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Moving beyond ‘a hierarchy of pecs and penises’: how gay and queer men contest, resist, negotiate, and perform masculinity

219855 Research report presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements to the degree of
Master of Communication at Massey University, New Zealand

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28 June 2020

ABSTRACT

This narrative inquiry examines the identities and lives of nine gay and queer men living in Wellington, New Zealand as narrated and performed in hour-long semi-structured interviews. Viewing identities as social constructions that are generated through people's interactions within specific physical and temporal contexts, this research project examines the performative construction of gay and queer masculinity, and the effects of gender and sexuality in the participants' lives. Through the perspective of a queer male researcher, this project locates gay and queer men within their wider struggles with heteronormativity, and gives voice and privilege to their minority identities and experiences.

Narrative analysis of the participants' stories focuses on how gay and queer individuals navigate their lives as non-normative men who are Othered by traditional, hegemonic and hierarchical masculinity. Viewing identities as unstable and requiring of endless (re)negotiation and (re)performance, this research also examines the complex hierarchical construction of hegemonic homomascularity by some straight-acting gay men who bolster their own gender performances by Othering femme-presenting individuals. It explores how heteronormative gender constructs and hypermasculine, hypersexual stereotypes affect the lives of the participants, identifying poor self-image, feelings of shameful and inadequate masculinity, and the need for secrecy about their sexuality as key drivers in homomascularity identity development. Additionally, media, pornography and violence are examined as significant in the generation and delayed performance of homomascularity identities. Finally, this research also analyses how some takatāpui and queer-identifying participants negotiate Self with high agency, and perform their identities free of the homohierarchy of traditional, hegemonic gender constructs. By integrating aspects of their gendered, sexual Selves within their identities, queer and takatāpui participants make clear the means by which people with non-normative homomascularity identities may be empowered, liberated and validated as people like all others.

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I INTRODUCTION

The diversity of genders, sexualities and identities continues to become more visible and accepted within mainstream society than has historically been the case in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This is significant to the individuals whose non-normative gendered sexual identities do not conform to the dominant heteronormative social constructs within which they must live and, hopefully, flourish. It is also of consequence for other people who value individual difference as social possibility and equality as a key aspect of societies in which all people are free.

Social change and progress are slow and erratic, and the construction and communication of masculinity within male homophile communities has received little scholarly attention for many years (Manley et al., 2007; Yep, 2003). However, there are strong indicators that things are changing, and that previously overlooked minorities are beginning to be examined and understood. Communication scholars are now exploring the marginalised identities of those who do not conform to the heteronormative prescriptions which privilege, promote and maintain the dominant social status of heterosexual men at the expense of women and sexual minorities in Western societies (Yep, 2003). By focusing on the construction and performance of masculinity for gay and queer men, this study seeks to extend knowledge in this domain.

What has been established by past research is that masculinity is a hegemonic construct that positions identities within a hierarchy that is generated according to normative gender roles and scripts (Connell, 1992; Kimmell, 1994). As gender role nonconforming deviants, gay and queer men are considered Others in opposition to whom traditional masculinity coalesces as normative and 'natural' (Gutting, 2005). Therefore, as social constructions, gendered identities of sexual minorities continue to be sites of oppression, resistance and contestation where much harm is done to the non-normative Self of gay and queer folk. Often beginning in childhood, non-normative queer individuals experience complex effects as Other beings in a straight man's world (McDonald, 2016). These personal, physical and relational effects of hegemonic masculinity have enduring impacts on the identities of gay and queer men (Fulcher, 2017; Sanchez et al., 2016).

Gay and queer men, however, choose to contest and resist heteronormative gender expectations, and to liberate Self by negotiating and performing homomascinities (McCormack, 2012; Milani, 2014). They come out of the closet to inhabit Othered non-normative identities (Yep, 2003). Yet, identities are social constructs performed in relation to specific and immediate contexts that are unstable and highly susceptible to normative pressures and constructs (Butler, 2006; Eguchi, 2011; Goffman, 1959),

and gay and queer men respond differently. On one hand, gay men rigidly enforce gender (Clarkson, 2006; Miller, 2015), and their negotiations and performances of Self have been shown to replicate many of the hegemonic and hierarchical characteristics of traditional Western masculinity (Milani, 2016; Taywaditep, 2002). Contrastingly, queer men are those whose identities are politicised by the rejection of all identity categories and roles, including those of normative gay constructs (McDonald, 2016, Yep, 2003). Queer identities disregard the binary masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual constructs of hegemonic masculinity, and move to a post-gay negotiation of Self within which sexuality and gender are indivisibly integrated (Slagle, 2006). Such individuals resist hierarchies and identity categories as sites of oppression, and present Self liberated from hetero- and homonormative expectations (Gutting, 2005).

Additionally, gay and queer identities are as multifaceted and complex as are the contexts within which they are generated and located. Consequently, this qualitative study employs a subjective orientation to investigate the nuanced ways that gay and queer men contest, resist, negotiate, and perform masculinity, and the effects of doing so in their lives. Viewing identities as the stories that we tell about ourselves to other social players (De Fina, 2015), it seeks to generate an insider's perspective of what it means to live as a gay or queer man in a heteronormative world by analysing the narratives of nine participants. Throughout, meanings, like people's identities, are viewed as social constructions within which there is no objective truth (De Fina, 2015). Subsequently, knowledge in this report is the product of interactions between gay and queer participants, and a queer male researcher, and understandings are seen as located in a specific time and place.

For individuals whose minority identities are oppressed, telling their stories is an act of resistance (Plummer, 1995). Therefore, this research has direct significance to those involved. It also has significance for wider populations of non-normative individuals who may benefit from hearing minorities' stories. It gives voice and privilege to the stories of Self of gay and queer men whose minority identities and perspectives are often disregarded and misunderstood (Plummer, 1995). It also provides valid information to the public, and doing so fosters positive attitudes to sexual minorities (Silverschanz, 2009). Moreover, the narrative basis of this research renders it a meaningful contribution to evolving social and cultural discourses by including the narratives of Othered minorities.

