of privilege and domination (Elliott, 2020a; Messner, 2002; Messner et al., 2000). Whilst many men do not occupy this sports centre, they are often complicit in its reproduction and maintenance as the hegemonic form of activity for men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This can also be looked at from the framework of closed and open masculinities, where straying away from this sports ‘centre’ can result in stigma and marginalisation (Elliott, 2020a). Hayden went further to describe how most men tend to stigmatise any activities considered feminine:

> ” Yeah. Like some of these guys are just like, not used to being in a space where there are more women, they basically like live in a masculine dominated world [...] So that's why they kind of like maybe put it down or it's kind of like anything, right, anything they don't understand. They kind of make a joke about it” (38).

Nevertheless, almost all the men said they were unconcerned about the potential social stigma for teaching yoga to mainly women, or for doing an activity viewed as feminine, and that being with groups of women had never impacted on their sense of masculine identity. In fact, most of the men had a strong sense of their own ‘masculine presence’ (Steve, 54), such as Lukas (43) who feels “extremely solid, extremely grounded, extremely strong” in his “masculine power” or Travis who also spoke to this:

> ”I've never felt the need to prove myself. I mean, there's definitely, there's been moments where, you know, I've had friends who run men's work, and they

broadcast and market themselves as much more manly men. And I'm kind of like, well, what does that even mean? I yeah, I don't know. I didn't, I guess I'm fortunate I've never had that ethos to deal with, of feeling like not masculine enough" (41).

In some ways the teachers showed they were unconcerned by traditional gender binaries by demonstrating a more egalitarian perspective, as described by Keenan:

"The yin yang of the masculine feminine energy within, both […] is necessary. You can't just exist within one constantly and be a whole human being" (38).

In other research, McDowell (2015) found male nurses also constructed their identity as similar to their female colleagues, rather than emphasising separation or difference. She suggests gender can be undone when men step away from societal expectations of masculinity. Similarly, work by Roberts (2018) demonstrated that the discourses drawn upon by young working class men around shared household duties with their partners were less reliant on traditional gender roles. He suggests the prospect of being feminised instils less fear among these men and that a more 'lived egalitarianism' and positive masculinity is emerging. The teachers' narratives in my research suggest yoga masculinities are more open-minded and not invested in traditional gender roles, showing a more positive and 'open' type of masculinity which moves away from closed hegemonic identities (Elliott, 2020b).

Whilst many of the teachers said they had a strong sense of their unique yoga masculinity, they distanced themselves from traditional men when discussing barriers to men's attendance in yoga. Many of the men's identities appeared to be reinforced by

dissociating from stereotypical masculinities such as a focus on strength building, instead aligning with more stereotypically feminine qualities such as slowing down and letting go. They tended to describe the typical ‘bloke’ as someone who would be uncomfortable doing yoga because it is seen as an easy, feminised activity:

> “I think there's always going to be that element in men's male culture of, you know, that kind of blokey like, ‘oh, that’s soft, I'm not going to do that. I'm just going to lift weights, and I'm going to build up my strength’” (Wayne, 47).

In similar research on men in Australia, Cagas et al. (2021) also found Australian ‘bloke’ culture, gender stereotypes, and yoga being perceived as feminine, were all cited as a barriers for non-yoga practising men’s engagement in yoga. Those men often described yoga as ‘easy’ and associated it with femininity. Hayden spoke to this explicitly when he described why men are often averse to doing yoga as it challenges their ego and masculinity:

> “It kind of tells you to strip away your ego, right? And most guys are very egotistical. So, telling you to strip away your ego, you're immediately going to become defensive and maybe push back against that. Yeah, and it's, it's like a practice of softening and releasing any kind of ideas about yourself and of others and, and sort of just being in this space. So yeah, I think it's very challenging for a lot of men. Which is funny, because they think it's like some, like really easy thing that is like, just for women” (38).

Many of the teachers described yoga similarly to Hayden, such as it being a ‘challenge’ for men, because it strips away the false ego and balances men’s masculinity

through its ‘softening’ practices. This contradicts what they said other men think yoga is, which is ‘soft’ and ‘easy’. Critiquing the limitations of a typical man could be seen as reinforcing the teachers’ own unique expression of masculinity as they described themselves as potentially stronger than the average man because they had embraced the ‘challenges’ of introspective, self-developmental yoga practices. As the teachers distanced themselves from features of HM, it also worked to produce evolved and unique masculine expression, by positioning themselves as potentially less egotistical and more open-minded than ordinary, insecure men. Moreover, many of the teachers framed traditional masculinity as weaker because it cannot handle the challenges associated with yoga practices. In this way, yoga masculinities are constructed as stronger and more advanced because they work on deeper aspects of the self.

When looking at the discourse and research around masculinity, some suggest men can use marginalised ideologies and aesthetics to make their masculinity more appealing, special and to gain social capital by deviating from complicity with HM (Bridges, 2014; Musial & Mintz, 2021). For example, some men who practice yoga can appear unique, new age and with progressive feminist outlooks. Hybrid masculinity captures the way men can incorporate non-hegemonic elements usually from marginalised masculinities, to shift power and create a unique masculinity by appearing special and different to ‘regressive, ordinary’ men (Musial & Mintz, 2021). Many of the teachers in this study emphasised how they were more progressive than ‘sexist’ or ‘macho men’, which is similar to the way that hybrid masculinity can reject hegemony, whilst maintaining hierarchies. Keenan goes further to describe how yoga is an important tool societally for breaking down the patriarchy in more ‘machoistic’ men who are averse to yoga:

> "Sometimes I feel like these are the people that need yoga the most, is the people who are living with this sort of macho mindset [...] I also sort of have an awareness that the patriarchy is a sizable beast out there. And it needs to be remedied and reined in" (38).

Bridges and Pascoe (2014) suggest hybrid masculinities emphasise distance between themselves and HM, yet simultaneously uphold gendered positions and power dynamics, which could be identified in some of the teachers' narratives. By rejecting the patriarchy and forming their own identity and masculinity as superior, hybrid masculinity can potentially create a new hegemony between men as it maintains a hierarchy and power difference, just in a different form. This is captured by Connell & Messerschmidt's (2005) discussion on HM where "one of the most effective ways of 'being a man' in certain local contexts may be to demonstrate one's distance from a regional hegemonic masculinity" (P.840).

Moreover, some teachers were able to make sense of their unique masculine identity, even when challenged around their practices and beliefs, by positioning their health behaviours as being more in control of their emotions and behaviours compared to their friends, aligning with traditionally masculine characteristics (Courtenay, 2000b). The teachers argued these new behaviours can be threatening to some men because being concerned with health challenges hegemonic norms. By being 'in control', they were also able to position their health behaviours as potentially 'more masculine' and superior then other men.

Sloan et al. (2010) also found that men who engaged in healthier behaviours than their friends, such as low or no alcohol intake, positioned themselves as 'rebels' and critiqued their friend's masculine practice of drinking lots of beer as problematic, irrational

and competitive. Being in control of one's health was positioned as autonomous and rational, all masculine traits of discipline and strength. Other research by Terry and Braun (2013) on men who had had vasectomies, found some of the men would align with being 'ordinary' like other men, or 'extraordinary' in comparison to other men, thus defining their masculinity by how they were similar or different. The 'extraordinary', new age, caring men talked about 'rural blokes' as if traditional masculinity was something to be disdained, which had a similar feel to how the men in my research compared themselves as different to 'blokes' or 'macho men'.

Rowan went further to describe himself as an 'enhanced man' because of yoga when describing his new healthier behaviours. In this way he positions yoga masculinities and its associated health behaviours as 'stronger' and superior to traditionally masculine health behaviours, even when describing the opposite qualities he has developed such as vulnerability:

> "I'm more grounded now as a man than I have ever been. Because I understand, I've learned focus through the practice. I've learned patience through the practice. I've learned acceptance, and I've learned understanding. I've learned to be vulnerable, and I see all of those things as such strong qualities. Such strong qualities that all men should have […] The practice of yoga for me has definitely enhanced me as a, as a man, right? I'm no longer this. I'm no longer this scared, timid twenty something kid who's trying to be something that he's not so that the world doesn't come and get him. And meanwhile, like walking around from stress levels through the roof that I'm so reactive and, and to the point where I can be aggressive and obnoxious and

> inconsiderate of other humans […] I mean, yeah, all men can (benefit from yoga) for sure. And I am a I'm a classic example of that" (42).

In this narrative, yoga masculinities are both 'strong' and in control yet 'vulnerable' and emotionally expressive, suggesting a dynamic and juxtaposed embodiment of both feminine and masculine qualities. Other teachers spoke of how they had a much more balanced physical body because of the combination of doing yoga and other physical activities. By comparing themselves to 'less balanced' or 'stiff' men, it has the potential to position themselves as more powerful than non-yoga men because of their well-rounded and enhanced physical abilities. For example, Dave (47) emphasised how the men he knows who do yoga have a more 'balanced' approach to fitness and improved physical abilities as a result. They "like sport, they like to be fit" and "need to be doing something to keep them in the game" so they combine yoga with going to the gym, outdoors activities and even Pilates. He described them as having a "masculine, feminine, balance". From these narratives, it appeared yoga masculinities were constructed as encompassing both feminine and masculine qualities and that helped the men engage in the world in a more 'balanced' way than traditional masculinities would.

Similarly to Dave, Jonathan (55) also talked about how yoga has kept him 'really energised' compared to his friends who are physically unfit:

> "Oh, look, it's kept me physically well into my fifties. I feel very, like compared to a lot of other guys in their 50s I watch my generation in decline. Older guys getting beer bellies and thickening up and getting potbellies and can't touch their toes anymore and [...] I'm like, wow, you look terrible. What have you been doing to

yourself yeah [...] So there's that, keep yourself healthy and well and mobile. I mean, I can go hiking. I can do all sorts of stuff I feel really, really, like energised.”

Similarly, research by Channon (2012) found men who did martial arts positioned themselves as superior to more mainstream types of sports men and negatively described others hegemonic traits to emphasise what they were not. This distancing from various forms of hegemonic masculinities gave them a framework to form their resistive version of unique masculinity as morally and even physically superior to other forms of hegemonic masculinities. However, positioning themselves as superior can also reinforce a local HM associated with power dynamics, competition and hierarchy. Lomas et al. (2016) found a local hegemony in men who meditated as they marginalised men who were unable to sustain a committed practice and ordinated those who were ‘progressing’, thus creating hierarchies and rivalries. This is because competition and status are associated with hegemonic norms and are a way in which hegemony can operate (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Elliott, 2020a).