This research contributes voices of lived experiences to established knowledge of how it is that gay and queer men contest and resist heteronormativity. It explores some of the experiences and realities of those who negotiate and perform non-normative identities, contributing personal, lived perspectives to the extant body of knowledge. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) communities continue to face multiple forms of oppression related to normalised socially constructed

ideas of sexuality and gender (Bartone, 2018; Yep, 2003). Consequently, this research has the potential to help individuals understand the normative oppressions they face. Once oppression is understood, it can be confronted and dismantled, offering benefits to all who value freedom and the choice to express Self through whatever identity they choose.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Gays, Queers and the Rest of the Rainbow

Although, there are multiple terms used to identify same-sex attracted men, the terms *gay* and *queer* are used in this study. Borrowing from Bartone's (2018) definition, the term *gay* is used in this report to identify males who are physically and emotionally attracted to other males, setting them apart from those in society who have opposite-sexed emotional and physical attractions. In this sense, gay men are those who have 'come out', who have rejected heteronormative forces to establish gay identities for themselves. *Gay* is also used to acknowledge the sacrifices and achievements of countless people who have formed the Gay Liberation Movement (Milani, 2014), and to honour the courage of the gay men and women who continue to live out radical negotiations of sexuality and gender despite immense social and cultural oppression, negation and criminalisation of their gendered sexual identities. Against tremendous odds, and with considerable losses, they continue to make it possible for me too to live openly as a gay man and researcher of gay issues.

English is peppered with pejorative terms for same-sex attracted men – *pansy*, *poofster*, *faggot*, *fudge-packer*, and *shirt-lifter*, to name just a few (Edwards, 1994). Derisive and injurious as these words may be, they fail to recognise the range and extent of diverse queer identities and behaviours, many of which have proliferated since the Stonewall Riots of June 28, 1969 and the Gay Liberation Movement that they sparked (Baker, 2005). Such pejorative and reductive terms also fail to encapsulate the vibrant richness of gay and queer men's identities and lives, and the resilience of the men who live them despite ongoing social and cultural misunderstanding, marginalisation, and exclusion.

The homosexual identity did not exist before the late nineteenth century when the modern homosexual subject came into being through the categorising and treating of sexual disorders by the medical profession (Foucault, 1990). Since then, queer men have continued to construct and enact a rich diversity of gendered sexual identities (McDonald, 2016), including *feys* and *nellies*, *queers*, *gays*, *clones* and *leathermen*, *drag queens*, *gender-benders* and *takatāpui*, *assimilationist dads* and *marriage equality activists*, *queens*, *fairies* and *plague survivors*, *bug-chasers* and *PrEP whores*, *muscle marys*, *twinks* and *bears* (for instance, see Speildenner, 2016). However, many of these identities remain largely invisible beyond their specific immediate social contexts, and unknown to large portions of wider heterosexual society.

That said, while this study focuses on the communication of homosexual masculinities as a broad identity grouping, it does not account in detail for the significant historical, geographic and cultural variances that are evident in the above listing of names. Therefore, the post-structuralist term *queer*

is also used throughout this report to acknowledge and include the diversity of minority masculine identities and their constituent communities. That is, the use of *queer* is in keeping with the interpretivist paradigm within which this study is located, referring to the broad array of political masculinities that contest heteronormativity, homophobia and misogyny (McCormack, 2012).

Gay and queer male identities are indeed heterogenous social and cultural constructs that are communicated and performed in myriad ways (Bishop et al., 2014). These identities are constructed around narratives that society tells queer men about themselves, as well as around stories they tell themselves about their minority positioning in a heterosexual world. All too often, however, stories of Self told from the edges of society are not heard in dominant social discourses (Yep, 2003). Therefore, in these times of social polarisation, hearing alternative voices that speak to the truth of queer men's genders and sexual identities is, perhaps, more important than ever.

2.2 The Queer Perspective

Since the 1980s, queer theory has been central to the narrowing focus of cultural studies on the identities and communication of gay men. It has emerged as a critical theory which challenges heteronormativity, or the assumption that heterosexuality is the normal, legitimate or dominant sexuality (Milani, 2014). As such, queer theory “demands new ways of looking at the world” (Slagle, 2006, p. 311). It is also dedicated to enhancing queer individuals' agency through resistance (McCormack, 2012), and “interrogating the normalising technologies of power” (Yep, 2003, p. 48). In this regard, queer theory has drawn on Foucault's ideas of reverse discourse as resistance to state and institutional power that arises from language and knowledge, where social power is not viewed as a binary top down structure, but one that is bottom up. Reverse discourse, therefore, holds that resistance to power is proportional to the exertion of that power (Foucault, 1990), providing the foundation on which queer theory rests.

Of particular relevance to the current study is that queer theory challenges the assimilation of LGBTQI people into an otherwise unchanged mainstream. Instead, it calls for the dismantling of existing power structures, and the generation of social and cultural domains that incorporate and celebrate radical queer identities alongside all others (McDonald, 2016; Milani, 2014). That is, queer theory celebrates human difference, challenging the assumption that LGBTQI individuals share an essential identity (Slagle, 2006).

Significantly, queer theory shares a core conviction with feminist thinking, that the personal is political (Anderson, 2009). I too share this conviction, and queer theory informs aspects of this study which

aims to de-mystify and empower the identities of marginalised same-sex attracted men. That is, I apply a queer lens to examining the communicative construction of the masculinities of gay and queer men, and to the effects of such homomasculine identity constructions on the communication and lives of those men.

2.3 Masculinity

Masculinity is constructed by men in negotiation together (Connell, 1992; Kimmel, 1994), and is understood as the normative, idealised presentation of male gender performance in relation to which most boys and young men are taught to position themselves. Diversities of masculinities exist, yet Western heterosexual masculinity is hegemonic in nature (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) - a reified system within which social roles for cis-gendered males are viewed as normal, and all others are either feminine or abnormal (Bartone, 2018). This hegemonic conception of masculinity rests on power enshrined as dominance over the feminine and women in general, as well as dominance over gay men since, by virtue of being the object and subject of their own desire, gay men are conflated with the feminine. They are, therefore, to be opposed as non-men, deviant and deficient Others (McDonald, 2016).

Given this hegemonic quality, heterosexual masculinity is also hierarchical in structure due to an ongoing process of (re)sorting wherein masculinities seek ascendancy over each other (Griffin, 2018). Such 'compulsory masculinity' accords certain Western masculinities salience and status, while others are diminished and de-valued (Connell 1992; Taywaditep, 2002), since heterosexuality "privileges, elevates and maintains the dominant material status of men" at the expense of sexual others (Yep, 2003, p. 20; Taywaditep, 2002).

On broad socio-cultural levels, men who have male sexual partners are considered more feminine and less masculine, and not real men (Eguchi, 2009; Yep, 2003). Sexuality is a system of power (McCormack, 2012) where masculinity is underpinned by a "homo/hetero discourse" (Kehler, 2004, p.108) and unequal power relations exist between men (Anderson, 2009; Messerschmidt, 2018; Plummer, 2005). Put another way, the masculinity of gay men is defined by what it is *not*. That is, homomascularity is *not* heterosexual masculinity, which is normatively defined as tough, aggressive, independent, and dominant (Mosher et al., 2006). As such, hegemonic forces of exclusive heteronormative gender definitions discredit and discount gay men's masculinities and identities as unvaluable, undesirable, and invalid.

2.4. Homophobia, Gender Roles, and Gay Self

Put simply, masculinity is homophobia. Understood as the verbal and non-verbal communication of fear and loathing of homosexuality, homophobia is “the central organising principle of our cultural definition of manhood” (Kimmel, 1994, p.127; Fulcher, 2017). Fuelled by homophobia, or “the fear of being homosexualised” (Anderson, 2009, p. 7), homophobia searches out, labels and excludes boys and men whose performance of masculinity appears sissy, weak or uncool (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). It is the “heterosexual and masculine social currency” (Anderson, 2009, p. 1) by which boys and men remain in step with the homophobic ethos they see as popular, and which is prescribed by male gender roles within compulsory Western masculinity.

Gender roles are explicit codes of behaviour, attitude and personality traits that are designated as masculine or feminine and appropriate for specific male or female social roles in a given culture at a specific period of time (Mosher et al., 2006). However, up to three-quarters of queer individuals demonstrate behaviours in childhood that do not conform to their ascribed gender role (Taywaditep, 2002), meaning that, in general, queer males often experience homophobia early in life. As a result, the drive to fulfil and maintain gender roles can be problematic for individuals for whom gender is textured by minority sexuality status and on-going failure to align with normative gender role expectations. This discordance is explained by gender role conflict, or the psychological state wherein gender roles have negative consequences or impacts on people, causing them to experience restricted ability to “actualise their human potential, or the restriction of someone else’s potential” (O’Neil, 1981, as cited in Mosher et al., 2006, p. 95). Unsurprisingly, gender role conflict has serious psychological consequences for individuals who experience it, including anxiety, depression, anger and lowered overall wellbeing (Mosher et al., 2006).

The consequences are also considerable for those who experience other forms of rejection of non-normative Self, such as homophobia. Homophobia is operationalised as the rejection and vilification of the performance of masculinity by gay boys and men. Moreover, homophobia constitutes “soul murder” (Yep, 2003, p. 22), or deliberate attempts to erase or undermine the separate identities of queer individuals. The effects of ubiquitous and constant homophobic and femmophobic pressures on the Self of young queer people are significant, impacting individuals throughout their lives. Well-noted minority stress effects in gay men include, “depression, shame, guilt, and lowered self-esteem ... body image concerns” (Fulcher, 2017; Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2019, p. 105), as well as the construction of negative gay identity (Eguchi, 2006; Rowen & Malcolm, 2002; Sanchez et al., 2016). Homophobia also affects the communication and daily interactions of gay men as seen, for instance, in the promotion of pro-masculinity attitudes (Hunt et al., 2015; Sanchez & Vilain, 2012), and discourses that differentiate between straight acting and effeminate gays (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). Homophobia has also

been linked to substance abuse by queer men (Weber, 2008). Furthermore, it affects relationship quality for men who have sex with men (MSM) who may encounter intimacy problems, decreased quality and satisfaction in relationships, and seeking out sexual encounters devoid of intimacy (Frost & Meyer, 2009), as well as poor relationship outcomes with father figures (Taywaditep, 2002). In short, the deleterious effects of the communication of homophobia on the Self of gay boys and men is a well-studied area (Silverschanz, 2009).

2.5 Social Identities

The notion that people negotiate, present and perform their concept of Self in daily encounters was greatly advanced by the sociologist Erving Goffman (1959). Interested in social constructions and human interactions, he explored the presentation of identity through the concept of dramaturgy, promoting understanding of the performative aspect of social identities. Additionally, Goffman viewed face-to-face communication as “the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another’s actions when in one another’s immediate presence” (p.15), drawing attention to the co-constructed and context-determined aspects of performative identities.

Regarding such social identities, Goffman (1959) conceptualised the presentation of Self as consisting of frontstage and backstage elements. He suggested that people are social tricksters seeking to present themselves in the most positive manner possible, and that the front stage is the public arena where self-identity is realised as the performance of normative roles, rendering this aspect of Self “a mask that social agents wear” (Eguchi, 2011, p. 41). Social identity impression management occurs frontstage, where people strive to achieve consensus with their audiences who “are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess” (Goffman, 1959, p. 17).

Meanwhile, the backstage is the domain of the Self, the space to which people are able to retreat to when they are no longer required to manipulate others in social interactions, or to perform according to social requirements and expectations. It is in the backstage that people are able to behave in ways they would not do in public, to perform Self without pretence. According to Goffman (1959), it is here, in the backstage, that people are able to rehearse and otherwise prepare for the roles they are required to perform on frontstage, where they must present identities that conform to the social mores and norms present within specific cultural and social contexts. As such, Goffman draws attention to the psychological processes people negotiate in order to perform their identities.

Extending this concept of performative social identities, De Fina (2015) has suggested that “identities are not sets of characteristics that can be ascribed to individuals or manifestations of individual

essences, but emerge through semiotic processes in which people construct images of themselves and others” (p. 351). Significantly, this view of identity is anti-essentialist. Adopting a post-modern view that aligns with the social constructionist orientation of this research, De Fina stresses identities as constructions of plurality and polyphony, with the potential that they differ and contradict one another within that same individual (p. 352; Andrews et al., 2004). Self, therefore, is neither stable, nor any essential utterance of an individual. Rather, Self is dynamic, “an historical and interactional construction subject to constant work and revision” (De Fina, 2015, p. 352).

2.6 Gendered Identities as Performative Re-enactments

Judith Butler (1991) problematises the performative nature of gendered identities, and queer identities in particular, noting that there is “no ‘proper’ gender [since] *gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original*” (emphasis in original, p.21). As she explains, all gendering is nothing more than impersonation and approximation. That is, all gendered identities, male and female, are constantly enacted through repetition and mimicry of the “normative measure of the real” (p.21). Therefore, she argues, the Self of any gendered identity is the “site of repetition” (p. 18), since gendered performances are always and ultimately nothing more than imitations of imitations based on emulation of heterosexuality which itself is “an incessant and *panicked* imitation of its own naturalised idealisation” (emphasis in original, p. 23). Ultimately, therefore, Butler renders all gender performance imitation, raising the question of what an ‘authentic’ gender identity is.