Interestingly, whilst many of the men described the non-competitive nature of yoga in previous excerpts, they also engaged in subtler versions of competition when comparing themselves to other men. Lomas et al. (2016) found that whilst local meditation hegemonies can be influenced by wider societal hegemonies such as competition and hierarchy, they can also work in opposition, such as by expressing emotions and caring. Even as many of the men in this study spoke of how they were more balanced than other men and free from the judgemental attitudes typical of HM, yet they reproduced local hegemonies in other ways by judging and labelling other men as less balanced emotionally, physically, mentally and less open-minded and self-developed.

Lomas et al (2016) also discuss how masculinity is negotiated and structured according to the social context and can result in conflicting identities in different social circles, which can cause men to de-emphasise certain behaviours or reinforce others to fit the group. Whilst the men in my study did not indicate that they felt impacted by friends or societal stigma to behave in a certain way, in some contexts emphasising physical attributes, especially over other men, could serve to reduce the likelihood of appearing overly feminine as they navigate the complexities of being a man. For example, some of the teachers spoke of how they came from a background of physical activity associated with more traditional masculinities, such as running, cycling, rugby, basketball, cricket, competing in triathlons, obstacle course racing, soccer, water polo, swimming, surfing, snowboarding and skateboarding. It appeared they could easily move between the worlds of more traditionally masculine activities and activities that have been positioned as feminine, such as yoga. This could suggest a more flexible approach to doing masculinity but may also serve to reinforce certain masculine aspects of the teachers' identity as well (Elliott, 2020b). Elliott (2020b) as well as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) suggest men move between different masculine identities to adapt to the social context. By also enjoying harder physical activities, it demonstrated the teachers were invested in a flexible approach and involvement in different masculine and feminine environments and had the ability to easily move between them.

When considering masculinity research, some suggest appropriation of feminised traits can blur differences between genders rather than challenge them, which is associated with hybrid masculinities (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). Barber (2008) found some men naturalise distinctions between themselves and traditional men by engaging in feminine

activities and framing themselves as more 'progressive' than 'misogynistic' men who they associated with perpetuating gender inequalities. Whilst those men appeared comfortable in the feminised environment and in their masculinity, they also avoided feminisation by claiming to be anomalies in that environment and separated themselves from the women, perpetuating power differences. Nevertheless, I argue that the yoga masculinities described by the teachers in this study are different to hybrid masculinities, as the teachers emphasised the positive feminine qualities that yoga develops in men and themselves and promoted the dissolution of gender binaries and hegemonies that perpetuate inequality and separation.

Moreover, even when comparing themselves to other men, the teachers spoke of possibilities, by either talking about how they too were once those kinds of men and how yoga had changed them for the better, or else that yoga offered a possibility to help men overcome stigma and stereotypes around traditional masculine expression. Thereby, they offered hope for all types of men rather than condemnation. Similar to the male nurses who identified with the female nurses and spoke in egalitarian, 'we' language and embraced non-hegemonic identities without it impacting on their masculinity, the teachers expressed a more 'open' type of masculinity as they engaged in a more feminist, egalitarian perspective, without it impacting on their masculinity (Elliott, 2020a; McDowell, 2015; Roberts, 2018). The men still had access to intersections of privilege because of their gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality and geopolitical location in a first world country, and it would be remiss to not acknowledge this. Yet even with this privilege, the men expressed ideals and behaviours that are in opposition to the closed hegemonies that perpetuate

gender, class and race inequalities or that conceal these inequalities in various ways (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014).

Therefore, I suggest many of the teachers enacted multiple, fluid, contextually and socially shaped masculinities as they made sense of their identities to suit the environment. They showed this by distinguishing themselves from traditional masculinities and embraced progressive ideals and feminised qualities, seemingly without motives of power-seeking, gender dominance or manipulation of ‘others’ so often associated with hegemonic and hybrid masculinities (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Channon, 2012; Elliott, 2020a; McDowell, 2015). It appeared the men were expressing the ‘open’ masculinities as described by Elliott (2020a), which are situated at the margin of hegemonic and closed masculinities as a “location of radical openness and possibility” (Hooks, 1989, p.23).

Theme 2. “The fact that it's portrayed as a female orientated thing stops men from doing it”

This theme discusses the barriers and facilitators to everyday men’s engagement in yoga from the teachers’ perspectives. Whilst the teachers were attracted to the powerful and transformative effects of yoga themselves, they also acknowledged that traditional masculine stereotypes and stigma were a barrier for other men’s engagement in yoga. They emphasised the need for a ‘masculine approach’ when discussing ways to encourage more men to attend yoga and while this risked initially reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes, the payoff enabled yoga to influence new participants through its practices and philosophies (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This suggests gendered stereotypes still prevail and impact on men’s attendance to yoga, even when the teachers themselves argued they were not impacted by them.

When asked about the benefits of yoga, many of the men described it as a powerful and transformative tool for men’s mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health and spoke in awe and reverence for how powerful their first class had been, such as Rowan:

> “First class, I come out of Shavasana I went, ‘What the fuck? Where did I just go? That was bliss’” (42).

Or Lukas who described his surprise and amazement at the effects of his first class:

> “How is this possible? Like, are you kidding me? This is all I need to do to be able to centre myself? This is all I need to do to become calm? I'm like, ‘This is crazy’” (43).

Similar research by McIver et al. (2022) found some of the men who practised yoga were initially surprised by the sense of calm they experienced from yoga. Some teachers described yoga as almost like a drug and themselves as a “presence dealer” (Travis, 41) and many others used the analogy of ‘feeling high’ after yoga to describe its effects. They said it was a way to overcome addiction, depression, enhance their overall wellbeing and relationships with themselves and others. Rowan spoke of how yoga helped him overcome his addictions and enabled transcendence:

> “I've never found anything other than drugs and alcohol. I've never found anything that gives me that gives me this feeling of that transcendental flow that I can get into when I'm practising” (42).

Many described yoga as a social tool to dissolve gender binaries and bring balance between the sexes and within oneself. Andre emphasised this when asked if every man could benefit from a yoga practice:

> “100% Every man should make an effort to actually discover it and learn it [...] I've always said that um, the only way that humanity, the world as a whole, the only way that the world's whole of humanity will find peace would be when these two energy channels are charged, and balanced within, within our existence in humanity” (57).

Yoga was said to be an empowerment tool to challenge patriarchal norms and empower others, especially men, when it comes to self-care and mental wellness and for improving men’s mental health:

> ”We live in this world where men just kind of, you know, like, have a shot of cement and harden the fuck up. And you know, just kind of grin and bear it. And so there needs to be more of a shift towards men's wellbeing and maintenance” (Travis).

Similarly to Lomas et al.’s (2016) research, my participants found a new way of coping with life’s stressors as they no longer resorted to more hegemonic ways of coping and being ‘tough’. It appeared that the teachers were attracted to the powerful and transformative effects yoga had on them and society as a whole and this is what kept them committed to the practice. Some of the teachers drew on essentialised gender differences when trying to understand and explain why more women might be drawn to yoga than men. For example, Andre (57) described women as more ‘evolved’ than men ‘spiritually and emotionally’ and that men needed to ‘catch up’ and start developing these qualities within

themselves if society is to advance. However, at the core of these discussions, the teachers expressed that men and women were equal and both have masculine and feminine qualities within. In this way the men often took a feminist, egalitarian perspective:

> “It's the Western women who will save the world. I think yoga has this magical way of just adapting to what's needed and empowering Western women. Women and men are really so alike, but we've conditioned ourselves to believe that we're so separate”. (Dave, 47)

Interestingly, whilst advocating for feminism and the reduction of patriarchy, Dave spoke to the ‘Western’ woman instead of all women globally. Whilst yoga is an ancient discipline from India, in recent years, many have criticised the Western form of yoga as inaccessible, appropriating and a space for racial inequality, where white people are overly represented (Berger, 2018; Bhalla & Moscowitz, 2020; Strings et al., 2019). Additionally, the recent commercialisation of yoga in Western media, which commodifies white women’s bodies and emphasises thinness, is anchored in hegemonic, classist and racist concepts of femininity (Bhalla & Moscowitz, 2020; Strings et al., 2019). Many indigenous feminists and women of colour have also criticised Western feminism as benefitting from the privilege of white colonialism and hegemony and that white feminists cannot claim to share the perspectives of all women (Borah et al., 2023; Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Others challenge Western, mainstream, white-centric, feminism as problematic as it facilitates privileged, middle-class, heterosexual theorising (Borah et al., 2023; Moreton-Robinson, 2000).

Considering this, Dave’s narrative risks locating Western women at the centre of feminist potential to ‘save’ the world. Messner (1993) suggests although ‘softer, sensitive’ masculinities are emerging among privileged men, it does not necessarily contribute to

egalitarianism but rather, can undermine it in subtle ways. The example above illustrates the way power dynamics can prevail subtly and potentially even unconsciously, as some of the men appeared to reproduce discourses associated with inequality and hegemony whilst simultaneously advocating for women and gender equality. Hybrid masculinity theory explains the way white men can reproduce systems of power, gender and race inequality in often subtle or obscure ways, and these behaviours can also be seen as local variations of HM as it perpetuates systems of class and racial dominance (Bhalla & Moscowitz, 2020; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

On the other hand, many of the teachers also displayed socially minded, open masculinities as they advocated for feminism, the reduction of sexism, patriarchy, and gender inequalities through what they described as the transformative effects of their yoga practice. The men could also be seen as expressing Elliott's (2020b) 'caring' masculinities, which embrace positive traits such as emotional expression, interdependence and relationality towards others and is an important part of men working towards social change and gender equality. This can be seen below as Hayden spoke about discussing mental health with women:

> "More of the people that I actually connect with are women, I find that I can actually have deeper conversations with a woman than I do with men. Because there's that stigma around mental health, and guys don't really talk about it. So when you're talking with guys, it's generally just like, small talk and stuff. Whereas I've always found with women, you can like delve a little deeper and really talk about what's going on" (38).

McKenzie et al. (2018) found in their research on men and social connectedness in New Zealand that those who shifted from maintaining shallow, limited connections to actively seeking emotional support challenged the constraints of hegemonic masculinity, which enhanced their mental wellbeing. Similarly, the qualities of emotional expression encouraged in yoga were suggested as beneficial for men's mental health. However, perceptions of yoga as 'soft,' 'gentle,' 'easy' and 'feminine' were considered a challenge to masculine stereotypes that men should be doing hard, strengthening workouts, which the teachers said were a barrier for many men. Andre spoke about some of these barriers he had seen impact men explicitly:

> "It's about, you know, why would I want to go to a yoga class and meditate or you know, do something, when I could be at the gym pumping weights, you know, the whole concept of, you know, that macho man concept or this, why am I gonna go and practise yoga, you know, there's 20 girls in the class and, you know, I'd be the only guy in there, I prefer to go and, you know, go for a paddle with my mates" (57).