Gender and sexual identities are complex constructs to negotiate or understand. They have an historical aspect, given that social worlds and the identities with which we inhabit them require endless (re)creation (Butler, 2006). This endless process renders them unstable, and open to being “de-instituted at every interval” (Butler, 1991, p, 24), which is of particular salience when considering marginalised, oppressed or legislated queer identities that are already open to gross misunderstanding or oversimplification (see, for example, Mosher et al., 2006). Further, as other theorists who have approached the problem of performative gendered and sexual identities have noted, they are a source of conflict in “social interactions and processes” (Eguchi, 2009; Yep, 2003). They are discursively constructed and negotiated (Milani 2014), existing within discourse that shapes the minds, bodies and lives of people as a “compounding nexus of intersecting social axes” (Milani, 2016, p. 445; Baker, 2005). Specifically, the identities of queer men are not normatively fixed but must be constantly reinstated through performative means that negotiate the tension between the heterosexual/homosexual behaviour divide (Clarkson, 2006).

As such, performative gender is the “multiple interpretation of sex” (Gutler, 2006, p. 8) – compound, always emerging; never stable (Plummer, 1995). Indeed, masculinity is nothing more than an endlessly shifting collection of meanings that we construct in relation to ourselves, others and the wider world (Kimmel; 1994). As humans we are always telling stories in order to give sense to ourselves and the world around us, stories that have at their heart concerns of ascendancy and power related to Self and Other (Foucault, 1990). Therefore, gendered sexual identity can be understood as the negotiation between private and public, “the relation between Self and Other” (Carlson, 2001, p. 308), and it is this interface that is the subject of inquiry in this project.

In this regard, it is worth noting that identities are particularly problematic under queer theory where they are viewed as oppressive, either as instruments of normative regulation, or as focal points for liberating contestation of that oppression. Furthermore, queer theory offers that gendered sexual identities are “caught up in power relations” (Milani, 2014, p. 445; Butler, 1991) since minority individuals who subscribe to and enact dominant sensibilities will accrue greater symbolic merit than those who do not subscribe to or subvert them (Milani, 2014). It can be seen, for example, that traits of hegemonic masculinity, such as hypermasculinity, straight acting, homophobia and femmephobia, which compulsory heterosexuality requires men to enact in order to perform acceptable gender identities, have been incorporated to form aspects of gay masculinity. Such gendered sexual identities, with their attendant exclusionary hegemonic practices, afford greater symbolic merit to masculine-gendered gay men who are straight-acting, pro-masculine and pro-muscular than to queer individuals whose performance of gender is inconsistent with their sex (Bishop et., 2014; Clarkson, 2006). As will be discussed in due course, this enshrines a hegemonic hierarchy of gay masculinities.

2.7 Internalised Homophobia

Foucault (1990) observed that power operationalised in some people as objects *and* as subjects of control, with the norms of disciplinary control internalised to the point of policing their own behaviour. Understood in this way, the internalisation of homophobic norms of oppression by gay men can result in them policing their own and others’ behaviour (Foucault, 1990; Gutting, 2005). Embracing “the bias of the oppressor” (Clarkson, 2006, p.193) in this way is the mechanism by which external norms such as self-loathing are internalised as homophobia, resulting in a gay person directing negative social attitudes towards their own Self (Bartone, 2018).

Internalised homophobia represents a major and potentially life-long developmental difficulty for gay men, and can be problematic in the construction of some homomale identities (Frost & Meyer, 2019; Rowen & Malcolm, 2002). It plays a role in generating problematic homomale identities

that follow a “master-script” (Bartone, 2018) of inclusion/exclusion of certain negatively stereotyped queer masculinities. For example, hypermasculinity, straight-acting and the cult of masculinity in contemporary gay culture, along with the attitudes of anti-effeminacy and femmephobia that are prevalent in the communication and behaviours of certain gay men (Eguchi, 2011; Milani, 2016). These problematic homomasculinities reproduce the characteristic misogynistic behaviours and discourse of heteromascularity as a distinct form of homophobia and femmephobia (Anderson, 2009). Rich opportunities exist, therefore, for understanding the role of homophobia and femmephobia in the co-construction and performance of homomasculine identities by gay and queer men.

2.8 Hypermasculinity, Straight-acting and Femmephobia

Gay men internalise prevalent concepts of masculinity (Bartone, 2018; Butler, 1991), to the point of enacting “hegemonic homosexuality” (Baker, 2008, p. 176, as cited in Milani, 2016). Consequently, as Edwards (1994) argues, post-liberation gay men have fallen into binary camps. *Masculinists* are proponents of hypermasculinity, seeking to challenge the long-held stereotype of gay men as effeminate by eroticising and rigidly enforcing masculinity. On the other hand, *effeminists* are gender-nonconforming individuals who seek to denounce traditional masculinity. In this view, the appearance in the 1970s of gay clones, who valorised traditional heterosexual masculine performance of the working man, heralded the beginning of the cult of masculinity in gay culture (Clarkson, 2006; Milani, 2016), and the ascendancy within mainstream Western gay culture of hegemonic homosexuality over effeminacy.

Hegemonic homosexuality is negotiated and performed as hypermasculinity, or the “desire to be a real man” (Bishop et al., 2014, p. 563). Active within this hegemony are straight-acting men who conform to the “heteronormative masculine image” (Eguchi, 2011, p. 37), and strive to be undetectable as gay men (Milani, 2016). Such individuals enact attributes associated with terms like ‘manly’ and ‘butch’, performing masculine identities that appear similar to the cultural norm of the strong, tough workingman (Clarkson, 2006). Furthermore, straight-acting identities have been variously understood as resistance to stereotypes of feminine gay male culture (Milani, 2016; Mosher et al., 2006), as a consequence of the AIDS epidemic, when gay men themselves sought distance themselves from the stereotype of gay men as unhealthy disease spreaders (Baker, 2005), or as a result of the eroticisation of maleness by gay men, due to them being the subject and object of their own desire (Baker, 2005). Others have suggested that the pro-masculine and pro-muscular attitudes expressed by straight-acting gay men derive from experiencing childhood homophobia (Taywaditep, 2002), and that the emphasis of the gay rights movement on equality and assimilation has encouraged gay men to adopt more normative heterosexual demeanours (Bishop et al., 2014).

Femmephobia, or to use an alternate term, sissyphobia, can be understood as the fear and rejection of gay and feminine men's identities and behaviours (Sanchez et al., 2010), and it is targeted at gender role nonconforming male individuals whose "expressions of femininity ... stray from the confines of patriarchal or essentialised femininity" (Blair & Hoskin, 2015). It is a communication strategy by which straight-acting gay men justify and enforce their masculinity (Eguchi, 2011), the practice of which is widespread among gay men (Taywaditep, 2002). Activated by internalised homophobia and perceived threats to the Self of masculinist gay men, femmephobia and other homonegative discourse is used to stratify men according to a hegemonic system of dominance that is consistent with that of heterosexual men (Anderson, 2009). Finally, sissyphobia enables the distancing of pro-masculine and straight-acting gay men from effeminate gay men in order to avoid being stereotyped as such (Hunt et al., 2015; Sanchez & Vilain, 2012).

Turning now to the men for whom femmephobia results in intersectional marginalisation and multiple minority stresses. Such individuals are first marginalised as gay men in a heteronormative world, and then as effeminate gender-nonconforming men who are doubly oppressed by hegemonic homosexuality. In this view then, femmephobia is the articulation of misogynistic attitudes towards feminine traits in male individuals whose performance of Self diverges from prescribed gender roles. It strengthens dominant social discourses that "valorise masculinity at the expense of femininity" (Milani, 2016, p. 453) whereby femme men are subjected to a range of negative stereotypes (Bishop et al., 2014). They are also socially excluded (Bartone, 2018), and perceived as less desirable as lovers (Bartone, 2018; Clarkson, 2006). Unsurprisingly, therefore, a man's tolerance of effeminacy in other men is actually a measure of his own security (Sanchez et al., 2010), and sissyphobic attitudes can be seen to reveal much about the construction of homomale identities.

2.9 Hypermasculine Norms and Femmephobic Digital Communication

Masculinity is clearly a significant construct for gay men that impacts how they present and perform Self. They have been found to internalise dominant notions of masculinity (Bartone, 2018), and are well aware that masculine practices and behaviours convey more symbolic value than those perceived to be feminine or womanly (Kimmel, 1994). Amongst gay men, femmephobic attitudes are prevalent, and likely arise from the homophobic and misogynistic heteronormative culture in which gay men live, and from the insistent enforcement in gay male social spaces of rigid masculine norms and hypermasculinity (Miller, 2019). Consequently, they have been found to privilege masculinity over femininity (Miller, 2019), and to valorise and eroticise masculinity, generally wishing to be more masculine than they perceive themselves to be (Sanchez et al., 2010).

Smartphones have penetrated the market since 2007, and their popularity has grown over the years (Bartone, 2018). The majority of gay men in America make regular and frequent use of mobile dating and other social networking apps (Connor, 2019), and gay men are avid internet users (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). Furthermore, studies have established the “consistent presence of promasculinity and promuscularity constructs” in online spaces (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2019, p. 266). As a result, several additional studies that have considered the significant role of hypermasculine norms and ideals and femmephobic communication in the negotiation and performance of homomasculine identities have focused on the digitally mediated communication of gay men.

To begin with, Clarkson (2006) applied gender role theory to digital discourse analysis of the online forum of StraightActing.com to examine the construction of homomascularity. His exploration of the positioning of straight-acting gay identities in opposition to those of femme gay men highlights the selective homophobia that arises from the normalisation of certain gay identities. Clarkson found that a hierarchy of homomascularities was enforced through homophobic and femmephobic communication (see also Bartone, 2018), and that gay men were turned against each other in the battle for ascendancy within the homohierarchy. Furthermore, he proposes that atop the hierarchy, apex gay masculinity can be located in high values across five identified factors: a working-class aesthetic, a large physique and physical prowess, social power, frontiersmanship, and dominance over femininity.

In a similar vein, Milani (2016) investigated how gay men understand, reproduce and contest homomasculine identities in online spaces. This study employed discourse analysis of text corpora consisting of 10 interviews with gay South African men, and 4,738 profiles on meetmarket.co.za, a South African gay social networking site. Analysis of usage and meaning according to collocational patterns of a range of high-frequency phrases indicated that *straight-acting* “carried positive values judgement” (p.450), and was often collocated with *good looking* and *handsome* (p.450). Echoing Baker’s (2005) findings, Milani (2016) also found that the valorisation of masculinity was accompanied by a disavowal of femininity that clustered under the phrase *no fems*. Milani, therefore, concludes that traditional heterosexual hegemonic masculinity is the most highly-valued identity, and that gay men enacting these identities enforce hegemonic homosexuality and conform to normative ideas about what constitutes a ‘real’ man.

The role of digitally mediated communication in the generation of homomascularity through the cultivation of pro-masculine and pro-muscular attitudes and behaviours was further examined by Miller and Behm-Morowitz (2016). This study echoed findings elsewhere (Brenan, 2016; Hunt et al., 2015;

Sanchez et al., 2016; Sanchez & Vilain, 2012) that gay men categorise and rank the masculinity of other gay men. Particular findings include that, in online spaces, communicative framing promotes pro-masculinity, pro-muscularity and anti-effeminacy, and that anti-effeminacy and pro-masculinity language may be one of the more dominant themes users take away from their exposure to dating apps that are specific to gay men (Miller & Behm-Morowitz, 2016). Significantly, they found that “the masculine body is manufactured into the collective identity of space through the use of predetermined labels and categories like ‘muscle,’ ‘jock,’ and ‘daddy’” (p. 183).

The role of communicative framing in generating homomale identities and positioning them in relation to one another has also been the focus of other studies. For instance, Brennan (2016) identified how framing in online communication generated negative attitudes to gay porn stars who sexually bottomed, and who were communicatively framed as feminine and spoiled because of it. Furthermore, Brennan identified the role of binary identity categories in creating a hierarchical continuum, and that labels such as, “muscle/lollipop, bloke/sissy, butch/femme, normal/queer ... come to represent a value system where to be young and lean and muscular is ideal and to *act* as anything other than straight is to fail” (p.24). Similarly, Bishop et al (2014) found that gay men who subscribe to hegemonic masculinity hold negative stereotypical views of effeminate and other gender-nonconforming men, suggesting that communicative framing articulates internalised homophobia as anti-effeminacy, thereby functioning to regiment gay masculinities.

Extending their earlier work on the generation of the homomale Self, Miller and Bahm-Morawitz (2019) examined the intersection of app usage, masculinity and body attitudes to explore the role of computer mediated communication in the facilitation of user attitudes and values. Significantly, they identified a nuanced, integrated view of the processes by which internalised homophobia, femmephobia and digital media “promote masculinity and denigrate femininity” (p. 272), shaping the collective attitudes of gay men to homomale accordingly. This study found that femmephobic communication impacts the way gay and queer men perceive each other, negatively affecting digital media users’ perceptions of potential mates, and their desire for off-line interpersonal interactions.