As well as it being too easy, being one of the few men in the class was also perceived as a problem for many men according to the teachers. Similarly, Cagas et al. (2021) examined the perspectives of non-practising, Australian men regarding yoga and found themes of gender stereotypes prevalent among these men, such as 'yoga is feminine', 'men are unwelcome in the yoga space' and the men's preference for strong and vigorous exercise. Keenan spoke to the stereotype that yoga is advertised as a feminine, self-care practice that deters men:

> “I feel like the sexism of it, and the fact that it's portrayed as a female orientated thing stops men from doing it” (38).

Moreover, as men are traditionally applauded for being competitive and good at sports, some teachers said it can be experienced as a challenge on men’s ego’s when they aren’t as flexible or ‘good’ at doing the poses compared to women. Travis explained situations he had seen in his classes:

> “A lot of men are very physically fit, strong, whatever, but then they'll go into class, and they'll see this, you know, 50 kilo woman next to them, able to do all these incredible movements, and they're just like tin man with a lot of muscle. And I think it's, it's very disheartening in their mind” (41).

Or James (43), who essentialises physiological differences between men and women as a fundamental reason why men aren’t as good at yoga poses as women. He also attributes these physiological differences as a reason why men will choose more traditional sports like cricket, as they have better “hand-eye coordination”:

> “Because I think also men don't see themselves [...] as flexible. And by nature, which physiologically is actually true. But on average, men tend to have more collagen and less elastin than women. And obviously, women's hips are designed to give birth, so that they tend to be more open and a little bit more elastin or pliable. And so, some of the poses, some of the asana are obviously more challenging for men. And so, I think when they come to a class and those challenging poses are presented early on, that they can become a real barrier to the people who are like, "Oh, I can't do that” soon enough, like "I can't get good at it fast enough". And the gains, the flexibility

> gains, it's a different kind of patience that's required. I think, men growing up in New Zealand, there's more of a kind of ball sports type, skill-level, in a lot of men. And so, strength-based, hand-eye coordination-based skills. I think those skills develop seemingly faster than flexibility, according to some of the research, the connective tissue takes up to 12 to 18 months to repattern to give you access to some of those more challenging flexibility-based seated poses and binds. And so, there's a little bit of impatience, particularly if you're a more athletic man who's used to being good at something, you know, you've got cricket, you pick up a tennis racket, and there's a lot of correlations, and you get reasonably good, reasonably quickly. But then you put that same guy on a yoga mat, and he wants to do a seated wide legged forward fold, and he can't get past vertical. And doesn't see gains happening very quickly and gives up pretty soon. And decides, "Oh, this isn't for me".

Here James attributes physical differences between men and women as part of the reason men find yoga challenging. He also assumes men are naturally better at coordination skills and sports and in this way replicates stereotypes based on gender by using biology to support his reasonings. Essentialising traits to men and women can mask gender equality and be used as an excuse to replicate hegemonic ideals whilst appearing rationale (Bridges & Pascoe, 2018; Kennedy, 2023). Additionally, the teachers argued many men like to appear competent and do not like to be seen as the least able in the class and this could be more so in a room full of women. Feeling inadequate or not good enough, especially due to lack of flexibility, was said to be a major obstacle for many men and this was made more obvious when being surrounded by flexible women. Liam described his experiences speaking to men:

> “I think the guys who I have spoken to about yoga and who are hesitant to come along, I think they kind of feel inadequate. And that's the main thing I think most men struggle with in coming to yoga is, and the general thing is, we're not flexible enough, so we can't do it. But I think when you get underneath that it's like, being inadequate or being bad at something, or being shown that you're bad at something. And especially when there's someone at the front of the room who kind of has, you know […] this perfect practice, or this perfect way of speaking. That just kind of highlights that a little bit more” (40).

The teachers indicated that heterosexual men may want to appear competent, confident and attractive to women and that showing vulnerability as a beginner, and not knowing what to do in the yoga space might risk contradicting this. Showing vulnerability or weakness goes against social norms of HM and because gender is negotiated through everyday health behaviours and social practices, being vulnerable may impact on the men’s sense of masculinity and social power (Courtenay, 2000a).

Jonathan (55) also spoke about older men being “intimidated by the younger women” and how older men with a “bit of a pot belly” might not feel comfortable or as “virile” practising with flexible young women. He called these women the “nubile bendies” who have advanced practices, are very flexible and often dominate class numbers.

Men were also said to avoid yoga as their sole pursuit because it wasn’t hard enough, strengthening enough or ‘worth their time’. For example, Lee (31) suggested many men might see yoga as a “waste of time” because they could go to the gym instead and attain obvious strength gains. Men were said to be drawn to stronger physical activities

because there are obvious muscular improvements which makes them appear more masculine and which society applauds. Rowan spoke to this explicitly and how societal stereotypes impact men's choice of activity:

> "If you're a person who trains in the gym, then you're in the mindset of, well, every hour that I spend on a yoga mat is an hour that's taking me away from looking like the way that I'm supposed to look in the eyes of society." (42)

These findings are similar to Cagas et al. (2021), who found men would rather play sports over yoga as they did not think yoga was as beneficial for their fitness. Alternatively, when looking at the facilitators to practice, many of the teachers said seeing athletic men use yoga as a tool for improving their sports performance had been inspiring for them and made it more socially acceptable for them to try. They suggested emphasising yoga's benefits as a compliment to men's activities for physical performance, longevity and injury prevention might make yoga appeal to more men. Similar research by Cagas et al. (2022a) found men were more motivated to do yoga as a supplement to their physical activities, and injury recovery was a salient motive. Role models such as successful male athletes were also an important motivator for the teachers early in their yoga journey. Dave spoke about an influential surfer in his life, who motivated him to try yoga to improve his own surfing:

> "Tom Carroll, who was a former world champion surfer who spoke about how he used yoga and it helped him to improve his surfing. And so that got me really curious about yoga" (47).

James also mentioned a famous rugby player in the sports centre of masculinity, who endorsed and validated yoga for many men:

> “I think one of the most famous All Blacks who talked about the way it improved his game was Ma'a Nonu [...] He said, ‘oh I practise yoga, because it allowed me to concentrate for longer on the game and it improves my mental fitness’. And he said that he reckons it extended the longevity of his career” (43).

Moreover, seeing other men in a yoga class was also considered a facilitator for men. James gave an example of a new male student who wanted to practise with other men in the class:

> “But we definitely noticed that men tend to feel safer with men, I've had a student recently sign up and have had email communication with him in the lead up saying, "Are there any other men who practise at your studio?" (43).

Many of the teachers used examples of strong, grounded, successful men who practise and teach yoga as a source of inspiration for them. Liam described seeing another yoga teacher be unashamedly himself and not overly ‘contrived’ or ‘feminine’ as a great motivator for him to teach:

> “He was just like, being himself as a man, rather than like all of the teachers I've been to before, were like women. And they had this very kind of […] contrived yoga voice, this perfect kind of constructed person at the front who was almost like, doing a performance as a teacher. Yeah. And then I went to this guy's class, who was just talking like normal people do and probably more, so like normal men do [...] And I was like, “ah, yeah, you can be a teacher and just your natural personality, especially a guy's personality can work as well”. And I remember that being a really big motivator, and kind of allowed me to drop some of those preconceived ideas that I'd

had about what it meant to be a yoga teacher from all the women teachers that I'd seen before that" (40).

In this excerpt, Liam talked about his feeling of not fitting into the mould of a typical yoga teacher, because he had only seen women teach. He described a man authentically and confidently "be himself" which played a pivotal role in breaking down barriers for him to be a teacher, as he could see himself in this alternative exemplar of how a yoga teacher could be. Interestingly, Liam seemed to criticise the 'contrived', 'perfect' female yoga teachers he had seen, possibly because he could not relate to them and that they appeared to be inauthentic to him. Having relatable role models appeared to be important for many men, as well as seeing men like themselves, which fostered a sense of camaraderie and fellowship. McIver et al. (2022) also found that men were uncomfortable being the 'only man on the mat' whereas classes that were "laid back", where men could "have a laugh" with "other men like me" (p.274) was motivating and de-stigmatising.

Many teachers mentioned yoga was an activity that men often felt unwelcome in or couldn't see themselves fitting into because of the feminised environment and low proportion of men which Liam spoke to above. Therefore, having men practise and teach yoga was suggested as a facilitator for more men's engagement in yoga. This is also shown in research by Cagas et al. (2021), where men felt more comfortable with other men in the yoga class and 'men only classes' were recommended as a facilitator for men's engagement in their findings. Moreover, many of the teachers in this study suggested advertising should include more men, as the majority of marketing represents women, which is set up as a barrier for many men. Keenan spoke explicitly to how yoga lacks male role models, especially in marketing:

> "I think that it's just it's not been represented on anywhere that a man can see himself" (38).

Travis also talked about how younger, heterosexual, fit, male teachers could attract younger men to yoga because they embody the stereotypes associated with traditional masculinity and could target this missing demographic:

> "And these days, in a very hyper attention driven economy, there has to be marketing of yoga that attracts men in and I don't think it's just, you know, showing pretty women doing stuff. There are a lot of very notable male teachers who are, you know, fit and young, you know, like good looking straight men that can get that same demographic in." (Travis, 41)

In some ways the teachers could be seen as reinforcing hegemonic stereotypes by suggesting fit, heterosexual, 'masculine' men would draw other men to try yoga because they could relate to these kinds of men. However, many teachers suggested seeing these stereotypically 'manly' men show more feminised qualities such as emotional expression and care would actually help to break down societal stigmas and stereotypes of what it means to be a man, as Rowan explained:

> "I think that for me to see a man who was genuinely soft, and caring, but can also be strong. And from a fiery and passionate place inside of love was really, really mind blowing to me. And […] to see people like Matt and Simon just be really firm and grounded in who they are and where they are in life, even when, even when

situations arise in front of them that can be quite testing to see, to see a man that doesn't flare up into anger in a testing situation is a fucking pretty hard thing to find in this day and age" (42).

At the core of these narratives, seeing traditionally masculine men do yoga was suggested to be a powerful facilitator for men which could break down stigma and stereotypes that yoga is feminine. Moreover, many teachers said that once men were drawn in to yoga through the harder, physical classes, this would expose them to the other, more subtle or esoteric practices of yoga, such as meditation, pranayama (breathwork), spirituality and philosophy, which men would eventually be more receptive too as they were slowly exposed to it. Rowan described this as "keeping up the lie" by keeping it superficial and physically focused, until men are ready to experience the breadth and depth of what yoga has to offer:

"A phrase that I like to use is 'keep up the lie', 'keep up the lie until they're ready for the truth'. Yeah, so if a man is coming to me, because he has a sore shoulder, well, I'm only ever going to talk to him about his shoulder and talk to him on a very highly, anatomy-based level […] until he starts to come to talk to me about the other feelings that he's having in the practice, and [...] I know, okay, cool. I can open up a conversation with this dude now about what's really going on and how his shoulder is all about his emotional instability and lack of spiritualism that he was never ready to hear before. He just thought he was a footy player and he fell over the wrong way. Keep up the lies, until they're ready for the truth" (42).