In exploring the self-presentation of gay men in online spaces, Miller (2015), found that anti-effeminacy attitudes were rampant in the online communication of gay men. This study identifies that the “Adonis Complex” (p. 7) causes gay men to fixate on the muscular body as an ideal, and to engage in self-objectification more than heterosexual men, with considerable negative consequences for their physical and psychological health. Miller also found that gay men are more likely to internalise cultural standards of beauty. As such, self-objectification is amplified in gay men’s spaces, rendering them susceptible to communication about, and effects of, hypermasculine scripts and norms.

Scholars have also identified a strong correlation between hypermasculinity and straight-acting in gay men, and the presentation of anti-effeminate and femmephobic attitudes in traditional media. For instance, Baker (2005) investigated desires and fantasies surrounding masculinity. He conducted a content analysis of 1350 personal adverts placed over 30 years (1973 and 2000s) in one British gay publication and found that the word *camp* collocated with *feminine*, *lonely*, *lazy* and “other negative qualities” (p.142). Contrastingly, Baker found *muscular* to collocate with *hairy*, *straight-acting*, *masculine*, *similar*, *mature*, and *handsome* (p. 146). Significantly, he found that entrenched symbols of masculinity such as work boots, tight jeans, leather, and uniforms, as well as tattoos, cropped hair, moustaches, motorbikes and pipes are essential in constructing a uniform gay male identity.

2.10 Homomasculine Communities of Caring

Gay and queer men have experienced untold persecution, criminalisation and brutalisation in multiple private and public domains. Or, as Butler (1991) more eloquently puts it, lesbians and gay men have been “traditionally designated as impossible identities, errors of classification, unnatural disasters within the juridico-medical discourses, or, what perhaps amounts to the same, the very paradigm of what calls to be classified, regulated and controlled” (p.16). Despite advances in gay liberation in many westernised countries and societies in recent years, gay and queer men are forced to negotiate and enact gendered sexual identities outside of mainstream norms of acceptability, occupying liminal spaces in society. Not only must they perpetually ‘come out’ in order to perform and defend their minority identities in a heterosexual world (McDonald, 2016), they are also required to endure and resist state-sanctioned negation, public rejection of their male homosexual identities, and, in the case of the AIDS epidemic, historic social indifference and opposition to their existence (see, for instance, France, 2017).

At the same time, certain identities have been found to be resourceful and resilient, representing a point of hope in an otherwise troubling cannon of literature on the communication of gay and queer men’s masculinities. Specifically, studies by Mosher et al. (2006), and Manley et al. (2007), suggest that the construction and performance of Self by gay leathermen and queer individuals who identify as bears are of benefit to individuals. Together, these gay and queer men constitute communities of caring that stand in contrast to the hegemonic hierarchy of traditional gay masculinity (Clarkson, 2006, Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2019). Within these, rather than being turned against one another, gay bears and leathermen were found to support one another, co-constructing identities of mutual benefit. As such, these studies indicate how other gay men who are not bears or leathermen might, perhaps, come to better understand, negotiate, and perform their own identities as gendered minorities.

Bears are gay men who are typically hirsute, stocky and “whose attractiveness draws on an aesthetic of maturity and traditional masculinity” (Manley et al, 2007, p. 90). Yet, they also construct and perform homomale Self free of the pro-muscular messages that are the dominant discourse relating to mainstream gay and queer identities (Bartone, 2018). Bears embrace naturalism over competition, as required by hegemonic homosexuality. That is, they construct and perform gendered sexual identities that align with the bodies that they have, rather than constructing identities in competitive relation to one another in response to homohegemonic norms and scripts. Significantly, embracing naturalism generates a welcoming and accepting community for bears (Manley et al., 2007), in contrast to the stratified and reified hierarchy of homohegemonic masculinity (Clarkson, 2006). Perhaps then, it is unsurprising that bears experience increased self-esteem and self-acceptance, along with increased levels of physical and emotional intimacy (Manley et al., 2007).

Leathermen, on the other hand, are a marginalised sub-group of gay men who fetishise leatherwear and symbols, and practice leather sex. They negotiate and perform inclusive collective and individual gender identities, and are typically constituted into networks or communities with high levels of cohesion (Mosher et al., 2006). Their use of leather accentuates hypermasculine forms of sexuality, often emphasising and eroticising large muscles and genitals. However, together, leathermen have re-negotiated a unique gendered sexual identity that embraces hypermasculinity and hypersexuality, without also importing norms such as misogyny and homophobia from heteronormative masculinity into their minority homomale identities.

Instead, leathermen eroticise and enhance hypermasculine norms such as dominance and emphasis on male genitals, whilst also allowing for the enactment of “traditionally feminine qualities such as vulnerability and nurturance” (Mosher et al., 2006, p. 119). Doing so enables them to avoid the psychological distress associated with gender role conflict, to integrate their sexualities with their identities, to experience high levels of personal validation and self-determination, and to enjoy interpersonal relationships that are based on trust, and are caring and nurturing (Mosher et al., 2006). By effectively negotiating and resisting the double marginalisation that arises from being a gay subgroup, leather communities thrive as places where gay men can embrace pro-masculinity whilst also benefitting in personal and social domains.

Furthermore, in embracing their marginalisation as sexual Others, and by generating sexual and gender identities that dismantle gender norms, leathermen are those who embody Foucauldian reverse discourse. As men whose use of leather eroticises and fetishises the male body and, indeed, homosexuality itself, leathermen inhabit and, therefore, resist heteronormative views of gay men as *perverts*, *freaks* and *faggots* that are used by hegemonic heterosexual masculinity to Other their

identities (Foucault, 1990). That is, leathermen are able to reconcile their homosexual identities with their male gender by resisting heteronormativity and negotiating and performing Self according to uniquely homomascuine scripts that benefit individuals and communities.

2.11 Literature Gap and Research Questions

Extensive research has examined the intersection of sexuality and masculinity, identifying them as powerful social and cultural forces active in the generation of gay and queer men's identities. The communicative role of the master scripts of hypermasculinity, femmephobia and homophobia in the development of homosocial identities has been well established, along with the deleterious effects of these factors on the health and well-being of gay men (Anderson, 2009; Miller, 2015; Yep, 2003). Additionally, however, queer men, along with bears and leathermen, have been shown to negotiate and perform gendered sexual Self in alternate, beneficial ways (Manley et al., 2007; Mosher et al., 2006)

However, despite the uptake of the study of issues related to the communication and identities of gay and queer men by scholars since the 1990s, some lacunae exist within the research literature. In the first instance, further exploration of the lived experience of performing, resisting and contesting heteronormative scripts and roles is necessary to further reveal the effects of gendered homosocial identity construction on the lives of gay and queer men. Of particular interest within this is the exploration of what structures of power are privileged and/or challenged through the valorisation of heteronormative masculinity by gay and/or queer men (Clarkson, 2006). Opportunities also exist to further examine how marginalised queer men contest and resist the communication of hypermasculinity and femmephobia by identities that embrace hegemonic homosexuality. Indeed, there is an ongoing need for the examination of the homosocial construction of the masculinities in relation to one another by those interested in gender as a communication concept (Eguchi, 2009).