The teachers drew on stereotypes that men can be averse to spirituality or insightful, introspective, meditative practices, so they need to be 'tricked' into practising them under the guise of asana (physical yoga postures). In Lomas et al.'s (2016) research, they suggested spirituality was seen as at odds with traditional masculinity which was more aligned with rational thinking and which disavows spirituality. In my study, Steve (54) also spoke about how he was initially "scared" of meditation and pranayama and would have never gotten so deep into mindfulness if it wasn't for asana which he called the "gateway drug". This aligns with research by Park et al. (2019) who found men cited spirituality as the lowest motivator to practise compared to women. However other research by Park et al. (2016) found that both men and women cited spirituality as a primary motive for maintaining a yoga practice over time. This was evident in the teachers' narratives as well:

> "What's kept me in yoga over the years is not going to vinyasa classes […] it's the meditation practices, the study of philosophy […] historically, that's what yoga is. The study of yogic psychology and yogic philosophy and the nuance of tantra […] I just can't get enough of it." (Dave, 47)

Similarly to the teachers, McIver et al. (2022) found longer term male yoga students experienced spiritual growth and a yearning for wisdom as they experienced a deepened connection with their inner selves. However, simultaneously, some of the teachers drew on science to validate their perceived benefits of yoga. This reliance on science to support their beliefs indicates an alignment with more traditional ideals associated with masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Gauthier et al., 2017). For instance, Steve said neuroscience had helped him believe in the validity and benefits of the subtler practices of yoga:

> ”It has been fascinating to kind of be able to follow the neuroscience in this area. And it really, I think it really helped me to go yeah, these benefits are actually real brain benefits. Not just "Oh, yeah, trendy people are doing it, you know, they want to look good or want to be seen at a trendy yoga school". (54)

Research suggests men tend to invest in stories based on fact and do not appear to be as religious or spiritually inclined as women and this gender gap is the result of important sociological and cultural differences that intersect and reinforce each other and is more prominent in gender-equal countries (Bryant, 2007; Hammermeister et al., 2005; Moon et al., 2022; Trzebiatowska & Bruce, 2012). This was also noted by the teachers:

> “Men are not, not as in touch with their spirituality” (Andre, 57)

> “You know, there's not, there's not a great deal of masculinity spoken about in spiritual language, in circles, I think.” (Rowan, 42).

When speaking about men’s beliefs Rowan talked to this explicitly:

> “They think that it's made up and I feel that they think that it’s very feminine. They attach, I feel that they attach very feminine ideals, ideas to the words spiritual, because we've never been taught in the Western world. We don't have spiritual teachings, okay? We have religion, but that's different […] And so all we can do is make up, make up what we think about spiritual teachings, from what we see. And I think, because yoga, yoga has the ability to soften us as people and soften our nature for a really long time, you know, the concepts of yoga are well, it relaxes you,

> it softens you, it makes you gentle. And you become spiritual from yoga. And so, spiritualism must also cross tie into those kinds of words. Like it's a lot about association, if that makes sense” (42).

In the text above, Rowan justifies men’s lack of engagement in yoga because it is associated with spirituality which is seen as feminine because it is an introspective and ‘softening’ practice. Engaging in spirituality could be seen as counter hegemonic as it ‘softens’ men and the reason for ‘keeping up the lie’ is because many men may fear becoming soft. Similar research by McIver et al. (2022) found men who were new to a yoga practice preferred teachers who focused on the physical rather than spiritual aspects. Moreover, the teachers in my study said many men were averse to the more esoteric, subtler practices in yoga as they appeared foreign to men and were associated with eastern, religious practices.

In summary, whilst the teachers themselves embodied yoga-informed masculinities, they drew on ideas complicit with HM, and essentialist framings of ‘men’, to make sense of why other men might not be drawn to try yoga and how to encourage them more. Whilst the men drew on counter hegemonic discourses and claimed to have egalitarian perspectives regarding gender, they sometimes simultaneously drew on traditional stereotypes and inadvertently reproduced hegemonic positions when making sense of men and women's engagement in yoga.

Essentialising traits and characteristics such as introspection, emotions, gentleness and softness with women re-establishes gendered hierarchies and fortifies gendered boundaries (Bridges & Pascoe, 2018). Often, the teachers described these feminine characteristics as less valuable to men compared to the masculine characteristics of

strength, competition, logic and heterosexuality, and this strengthens hegemony when these characteristics are naturalised to men and women (Connell, 2005). Additionally, men were often framed as biologically and physiologically different to women and a reason why they found yoga challenging and preferred traditional sports. Essentialism can mask sexism as it normalises why women are treated differently to men and yet essentialism is often socially accepted by those who call themselves progressive as a way to explain and perpetuate gender norms (Bridges & Pascoe, 2018; Kennedy, 2023). In this way, the teachers often replicated hegemonic norms when making sense of the world and other men's practices.

Overall, the teachers suggested barriers to men's engagement included the feminised environment, overly spiritual or esoteric practices, men's beginner status and lack of flexibility and the advanced practices of women in the class. The men also drew on more traditional discourses of how yoga could appeal to men, such as through simpler but stronger classes, a focus on science as evidence, emphasising sports performance and physical longevity and masculine role models. Many of these responses relied on essentialist discourses of gender and focused on adaptions to make yoga more 'men friendly.' Additionally, the teachers often used analogies to drug taking to describe yoga's powerful and transformative effects, which is reflective of many of the men's own history of addictions. This could also reflect gendered associations of masculinity with higher rates of substance abuse and risk taking behaviours which are linked to conformity to traditional masculine norms (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2022; Seidler et al., 2016; Teese et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, the teachers' ability to adapt and relate to different men's perspectives provided insight into the way masculinity influences men's engagement in yoga. Many of the teachers could relate to more traditionally masculine, non-yoga men when describing their own initial barriers to practising yoga, even though they positioned themselves as now different. The majority of the teachers also showed an open-mindedness, fluidity and reflexivity in their understanding of different men's experiences (Elliott, 2020a). These findings align with previous research suggesting male teachers, role models and fellow male students would be a facilitator for other men's adoption of a yoga practice. This is because men tend to feel more comfortable with men, particularly in the context of navigating the complexities of masculinity and being a man within a predominantly feminised setting (Cagas et al., 2021; McIver et al., 2022).

Theme 3. Male yoga teachers are very conscious of their masculinity in a feminised space

Theme 3 represents how the teachers were very conscious of their masculine presence in the existing feminine space of yoga. As a result, they emphasised the importance of high ethical standards and strong boundaries to create a safe space for vulnerable people in their classes. Additionally, even though my interview questions had not asked directly about trauma, sexual misconduct or the #MeToo movement, many of the teachers described the burden of societal stigma and shame around other male yoga teachers' sexual misconduct in the yoga space unprompted. When asked if there was "anything else" they would like to discuss at the end of the interview, some of the teachers also brought up the issue of miscommunications and relationships with female students, and the need to call out and dismiss predatory or sexist men.

As discussed in the literature review, there are prominent, senior, male teachers and gurus who have been identified as abusive (and also themselves victims of abuse) (Remski, 2019). The men in my study said this had a big impact on the way they taught yoga and experienced teaching as a man, and they strived to counter this societal stigma and shame by ensuring they maintained a respectful and supportive environment for their students. The men enacted positive masculinities by showing care and concern for the vulnerability of their students and emphasised the importance of being sensitive to the diverse range of people entering the space by being trauma informed. In the excerpt below, Dave touched on safety issues, especially with male teachers, when asked if there was anything else he would like to discuss:

> “And an extra thing to be aware of as a male yoga teacher is that you're going into an area where there is trauma, and that you need to be very careful about your actions and your words going into that space. So, I'm always quite cautious. I've always been fairly cautious there. I just feel that yoga is so important that you know, it doesn't, yoga doesn't need another sex predator. Yoga needs, what yoga really needs is really good quality male yoga teachers who can teach yoga and should share the teachings and keep their personality and their desires out of the way” (47).

Dave talked about men’s desires and the problems that arise when boundaries are blurred, and male teachers allow their sexual attraction towards their students to take over. He spoke of an invisible boundary in yoga, where teaching should be separate from any desires or sexual relationship with a student, as they cannot occur simultaneously in a safe way. This is because of the power difference between teacher and student, which would automatically place the teacher in a ‘predatory’ position. Some of the teachers spoke in

ways that essentialised men's sexual desires as a natural urge, automatically associated with being a man. According to some authors, this naturalising of male urges can also be used to justify men's actions and diminish the seriousness of sexual assault (Gavey, 2019; Gravelin et al., 2024; O'Hara, 2012). However, many of the teachers said they would never have a relationship with a student because of the uneven and hierarchical power dynamic and the vulnerability of the student. Similarly, Wayne addressed this issue unprompted, by saying he would never form a romantic relationship with a student because of ethical issues involved in the student-teacher relationship. He went further to discuss the principle taught in yoga of Ahimsa (do no harm) which was an important value teachers drew upon to maintain the yoga room as a safe space:

> "We're always just, you know, 'you just don't do these things'. And it was about respecting the person and respecting, you know, male or female […] you are their teacher, and […] true to the principles of yoga and you know, ahimsa being number one, you know, you don't harm people" (47).

In line with the theme of do no harm, Keenan discussed his experiences of being a man where women have been nervous to enter the class early, when alone. He was aware of the safety concerns women may have and worked hard to create a feeling of safety in his yoga class through extra trauma informed training:

> "I noticed a trepidation from you women, to come into the hall if it's just me there, out of potential, you know, safety projections or fear or very, very understandably and I don't judge any person who feels fear from being in a room alone with a male and I totally understand this […] I had to work very hard to get my, I feel like I've had

to work a little bit harder to provide safety and do my bits with trauma informed training to really make it a safe space because I appreciate the challenges that non male folk feel stepping into a room with a cis-white male" (38).

Many of the teachers were highly aware of the safety concerns for non-males attending a male teacher's class. They described needing understanding and empathy for the past trauma women may have been exposed to because of men, such as sexual assault and harassment. For many of the teachers, it was important for them to ensure they created a safe space by doing extra trauma-informed training, having strong boundaries and being aware of their power and positionality as a man.

The teachers also discussed the challenges they had experienced or witnessed of being a man and navigating the heteronormative stereotypes that men are just doing yoga to meet women. Hayden went further to describe how the yoga environment serves as a safe space for women, where they are free and comfortable to wear tight clothing. However, he acknowledged that some men may sexualise this, especially when seeing women in certain poses. He said this adds to stereotypes around why he and other men might go to yoga and gives an example of how some men may perceive things:

"They also like, sexualise it a lot, because it is a women's space. And they picture all the women in like tight leggings, like doing stretches and like, downward facing dog and everything. And they, a lot of guys like, you know, are being led to kind of, like, sexualise it. And so, they think I'm like, going there to like meet women or things like that" (38).