Given these gaps in the research literature, this research project into the performative construction of gay and queer men's identities, and the effects in their lives of negotiating and resisting masculinity, is of significant value. It broadly explores what it means to live as a gay or queer man in Wellington, Aotearoa/New Zealand in 2020, and is guided by two research questions. The first of these is *How do gay and queer men negotiate, construct, perform and resist masculinity?* Additionally, as this project is concerned with the lived experiences of performing minority sexual and gendered identities as well as with their construction, it is also seeking to interrogate the question of *What effects does homomascuinity have in the lives of the gay and queer men?*

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical and Analytical Frameworks

Following the principles of narrative inquiry, this research project strives to understand and describe the meaning and significance of the lived experiences of gay men whose masculinities and, therefore, identities are Othered as deviant (Lichtman, 2013; Tong et al., 2007). Located in the interpretivist paradigm, it seeks understanding through empathetic objectivity, holding the view that sense can be made of social reality by drawing on “the well of our humanity ... from the inside out” (Humphrey, 2013, p. 7). Such a framework requires the endless re-construction of concepts and worldviews in order to make sense of the world from a multiplicity of perspectives and, therefore, to reflect and capture the diversity of identities as constructed, performed, and communicated by the participants (Humphrey, 2013).

Seeking to understand the communicative organisation of social and cultural realities in which gay and queer men, including myself, live, I have adopted a social constructionist orientation for this study. That is, meaning and knowledge are seen as co-created by actors in a communication event. Therefore, they are also viewed as context-bound and temporally located - the product of a collaborative process between a researcher and a participant (Littlejohn, 1992). This view is consistent with the postmodernist approach I adopted, holding research insights and concepts not as privileged representations, but as the subjective apprehension of a set of particular narratives about the cultures of gay and queer masculinities at a specific place and point in time (Jensen, 2012). As Beasley (2012) points out, the social constructionist approach incorporated by gender and sexuality studies “conceives power in terms of social structures” (p. 749), and gendered sexual identities as products of the social structuring effects of power. As such, social constructionism constitutes a suitable theoretical framework for this study into the communication and articulation of gender and sexuality in the lives of gay and queer men.

Social constructionism suggests that human interactions produce social phenomena (Burr, 1995), and that co-created knowledge and perceptions generate thoughts, behaviours and intentions expressed in communication (Braun et al., 2018; Littlejohn, 1992). Viewing meaning through a pluralist and subjective post-modernist lens (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018), within which knowledge is the product of symbolic interaction between social groups (Littlejohn, 1992) and there is no single, immutable ‘truth’ (Burr, 1995), social constructionism problematises the notion of rational, objective knowledge of social phenomena. That is, objective truth or fact is impossible (Burr, 1995; Downing, 2008; McDonald, 2016), for example, regarding the ‘truth’ as to popularly held beliefs of what

homomascularity is or is not. Social constructionism, therefore, provides a suitably flexible conceptual framework to investigate deep personal and cultural meanings and understandings, and to study their accretion into gender norms.

Within this framework, as indicated in the literature review, I make use of three theorists to examine how gay and queer men resist, contest and enact identities that are socially constructed. I also provide a theoretical overview of narratives themselves.

Goffman's (1959) concepts of frames and facework provide insights into perceptive and performative aspects of the construction and communication of gay masculinities. I also make use of his concepts of Self as divided into back stage and front stage, and the implications of these for successful presentation in reality.

In the Foucauldian view, language has constructive power in knowledge processes (Burr, 1995), and power operationalises in some people as objects *and* as subjects of control (Gutting, 2005). I have used these ideas to understand the power of communication in organising the masculinities of gay men. I also made use of them in identifying and understanding the communicative processes and outcomes of Othering and marginalisation in the lives of homomasculine men.

Lastly, Judith Butler (1991; 2006) whose work conceptualises identities, in particular gendered and sexual identities, as performative expressions that are highly influenced by social context. Her conception of identities as dynamic and compound, constructed according to the intersection of "axes of power relations" (2006, p. 6) such as race, class, and gender, have been of particular use to me in understanding how the gay and queer participants negotiated and performed homomasculine Self.

Indeed, such understandings also led me to reflexive consideration of how my own gay male identity interacted with and influenced those of the participants. That is, how - in the context of the interviews - homomasculine power relations were active in co-constructing our performative identities regardless of any intent or effort on the part of the participants or myself. What's more, how is it even possible to identify and account for such effects during data analysis and interpretation?

Reflexivity aside, one final theoretical aspect remains to consider, that of narratives themselves. As humans, we are perpetually telling stories in order to give sense to ourselves, and to the world around us. Through stories we learn to position our own values and actions in relation to established and common categories, all the while engaging in our own personal formation process (Bamberg, 2012). The meanings we conjure up, and the realities that we narrate, craft, blend and flow. However, they

always remain “emergent: never fixed, always indeterminate, ceaselessly contested. Change is ubiquitous: we are always becoming, never arriving” (Plummer, 1995, p. 20). Furthermore, discourse gains the power of inscription through “citational repetition and sedimentation” (Kaufman, 2006, p. 1142). Repetition constitutes the accretion of meaning – our social realities, along with our positionings within them, are constantly (re)formed through discourse. Therefore, through language and discourse, potential identity formations are generated. Indeed, narratives function to mould us into who we are, they are the cornerstone to our identities (Andrews et al., 2004; De Fina, 2015;). It is for this reason that I have chosen to approach the research questions of this study through the paradigm of narrative analysis, the process of which I discuss in depth in subsequent sections.

3.2 Research Orientation

Throughout the design of this research, I have given deep consideration to how best understand the significance and complex communication of gendered sexual identities in the lives of gay and queer men. Such deliberations persisted throughout my reflexive thought processes, and ultimately they were addressed by me orientating this research to be not just *about* gay men, but undertaken *with* gay men. I achieved this through incorporating aspects of participatory research into the project’s orientation (Bergold & Thomas, 2012), and through careful balancing of internal and external perspectives (Jensen, 2012) within the interpretivist framework that I engaged (Braun et al., 2018).