Whilst many teachers said there were societal stereotypes that men practise and teach yoga in order to attract women, many of the teachers worked extra hard to remain 'above reproach' in this domain. For example, ethical standards and boundaries were emphasised as being very important when performing adjustments on women. Men were very cautious on how to place their hands in the correct position, especially as more traditional styles of yoga such as Ashtanga can have very strong adjustments that the teachers noted some women may feel uncomfortable with. Many of the teachers avoided adjustments all together, unless they knew their student well and were a regular:

> "I basically don't give adjustments, unless I'm in a yoga studio […] And I'm pretty, more or less familiar with the particular student. Like, I don't, I hardly give adjustments anymore. And I think that's pretty standard amongst male yoga teachers these days" (Lukas, 43).

Some of the teachers spoke of maintaining safe boundaries by keeping touch, talk and eye contact to appropriate levels, checking with students about adjustments first and even dismissing their teacher trainees or other male students who were behaving in inappropriate ways towards female students. Travis spoke to this explicitly:

> "I had to fire people sometimes […] because they would be assisting, you know, a man who I could say, is not maybe the most attractive or […] magnetic person, is now in a room with beautiful women in very tight-fitting clothes and touching their bodies. And they were taking advantage of that and making inappropriate gestures, breaths, sounds. And you know, that's just, that was never okay with me" (41).

Similar to Hayden's description, Travis described the yoga environment as a safe space where women felt comfortable wearing tight clothing and moving into various (potentially vulnerable or compromising) yoga poses. The teachers described themselves as protectors of this safe space against deviant men who could take advantage of women. Travis described this type of deviant man as someone who is not used to being around 'attractive' women, has fewer boundaries and could easily forgo their moral standards for their desires. Flood (2019) suggests many men see violence against women as perpetrated by only a small number of deviant men and many reject feminist insights that sexism and violence is commonplace in our society. Similarly, Travis spoke of this certain type of deviant man as being more capable of sexual misconduct and distinct from himself. Travis positioned himself as the protector and different to these men as he stood up for women and fired predatory teacher trainees. However some suggest this patriarchal protector role reflects a benevolent sexism where women 'need' support and have little agency (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Kennedy, 2023).

Travis also spoke of the ease in which misunderstandings and misconceptions can occur between the student and teacher and the high risk of engaging in a relationship with a student. For example, he argued some women might be seeking something in the teachers and gave examples where women might have been 'luring or goading' for his attention:

> ” There's a lot of women looking for something, or chasing something, or broken or hurt, who go into a room. And […] the yoga room represents much more than just a place to stretch, it's kind of a sanctuary where you can say, express, be whatever you need to. And I know that there were a lot of women coming through the doors, who were looking to people like myself, male teachers, and kind of expecting, like, 'Oh,

> this is going to be my saviour'. And that was always an interesting thing to deal with. Because I did have a lot of friends who I don't wanna say abused that power, but definitely took advantage of that power. And I don't want to say mistook vulnerability for sexuality, but definitely took it as sexuality" (41).

Whilst Travis acknowledged the uneven power dynamic between teacher and student, he also pointed out that women's vulnerabilities and intentions can be part of the misunderstandings that cause problems between men and women. In this way, he took the sole blame off male teachers and placed part of the responsibility onto women and their actions and intentions. This contrasts with the previous excerpt where women are seen to be the victims to the predatory nature of certain men. Gavey (2019) discusses how some women can be portrayed as sexually passive yet provocative and this narrative diminishes male agency in rape and the harm that it may cause. Stereotypes around sexual violence, also known as 'rape myths' are common within discussions around sexual violence and often shift the blame to the victim, such as that they were 'asking for it', 'wearing provocative clothing', 'are lying' , 'have ulterior motives' or 'wanted it at the time and changed their mind later' (Gravelin et al., 2024; O'Hara, 2012).

Research has also identified that many men see women as more likely to make false accusations of sexual violence than they do (Flood, 2019; Webster et al., 2021). Flood's (2019) research on men's response to the #MeToo movement found some men believed they were held to higher standards than women, who were excused and given special treatment due to political correctness around this movement. This sentiment is exampled through Travis' argument that communication is part of the problem and that women are also responsible for communicating clearly. However, whilst miscommunication theory

suggests heterosexual sexual violence is a result of misunderstandings of social cues between men and women, research shows men and women both display literacy in the same forms of communication regarding consensual sex (Beres, 2010). This suggests miscommunication is not to blame for non-consensual sex, which sits in contrast to the argument Travis makes about misunderstandings between teacher and student and sexual relations in the yoga environment. In the excerpt below, Travis went further to say he had seen women also voluntarily participate in sexual relationships with their teachers under misconceptions and false ideals around the meaning of that relationship, which created further misunderstandings between male teacher and female student:

> “The #MeToo movement is very interesting in that. I think once one person says something, then other people feel empowered to say something. In saying that, I think it does take two to tango. And I did see [...] a lot of people where there's teacher trainers, and there was, you know, students that came through, and they idolise the teacher, and they just really wanted to get close to that teacher and then ended up turning into a sexual connection. And, you know, it was like this fantasy of like, ‘Hey, I'm gonna date my yoga teacher, we're gonna go and live happily ever after’. And that didn't happen. And so they were let down because their fantasies weren't played out. Now, I don't put blame on either party. I think it's a two-way street. What I think the issue was, is I don't believe there was a lot of clear communication with regards to where things went” (41).

Lukas also spoke to this problem of misunderstandings when communicating with female yoga students:

> "It's a fine line to walk, you don't want to seem cold, you don't want to seem rude, you don't want to seem aloof. You don't want to seem like, whatever, unfriendly. You want to connect with people. But at the same time, you could easily be misinterpreted" (47).

He extended these arguments by also including *female* yoga teachers when speaking of sexual 'predators'. This kind of framing continues the theme that women are partly responsible for these situations and suggests an equivalence in power and autonomy for men and women which statistics show is not the case (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020; Ministry for Women, n.d.):

> "It's a very, very complex topic. Because there are plenty of predatory male and female yoga teachers out there. But I would say any discussion, talking about gender, or sex and the male experience or female experience in relation to yoga. It really, I don't feel it would be complete, unless you touch on it a little bit, because I feel it's not a small issue. It's like a really majorly important issue. In terms of male yoga teachers and their experience [...] for me. I would say THAT is an issue that I'm hyper aware of" (43).

In these narratives, the men often reproduced conflicting discourses. For instance, the need to empower women to help break down the patriarchy, but also that women are vulnerable and in need of protection and yet also co-responsible for participating in problematic, unwanted sexual relations with their male teacher. These kinds of conflicts are common in sense-making, especially where a social phenomenon is still developing (and potentially contested) and are referred to as 'ideological dilemmas' (Billig et al., 1988).

Waling (2023) speaks of this dilemmic framing when addressing men's involvement in the #MeToo movement. She highlights how our limited approach to understanding masculinity is exposed in the tensions and contradictions that arise in men's discussion around this movement. Whilst many men are awakening to the problems of gender inequality, there is still often a subtle shifting of responsibility within contemporary discourse to either; women 'who should have known better', men as unaware and victims of their masculinity, or an over-reliance on only men to 'fix the problem' and be the saviours. All of these framings of the issue can undermine women's experiences, power and autonomy. Additionally a tendency of men to distance themselves from 'other' men who have used violence against women, obscures how sexual violence is embedded in our society and in gender relating (Flood & Ertel, 2020). Over-simplifying masculinities inadequately accounts for the interplay of social, economic and environmental factors that affect gender relations and men's perspectives and is one of the reasons masculinity is so nuanced and difficult to articulate (Waling, 2023).

Moreover, reflective of this time period and current issues, the teachers argued that the #MeToo movement had increased societal awareness around sexual misconduct in the yoga space and as a result some of the men felt a strong pressure to remain vigilant and cautious around female students. In Kennedy's (2023) research on men in outdoor education they also found that men felt a changing discourse in gender relating because of the #MeToo movement, which had resulted in their increased awareness of toxic masculinity, gender inequality and power dynamics in the workplace, which many worked to remedy. For example, Lukas went further to discuss how teachers must remain hyper-

vigilant and alert, in case they say or do something that could be seen as inappropriate, especially in the trauma sensitive environment of yoga:

> “And you have to be absolutely on point with not just with your words, not just with your actions, but also with your energy. And to be that on point all the time. In every aspect, every facet of your work as a yoga teacher” (47).

Lukas described being misunderstood and having his ‘friendly’ actions misinterpreted, which was why he felt he needed to be so careful with how he presented himself to women. This replicates the miscommunication theory Travis spoke of earlier. Flood and Ertel (2020) found that ‘call out culture’ in men aspiring to be allies to feminism can cause them to be hyper-vigilant for fear that they could be publicly criticised for making mistakes. Those men were seen to be unhelpfully self-regulating and policing their language and actions. Similarly, some of the teachers in this study also described censoring themselves and acting extra ‘cautious’ because of stigma around other men’s behaviours. Many teachers showed they felt strongly about the importance of maintaining boundaries but also often described the challenges they experienced in feeling responsible for upholding these boundaries as one of the few men in the feminised yoga environment. They spoke of feeling hyper-aware of their masculine presence, as was elaborated on by Lee:

> “We'd go to trauma informed retreats, where women would be talking about their trauma. And obviously, it's usually men are the perpetrators in these stories, and you almost feel like you're shrinking back into, into yourself to not want to be this like,

the ambassador of, you know, these evil men that are the antagonists in all of these stories" (31).

Lee spoke of feeling guilty and a responsibility for being the sole man amongst the group of women in his teacher training, sensing that he was representing all men by his presence. Whilst my interview questions had not asked about this topic specifically, many teachers brought up their empathy and the burden they felt as men, for the misdeeds of other male yoga teachers who had taken advantage of vulnerable women and caused trauma. As a result, the teachers argued they had to work hard to challenge this stereotype and create a safe and respectful environment in the yoga space, in the face of misconceptions and assumptions around their gender and motives for being a teacher:

> " I guess we probably need to go there, as like a lot of men who do get into yoga are maybe going in there for the wrong reasons […] There are some men who, who seem to make a lot of noise in the yoga world who, yeah, they're wankers, you know, and I would never employ them […] A lot of the yoga gurus, the male yoga gurus, you know, they're sex predators, you know, they've caused a lot of chaos and through their deviant, malicious actions. So, I was acutely aware of that coming into yoga, and it had been sort of been impressed upon me by a couple of my male yoga teachers and a couple of female yoga teachers, like, you know, you've got an extra responsibility." (Dave, 47)

As exemplified by Dave, the men described feeling 'responsible' and also careful to ensure they did not replicate trauma or inappropriate power dynamics in the yoga space. They spoke of managing societal stereotypes about male yoga teachers' bad intentions by

modelling strong, respectful boundaries that were both protective for themselves and for the women in the spaces they taught in. In this way they attempted to counter stigma from the past misconducts of male teachers by ensuring that the yoga room was a safe and welcoming place for all.

In the past five years there has been debate over men's constructions of masculinity and relating. In Kennedy's (2023) research, men were shown to express a new type of masculinity which included adoption of feminine skills and denigration of machoistic or conservative masculinities. He suggests a new hybrid masculinity was evident as these men assumed a socially progressive perspective, yet displayed a subtle sexism evidenced in gender essentialism that supports HM, and which fortifies boundaries and hierarchies. Similarly, in this research some of the teachers engaged in hegemonic discourses as they explained heterosexual relations between men and women in the yoga environment. Some downplayed men's responsibilities whilst attributing part of the miscommunication issues towards women. This is problematic as in Australia between 2018–19, the majority of sexual assault offenders were male (97%) with 1 in 6 women reporting experiencing sexual assault versus 1 in 25 men in a 2016 national survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020).

Many of the men gave examples of 'bad men' who are inherently deviant, which is a common phenomenon that associates blame and sexual violence on specific types of men whilst excusing 'good' men (Waling, 2023). Separating 'bad' men as 'other' can serve to distance oneself of the responsibility associated with everyday sexism and gender violence which everyday 'good' men can perpetuate in subtle ways (O'Hara, 2012). Waling (2023) suggests that we need to rethink our language so that rather than framing men as 'good' or 'bad we acknowledge that everyday 'average' men are also capable of committing sexual

violence. Reframing language and challenging this myth of good and bad men is what can truly work towards addressing gender inequalities, sexual violence and power dynamics (O'Hara, 2012).

As men can often restrain other men's anti-sexist behaviour either through violence, perceived loss of status among peers, or criticism and stigma, adopting anti-sexist ways of being can be challenging for men, yet creating communities of support with women is an important strategy for pro-feminist advocacy (Flood & Ertel, 2020). Flood and Ertel (2020) suggest for men to engage in feminist allyship, they need to actively work towards undoing the privilege and political power they hold and resist the sexism that is offered to them daily. Many of the teachers showed feminist allyship by actively dismissing friends, students and teachers who acted in misogynistic ways and challenged gender stereotypes, even in the face of exclusion from friends and peers. Flood and Ertel (2020) also suggest some of the barriers to feminist allyship include over-intellectualising feminism without embodying it, claiming leadership positions and being 'saviours'. This could be seen in certain situations where the teachers positioned themselves as leaders of change and protectors against deviant men, but often attributed blame towards 'other' men and women's actions, made false equivalence arguments and replicated hegemonic discourses. Flood and Ertel (2020) suggest an antipatriarchal stance involves challenging the oversexualising and objectification of women, men's entitlement and egotism and developing oneself emotionally, which many of the teachers embodied through their actions and through the self-developmental practices of yoga.

Being solicitous and helpful towards those less powerful is a key component of Elliott's (2020a) caring and open masculinities. Sympathising with women and reproducing feminist discourses also has the ability to distance oneself from closed patriarchal forms of

masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Throughout these interviews most men displayed egalitarian, caring perspectives as they worked hard to be trauma informed, be emotionally developed and tried to create a safe community for women. They advocated for yoga as an empowerment tool for gender equality and the reduction of male ego and entitlement, thus lessening discourses of difference between the sexes (Elliott, 2020b).

Summary

In summary, this analysis looked at the fluid ways male yoga teachers embodied unique masculine identities whilst navigating challenging social contexts, gender relations and the wider discourse around gender and what it means to be a man in this modern day as a yoga teacher. In theme one, I looked at the impact yoga had had on the teachers and the way they spoke about themselves in terms of their masculine identity. I analysed the discourses the teachers drew on when making sense of their position in the yoga space and how they may engage in aspects of hybrid, hegemonic and open masculinities when comparing themselves to other men.

In theme two, I looked at some of the challenges the teachers suggested men might face when engaging in or adopting a yoga practice and how to overcome these. Many of the teachers spoke of their own experiences and some reverted to gender essentialism and traditional masculine norms when describing other men and when making suggestions on how to improve men's engagement in yoga.

In theme three, the teachers consistently spoke about having to navigate the stigma associated with being a male teacher, because of the behaviours of past deviant male teachers and gurus, and the shame associated with that. The men described the impact of the #MeToo movement on people's awareness of sexual misconduct in the yoga

environment and this also brought up men's perspectives on relationships dynamics and how easily miscommunications could occur between student and teacher. Many described the way they remained cautious and vigilant by maintaining strong boundaries and high ethical standards. Whilst I was unprepared for such a discussion based on my literature review on men and yoga in the West, it required me to go back and do more research on the #MeToo movement and history of sexual abuse by yoga gurus in the world, which I then added to my literature review.

Across all three themes, many of the teachers appeared to move between both open, closed and hybrid forms of masculinity as they made sense of their own and other men's participation in yoga. They appeared to express a unique type of masculinity by showing emotions and sensitivity that challenge male stereotypes and patriarchal norms as they advocated for gender equality through feminist allyship. This is not to say that some of the teachers did not engage in local hegemonies, which was evidenced when describing other men and making comparisons to them.

Many of the teachers could also be seen as coming from the privileged 'centre' due to their gender, class and education, and which could be evidenced in certain 'closed' narratives when making sense of men's and women's behaviours. For example, some teachers engaged in hegemonic discourses when discussing women's involvement in miscommunications between men and women and when describing essentialist aspects of gender. However, simultaneously, they also showed care, compassion and an openness of understanding when actively challenging men's misogynistic behaviours and describing the challenges and issues facing men and women when engaging in yoga.

Similar to Elliott's (2020b) interviews with Australian men living in Berlin, the men appeared to move from the privileged centre towards 'openness' at the margins, as they

expressed their discomfort around sexism, patriarchy, gender inequalities and traditional markers of HM, and risked exclusion from peers because of their alternative yoga behaviours. Different social contexts required different perspectives and I would argue the men expressed a unique type of 'yoga masculinity' by displaying a flexible approach to teaching in a feminised environment, whilst navigating societal stereotypes and working to break these down in the face of stigma and ostracisation. Consequently, I would suggest this is more in line with Elliott's (2020a) 'open' masculinity that is fluid, contextual and often difficult to articulate with words, yet offers possibilities for more gender equality and the reduction of patriarchy through feminist allyship.

Chapter 5 – Concluding Discussion

In this chapter I will give a summary of the research, the core findings, including the teachers' suggested facilitators and barriers to men's yoga engagement. This will also include my personal reflections and finish by discussing the strengths and limitations of the research and future recommendations.

Summary

This research took a critical, qualitative, perspective using reflexive thematic analysis to learn about the experiences of 15 yoga-teaching men in Australia and New Zealand. The purpose of this research was to understand how male yoga teachers account for the facilitators and barriers to their practice and positionality as a man in this occupation. By understanding how male yoga teachers navigated the potential challenges associated with practising and working in a predominantly feminine environment from their unique perspectives, this thesis provides new and novel information in this under-researched topic and group of men. It also contributes to our understanding of how to mitigate the perceived stigma associated with engaging in a 'feminised' activity, which past research suggests is a barrier to men's engagement in yoga (Cagas et al., 2021; McIver et al., 2022).

This thesis adds to the growing exploration and discussion around masculinity, gender and societal power structures as I analysed the way men drew on a variety of discourses around masculinity and health behaviours when it came to engaging in yoga. Many of the teachers used what could be called 'open' masculine discourses when describing their experiences teaching and practising yoga and to describe the powerful transformative and beneficial effects yoga had had on them (Elliott, 2020a). However, they

tended to use 'closed' masculine discourses to make sense of other men's and women's behaviours and when comparing themselves to typical 'blokes' (Elliott, 2020a). This movement between traditional, hegemonic and more progressive, feminist narratives is consistent with the fluidity and intersecting of Elliot's (2020a) closed and open masculinities which are changing, complex, and often difficult to capture in words. This research also suggests that traditional masculine stereotypes are still deeply entrenched in men's performance of gender, even when newer, open, egalitarian masculinities are emerging (Elliott, 2020a, 2020b). Moreover, the teachers discussed the impact of past male teachers' and gurus' behaviours that had influenced how they held space and prioritised trauma-informed yoga. It brought up the teachers' reactions to the #MeToo movement, navigating relationships with students, sexual misconduct in the yoga space, and the challenges the teachers faced to amend this stigma, which adds to the limited literature in this understudied area.

Core Findings

Facilitators

In line with the aims of this study, avenues for engaging men in yoga were sought because it has been shown to be beneficial for their overall wellbeing and mental health (Conboy et al., 2010; Silveira & Smart, 2020; Suárez-Iglesias et al., 2022; Thayabaranathan et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2023). This is especially important because men's engagement in yoga lags far behind women with estimates at 1-3%, despite these benefits (Cagas et al., 2021; Cagas et al., 2022a; Hinds et al., 2018; Vergeer et al., 2017; Vergeer et al., 2018). Recognising this discrepancy in uptake, the teachers made a number of suggestions that would be useful for engaging more men in yoga. Many adopted

essentialised discourses of gender when describing men as being fundamentally different to women and positioned men as a homogenous group with very little between-group variation.

Some of the suggestions to make yoga more 'men friendly' included marketing yoga to men by having role models such as athletic, successful or influential men advocating for yoga and emphasising the benefits of yoga for sports, rehabilitation and recovery. Having the benefits of yoga supported by science and endorsed by well-known health experts and through popular men's social media platforms was also framed as potentially beneficial and this recommendation is supported by past research on men in yoga (Cagas et al., 2022a).

Many teachers suggested keeping the language simple, the environment not too esoteric with less emphasis on spirituality, which was suggestive of Western men being averse to spirituality as a homogenous group. Encouraging men's introduction to yoga to be a stronger, intense style of class rather than a complicated 'flowy' or 'dance' style of class, or a softer, gentler style, was also identified by the teachers. This approach was intended to attract and retain men, as they were said to be drawn to the more physically challenging, strength-based classes, which is also supported in the literature (Cagas et al., 2021). The teachers suggested that once men were exposed to the benefits of yoga like they themselves had been, they would be much more open minded to explore the subtler meditative and philosophical sides of yoga that kept many of the teachers engaged in their practice long term. Having more male teachers and men in classes was also suggested as a facilitator for new men and supported by similar research (Cagas et al., 2021).

Barriers

This research demonstrated men's accounting for challenges that they identified to engaging in yoga. Central to their descriptions was a positioning of yoga as a feminised activity which can impact on their sense of masculinity, as did similar research by Cagas et al. (2021). The teachers suggested that barriers for men's engagement included the 'feminised' environment of yoga, feelings of inferiority for being a beginner, inflexible or 'bad' at yoga compared to more advanced, flexible female students, and the misperception that yoga is too easy. Other deterrents they described were a lack of male role models and teachers, less perceived value for the time, effort and financial investment in comparison to more 'typically' masculine activities, such as going to the gym or doing hard physical activities, and a preference for more vigorous exercise and sport. The stigma associated with new, healthier lifestyle habits and exclusion from peers for changing their health behaviours was also a challenge for some of the teachers and a suggested barrier for men.

Teachers' Experiences

Finally, and perhaps in contrast to the more essentialising orientations of their other suggestions, the teachers spoke of yoga as a way to break down patriarchal structures, dissolve gender binaries and encourage equality between the sexes in a safe environment. Many of the teachers emphasised their efforts in being trauma informed to remedy the damages caused by other men's sexual misconduct. This was an unsolicited topic but clearly one of importance for the men and relevant with regard to masculinities and led me to my analysis of the #MeToo movement and Elliott's (2020a) theory of masculinities. These men appeared to express an open-mindedness and non-traditional ideals that contrasted with past research on men's perspectives on yoga (Cagas et al., 2021; McIver et al., 2022). Furthermore, the teachers saw yoga as a way to solve many of society's problems of gender

inequality and believed everyone could benefit from yoga, which suggests yoga was much more than just a physical activity for men.

Personal Reflections

I came to this research with the intention to hear about the benefits of yoga for male teachers, the challenges they had initially faced engaging in yoga, how they overcame them and also potential future interventions and suggestions for encouraging other men to engage in yoga. I also anticipated learning about men's expressions of yoga masculinities, and to gain more of an understanding of how this differed to traditional hegemonic masculinity. Whilst I learnt a lot about the men's experiences in the topics above, this research brought up something I was unprepared for and had not been discussed in past research on male yoga teachers (Cagas et al., 2021; Cagas et al., 2022a; McIver et al., 2022; Park et al., 2019; Parker, 2020). Many of the men talked about their challenges with stigma and stereotyping due to their positions as male yoga teachers in a predominantly female environment and the history of sexual misconduct and assault by past male teachers and spiritual leaders such as yoga gurus, that had impacted on them.

Past research on yoga and men has tended to focus on short-term interventions in small subgroups, such as in prisons and universities, and has focused on the beneficial effects of yoga (Bartels et al., 2019; Brems et al., 2015; Hurst et al., 2018; Kerekes et al., 2017). One of the only studies which also interviewed male yoga teachers in New Zealand was the unpublished thesis by Parker (2020) who found those men experienced stigma for engaging in a feminised activity. Other similar studies on men and yoga in Australia found stigma and issues of masculinity were a barrier to everyday men's yoga engagement (Cagas et al., 2021; McIver et al., 2022). However, none of these studies found issues of sexual

misconduct, predatory males, yoga-student relations or the #MeToo movement to be significant factors in men's experiences in yoga and which was part of the reason I did not expect to discuss the topic with the teachers.

My research was inductive and so my resulting discussion arose from themes that were constructed from commonalities in the men's interviews. As the interviews were semi-structured and open-ended the directions they took were also shaped by the teachers. This seemed most evident in the opportunity I gave them to discuss 'anything else?' in the closing question. In response, half of the teachers brought up stories and examples of the challenges they faced dealing with stigma, stereotypes and even false accusations around sexual misconduct because of the behaviours of other men in the yoga space. Therefore theme 3 was constructed around this topic.

Additionally, I had intended to act as advocate and provide a voice for male teachers to discuss all of their experiences teaching yoga with a focus on the positives of yoga for men's holistic health and how to encourage more men's engagement in yoga. However, the directions of many of the interviews led me into a critical analysis on men's adherence to masculine norms from a feminist perspective. Whilst I wanted to tell the teachers stories as an ally to men's voices, as a woman I felt compelled to comment on conflicting discourses in the men's narratives when it came to the #MeToo movement, complicity with hegemonic norms, patriarchy and yoga masculinities. I felt hesitant for being critical and had to navigate how to represent the data accurately whilst also providing my perspective, as well as theirs. At times I felt that I was presenting the findings in a way the men would not be happy with by commenting on their adherence to masculine norms or miscommunications in the yoga space. However, my criticisms were not on the men themselves, but rather the systems and discourses they drew on to make sense of their experiences. In fact, my critical

theorising was that the teachers were actively orientating towards engaging as 'better' men in the world and were challenging oppressive, patriarchal structures whilst advocating for women in feminist allyship (Flood & Ertel, 2020; Waling, 2023).

Elliott and Roberts (2020) argue that it is crucial to remember that these men are 'real' people who have behaviours and lives that go far beyond what is expressed in a short interview and so, to position individuals as displaying hegemonic traits raises questions around the complexities of doing feminist research with men. If the researching of men's performance of masculinities is not scrutinised and interrogated, then it can replicate and perpetuate power imbalances rather than challenge discrimination and inequalities (Elliott & Roberts, 2020). Elliott and Roberts further argued that a key issue when interviewing men is to maintain generosity and value their time whilst also being able to critique problematic discourses, even in 'good' men. They suggest researcher self-reflexivity is important here as we question what constitutes a problematic discourse and who gets to decide what men should and should not be saying. Therefore, to give a fair representation of men's voices, my analysis drew on the relevant literature on masculinity, gender, yoga and health to support my findings for my readers' critical discernment, whilst the data provided the evidence for my reasonings (Braun et al., 2018; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Butler-Kisber, 2018; Connell, 2009; Elliott, 2020b; Messerschmidt, 2018; Roberts, 2018; Waling, 2023). I will now discuss future avenues for research based on the strengths and limitations of the study.

Strengths, Limitations and Future Research

As a cis-hetero-woman who grew up in a middle-class, Pākehā (Caucasian) household in New Zealand, I was aware that I was viewing the research from a specific lens. However, to improve fidelity, my questions were purposely framed to address a specific

research question whilst remaining open-ended. I designed the questions with an awareness of this implication, and addressed it for the readers' discernment, whilst recognising the impact this may have had on my interviews (Levitt et al., 2017). Individual interviews were a strength due to the various perspectives, opinions and sometimes personal nature of the discussion, as well as mitigating some of the impacts of the hetero gender dynamic which would have been more difficult to navigate in focus groups (Sallee & Harris, 2011; Sloan et al., 2010). Moreover, conducting video interviews across Australia and New Zealand was convenient and accessible and provided increased safety as a woman interviewing male strangers. Being a yoga teacher myself was a strength of the research, as my awareness as an insider in that respect allowed me to understand implied content, have shared knowledge and an easier entrée with prior understanding of the topic (Berger, 2015).

This study provided insight into an under-researched topic and group of men, furthering our understanding of men's perspectives teaching yoga. It contributes to our understanding of men's experiences in a feminised environment and how this impacts on their sense of masculinity. A challenge of qualitative research from the perspective of constructionism is that I recruited participants that were members of a social category and location, which potentially replicated a certain narrative through my particular sampling of men (Potter & Robles, 2022). However, my intention was to purposely recruit a small and homogenous group, representing one type of perspective, in an under-researched area to gain specific insights into that group (Braun et al., 2018; Guest et al., 2006; Terry et al., 2017). Nevertheless, future research could address this factor, if possible, by recruiting from various ethnic backgrounds and also factoring in socioeconomic status in, which my study did not address. This would increase our understanding of less privileged and marginalised

groups of men's perspectives teaching yoga in Australia and New Zealand in this small, under-studied population.

Additionally, as spirituality was cited as a barrier to men's engagement by teachers, and this is supported in the literature, it would be interesting to understand indigenous men's perspectives on practising and teaching yoga in Australia and New Zealand (Cagas et al., 2021; McIver et al., 2022). New Zealand Māori and Australian First Nations peoples have a rich, deep, cultural and spiritual heritage, and a strong connection to the land and the importance of spirituality on indigenous men's well-being has been highlighted in past literature (Mead, 2016; Rua et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2023; Tse et al., 2005). Therefore, understanding how indigenous men might experience yoga and its associated spiritualism, and the potential benefits of it for their well-being, especially those suffering from physical and mental health issues, would be valuable.

Another aspect of the men's demographics was the style of yoga they taught, which had been asked about and recorded in the participant demographics form, with many teachers having a wide range of experience in various styles. Yoga style was also not a criterion factored for by Cagas et al. (2022a) when selecting men in their yoga research, which they mentioned as a limitation to their work. This is because yoga styles vary greatly and can range from passive, restorative, supported, ground-based poses to challenging, strengthening, hot, fast-paced, power classes with very advanced poses. Considering many of the teachers taught the stronger vinyasa styles of yoga in this study, it may have oriented some of their perspectives around what was considered a 'masculine' form, as they were attracted to harder classes and also had students who preferred those styles of classes. In future, including perspectives from men who taught different styles of yoga and sampling accordingly may provide unique perspectives.

Investigating perspectives based on length of teaching and practising yoga would also be interesting for future research. Many of the men described how their practice had evolved over time and they were now more drawn to the meditative, philosophical or subtler practices compared to the early days when they had focused more on physical asana. Past research shows a correlation to the extent of yoga practice and spirituality and meaningfulness in one's life, which is an under-researched topic (Csala et al., 2021; Ivtzan & Papantoniou, 2014; Kidd & Eatough, 2017). As the men's length of teaching yoga varied from 1.5 – 23 years this could be an influential factor and further explored.

An aspect of the research I did not fully investigate but which arose in many of my interviews was the men's sexuality. I had not asked about the men's sexuality, as the intent of this research was to open up the conversation in an under-researched topic and sexuality went beyond the research question. Trying to sample for different sexualities might have further restricted my sample in this small population of men and I had limited resources to adjust my sample according to sexual orientation. However, one gay participant said this was an important factor I should be noting in my research, as he believed it impacted on his experience teaching to women compared to heterosexual male yoga teachers. He said he was less threatening to women because everyone knew he was gay by the way he presented himself. Past research suggests gay men are seen as more suitable for 'feminised' managerial and leadership positions than heterosexual men (Barrantes & Eaton, 2018). Moreover, gay men working in 'masculinised' roles were seen as less feminine than gay men working in 'feminised' roles (Fingerhut & Peplau, 2006). This could have implications on how gay men in leadership and managerial roles (such as teaching yoga and owning yoga studios) would be perceived and how their sexuality might potentially impact their experiences teaching yoga. Two of the teachers who identified as gay in my study pointed

out that their sexual orientation likely impacted on the classroom dynamics, especially when teaching to mainly women. Therefore, I recommend future research include sexuality as a factor in their sampling criteria when addressing men's experiences working in feminised environments and teaching yoga to women.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

This research provided a unique perspective from an under-studied group of men and adds to the paucity of research on male yoga teachers in Australia and New Zealand. The findings from this study are supported by past research suggesting yoga plays an important role in men's mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health (Bilderbeck et al., 2013; Borotikar et al., 2023; Burnett-Zeigler et al., 2016; Cagas et al., 2020; Csala et al., 2021; Krejčí et al., 2020; McIver et al., 2022; Toof et al., 2022; Watts et al., 2018). Past research suggests men are less likely to see health specialists for many reasons including gender stereotypes, stigma, structural, cultural and educational barriers, and less action-based informal approaches suited to men (Affleck et al., 2018; Seidler et al., 2021; Whitley, 2021). Similarly, this study found men experience a wide range of societal barriers to yoga engagement and the participants recommendations were informative for understanding the facilitators to encourage more men to practise yoga.

Additionally, this study shed light on the way male yoga teachers express unique and fluid forms of open, hybrid and hegemonic masculinities, suggestive of a new form of 'yoga masculinity' which adds to the literature on this under-studied topic. Consequently, this research could be used to inform future health interventions targeted towards men and to facilitate men's engagement in other feminised health-promoting activities and wellness modalities. These findings play an important role for informing future research regarding

men and yoga and for guiding policy and public health interventions for men’s holistic health, which has further implications for community health and society as a whole.

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Appendix A

Information Flyer

Participate In a Study on Men Who Teach Yoga!

What are your experiences as a yoga teacher?

I am looking for men 18+ years who have at least a years experience teaching yoga.

I am looking for teachers in Australia and New Zealand.
Participation involves a 30-60 min zoom call, where we will casually chat about your experiences practicing and teaching yoga.
All participants receive a grocery gift card for their time.

If you're interested please contact me via Email:
Kristina.Aitchison.1@uni.massey.ac.nz

About the Researcher

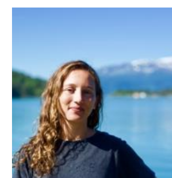
My name is Kristina Aitchison. I am a Masters student at Massey University's School of Psychology and I am also a yoga teacher. I have a special interest in mens mental health and would like to learn more about the benefits and challenges men face in engaging in yoga from a yoga teachers perspective. This will help to add to our understanding in this under-researched area and may help to inform future research and mental health policy.

Appendix B

Forms Sent to Participants

Figure B1

Participant Information Sheet



Information sheet

Researcher: Kristina Aitchison
September 2023

Men's perspectives teaching yoga

My name is Kristina Aitchison. I am a Masters student at Massey University's School of Psychology. This information sheet is to help you decide if you'd like to take part in an interview study aiming to better understand men's perspectives teaching yoga. You may want to talk about the study with other people, such as colleagues and family. You can also contact me if you have any questions (details below).

Project Description
In this research project, we're interested in understanding your experiences as a male yoga teacher in the context of Australia and New Zealand. We want to know about the benefits you've gained and the challenges you've faced in both practicing and teaching yoga. We're also curious about what it's like for you to be a man in a profession where statistically the majority of teachers and students are women. We want to explore your experience of being one of the few men teaching yoga in this type of occupation and hear about any challenges you might have encountered and how you've been able to overcome them. Additionally, we're trying to figure out why there are fewer men who choose to do yoga compared to women in Australia and New Zealand. So, we'd like to hear your thoughts on what might be causing this gender difference in yoga participation. Another aspect we want to delve into is your sense of masculine identity, particularly in the context of teaching yoga classes primarily attended to by women. How does this experience affect your perception of yourself as a man? Have you faced any stigma or judgement from others for being in this occupation? We're also considering how broader societal attitudes may impact your personal and professional life. Finally, we would love to hear how yoga has positively impacted you and your mental, physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. If you're willing to participate, your insights can help us gain a deeper understanding of these important issues in the world of men's health behaviours and for informing policy and health interventions for improving men's mental and physical wellbeing.

You are invited to take part in an interview.
If you are interested, please consider the information below and complete the consent form attached.

To be eligible to participate in this research, you need to meet the following criteria:

1. You identify as a man.
2. Are 18 years of age or older.
3. Have at least one year of experience teaching yoga.
4. Have done a minimum of a 200-hour teacher training.
5. You should have availability to participate in a 30-60 minute Zoom or Skype interview.

If you meet these criteria, we would love to have you be a part of this study! Taking part in this interview is totally voluntary and you can decide to opt out at any time. Participants will be recruited through my yoga connections, social media networks and yoga association websites and we expect to have about 12-20 participants to gather enough information.

What will happen if I take part?

- Before we schedule interviews, you will be asked to sign a consent form.
- You will also be asked some brief questions about who you are and your teaching experience so we can provide a summary of participant demographics. This can be done via E-mail before your interview.
- Interviews can take place at any time convenient for you, where you have access to Zoom and a quiet space to chat openly.
- The interview will likely take between 30-60 minutes depending on the extent of your answer to each question, with a maximum of 90 minutes allocated in total.
- During the interview, you will be asked to reflect on your personal experiences practicing and teaching yoga.
- I will have a list of general questions, but you do not have to answer everything. Equally, you can add information of your own.

Figure B2

Participant Demographics Form

Yoga Teacher Background Questionnaire

1. Personal Information:
   a. Name:
   b. Contact Number:
   c. Age:
   d. Ethnicity:
   e. Country of Origin:
   f. Current Location:

2. Yoga Experience:
   a. Length of Teaching Yoga in years:
   b. Length of Practicing Yoga in years:

3. Teaching Style:
   a. Describe your style of yoga teaching:
   b. Do your classes comprise of mainly men or women or equal numbers?

Figure B3

Informed Consent Form

Kristina Aitchison
School of Psychology
Massey University, Palmerston North
PO Box 11 222
Telephone: 0061414134308
Kristina.Aitchison.1@uni.massey.ac.nz

Participant Consent Form

Men's perspectives teaching yoga

I have read and I understand the Information Sheet provided. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary. I am aware that I may withdraw from the study up to 2 weeks after taking part.

1. I agree to participate under the conditions of the Information Sheet. Yes ☐ No ☐
2. I agree to the interview being sound recorded. Yes ☐ No ☐
3. I wish to have a copy of transcript to review. Yes ☐ No ☐
4. I understand that participation in this study is confidential. No material that could identify me, my work place or my colleagues will be used in any reports on this study. Yes ☐ No ☐
5. I wish to receive a summary of the results from the study. Yes ☐ No ☐

Declaration by Participant:

I ________________________________hereby consent to take part in this study (print full name).

Signature: ____**Date:** ___________________

If you ticked 'yes' to items, 3 or 5, please provide your contact details below:
Address:
Email:
Telephone:

Appendix C

Interview Schedule

Briefing, acknowledgements, and introductions.

Aims of the interview

- To understand the type of barriers and facilitators yoga teachers encounter in their engagement teaching and practising yoga. To understand how they navigate their roles as men in a predominantly female activity in Australia and New Zealand.
- To further understand how these men experience their masculinity in a feminised role. Do they enact and experience their masculinity in a different way to traditional, orthodox masculinity?
- To understand how we can help men overcome potential barriers or stigma engaging in an activity that is feminised. To understand how men who have overcome these barriers such as yoga teachers, managed potential judgement from others or other barriers such as stigma. This will help us get a better understand of how masculinity plays a role in men's perceptions of yoga and whether this impacts their participation. This can help to inform future research and interventions on encouraging men to engage in alternative help-therapies for their mental and physical well-being.

Questions will be broad and related to these aims and prompts will be used. None are mandatory to answer.

Script: I am really interested in hearing about your journey as a yoga teacher. We'll chat about your experiences practising and teaching yoga, engaging with male students and colleagues. We'll also get into how you think yoga is perceived by men, why you think there are less men doing yoga then women, and any interesting encounters you've had in that regard including the stereotypes you've noticed, and how societal norms might potentially shape people's views of yoga. Finally we will discuss how you manage any stigma that might be associated with teaching yoga as a man.

- **Why were you initially drawn to yoga?**

  e.g. referrals, a life event, injury, stress, physical or mental reasons, friends/partner/family suggestion, curiosity?

1. **What are the benefits of yoga for you? Do you think people who are new to yoga also experience these benefits?**

   e.g. flexibility, stress-reduction, sense of community, emotional regulation, relaxation, rehabilitation, sleep, spiritual benefits, sense of purpose?

- **Have you experienced any judgement or stigma in your journey practising yoga or becoming a yoga teacher?**

  Has your journey in practising yoga or pursuing a career as a yoga teacher been influenced by any experiences of judgment or stigma?

  e.g. Have you experienced any judgement from friends, family or other men for doing yoga? Stigma from non-yoga people?

- **Are there strategies or approaches you've found effective in overcoming these barriers, which might be helpful to other men interested in yoga?**
- **What percentage of people in your yoga class are men or women?**

Why do you think this is the case e.g. if there is more women why so? Why are there less men?

- **Why do you think other men are initially drawn to try yoga? What benefits do you think keep men in yoga?**

  e.g. *what have you witnessed as a teacher? Have men told you why they have started yoga? What do you personally think are the reasons they start?*

- **Considering there are less men that do yoga to women in Australia and New Zealand, why do you think that is and what do you think are the barriers for men in starting and sustaining a yoga practice?**

  e.g. stereotypes, demographics of participants, accessibility, priorities, awareness, education on benefits, spiritual aspect, time, class style, teacher, gender differences, student numbers?

- **Do you think all men could benefit from yoga?**
- **If we are thinking about a typical yoga teacher, what do they look and act like? How does this fit in with your own self-image? What does a typical male yoga teacher act and look like?**

  E.g. is the typical yoga teacher a white woman, flexible, athletic, doing hard postures? Or is it a man from India? What do the majority of yoga teachers look/act like in your area?

- **What comes to mind when you hear the word masculinity and what characteristics define a man? How do you think practising yoga challenges or conform to men's perceptions of traditional masculinity?**

  Do you think that society's expectation of how men should behave impacts their engagement with yoga?

How might societal expectations regarding male behavior influence the way men approach and participate in the practice of yoga?

E.g. Yoga is for women only? Men avoid doing yoga because it's not manly enough? There are too many women doing yoga for a man to fit in?

- **What was the motivator behind your career choice? How do people react when you tell them your occupation for the first time?**

  E.g. Meeting people for the first time, telling people who don't do yoga what you do? How do friends and family react?

- **Are there any implications of your job on how you see yourself as a man? How do you manage any conflicts in this respect?**

  E.g. Do you have to explain yourself to others? Do you find yourself having to excuse your choice of occupation or emphasize certain aspects?

- **Is there anything I have missed?**

  Is there anything else you'd like to share before I turn the recorder off?