In the first instance, I orientated this project by drawing on aspects of participatory research, which is suited to the study of marginalised groups whose views are not often heard or sought (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). That is to say, I undertook this project as one that positively favours the “possibility, significance and usefulness of involving research partners in the knowledge production processes” (p. 192). Furthermore, in order to conduct this research *with* participants as far as possible, I have been mindful of emic and etic (internal and external) perspectives on communication (Jensen, 2012). I have sought an insider’s view of homomaskuline identity construction and performance, as presented by interviewees and as understood by myself as a queer man presenting and performing my own homomaskuline identity. Additionally, I have applied the theoretical lens of an external researcher with ‘expert’ scholarly knowledge to the participants’ narratives and the data they produced, all of which has been filtered through my own homomaskuline perception. Addressing issues such as balancing and integrating emic aspects of understanding and etic elements of interpretation (Jensen, 2012) required awareness and reflexivity on my part. I also approached issues related to perspectives on knowledge within this research by adopting a postmodern orientation that accommodates a multiplicity of perspectives and meanings simultaneously (Holtzhausen, 2002).

Finally, interest in capturing and analysing the nuance and depth of human experience underpins the interpretivist research ethos and approach (Silverman, 2017). Therefore, such an approach offers an ideal lens through which to view socio-cultural notions and norms such as homomascularity, and how they affect the lives of gay men who resist or perform them. Understanding social realities such as the communicative co-construction of performative gay masculinities requires an open, flexible and interpretive methodology (Braun et al., 2018), one that integrates theoretical perspectives, research aims and data sources into a coherent entity (Curtin, 1995). Therefore, I viewed interpretive analysis as a fluid, iterative process (Miles et al, 2014; Silverman, 2017) within which flexible theoretical frameworks enabled my perception of patterns, significance and explanations (Braun et al., 2018). As my interpretations, insights and conclusions became more grounded and explicit (Miles et al, 2014), I viewed them as offering direct access to understanding the lived experiences of participants, and the construction of their masculinities (Silverman, 2017).

3.3 Participants

There is no set way to determine the optimum number of participants in qualitative analyses (Braun et al., 2018). That said, time pressures and scope limitations of this project resulted in me aiming to recruit twelve participants. I recruited them via selective snowballing methods (Silverman, 2017), word of mouth and a recruitment poster (see Appendix A). This was emailed out to my personal contacts, who were asked to forward it on to potential participants. It was also displayed in local gay bars, and emailed to local LGBTQI sporting and social organisations, with the request that they forward it to their members if they deemed it appropriate to do so.

In qualitative analyses, participant groups are best composed according to criteria decided by the researcher. (Schroder et al., 2003). Accordingly, in order to be involved in this study, it was necessary that participants identified as males who lived publicly as gay or queer men. Initially, my recruitment efforts yielded 13 participants. However, the arrival of Covid-19 and the unprecedented situation of a national lockdown resulted in some participants withdrawing. In the end, nine participants were interviewed for this study, of whom six were friends or acquaintances of mine. As these interviews provided sufficient data for my research purposes, I made no further efforts to recruit additional participants.

Participants' autonomy is a key ethical consideration in research (Massey University, 2017). Autonomy is promoted by valid voluntary, recruitment and informed consent processes that are free of coercion or pressure (Massey University, 2017). Such concerns and processes build a partnership with participants and improve the quality of data (DuBois, 2006), and are especially significant for LGBTQI

populations (Dodd, 2013) given the historic social oppression and negation that they have faced, and the understandable mistrust that this has generated. Therefore, throughout the study, my aim was that participation was respectful, supportive and compassionate (Massey University, 2017). To achieve this, I provided all participants with a full summary of the research project written in plain English. Participants were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendices B and C), and they were able to communicate freely via email with me for clarification of queries or concerns. In order to mitigate potential “cognitive vulnerability” that may impede informed consent (Seiber & Tolich, 2015, p. 14), all communication used uncomplicated and jargon-free language. Finally, privacy and autonomy were also promoted through the data being deidentified and securely stored and handled.

In recognition of the time and contribution of participants, they were offered a koha of \$20. Such an offer was made with full awareness that researchers must avert undue influence or pressure on participants (Iltis, 2006), especially with LGBTQI populations which have historically been subject to oppression, coercion and erasure by institutions and authorities (Dodd, 2013; Tufford et al., 2012). Three participants declined this, and given that communities who are the focus of research must benefit from the research in order for it to be ethical (Massey University, 2017), I made the decision to donate unwanted koha to InsideOut – a national youth organisation working to make “Aotearoa a safer place for all rainbow young people to live and be in” (InsideOut, 2020).

3.4 Data Collection

Interviews are an excellent mechanism for accessing people’s perspectives on communication and culture (Jensen, 2012). They are also ideal for exploring sensitive issues that people struggle to talk about in the presence of others, or when the topic of discussion lies outside of socially acceptable discursive bounds (Schroder et al., 2003). Qualitative researchers elect to use interviews when they wish to delve beneath statistically driven generalisations, and also because interviews have the potential to validate the knowledge of “‘ordinary’ people” (Fraser, 2004, p. 184). Semi-structured in-depth interviews also have the capacity to unearth hidden or subordinated ideas, and to provide rich data with which to research identity issues (Maydell, 2020). Thus, this type of interviewing represented an ideal method for gathering data about the lived experiences of homomaskuline individuals.

So as to elicit consistent data across all interviews, I developed an interview guide of 14 open and colloquial questions (Miles et al, 2014; Schroder et al., 2003) (see Appendix D). Questions targeted participants’ self-identification as gay or queer men, their perceptions of homomaskulinity and their insights into the mechanisms and effects of gender and sexuality in participants’ lives. I field tested this guide to establish its meaningfulness for this study (McGaha & D’Urso, 2019), and to ensure that

language and labels I used were appropriate and non-offensive (Dodd, 2013). I also made it available to participants in advance of interviews to increase their comfort and ease.

To allow for the co-construction of meaning to be open and balanced, interviews must aim for interactional symmetry by occurring in locations in which participants and the researcher feel comfortable and relaxed, and able to talk with ease (Schroder et al., 2003). As such, I planned to conduct hour-long interviews in the Massey Library, or, if I knew the participants well, and with the consent of my research supervisor, in their homes. However, the national lockdown in response to Covid-19 meant that only two interviews were conducted in participants' homes, and the remainder had to be conducted through online conferencing platforms such as Skype or FaceTime. Significantly, the move from in-person to online interviewing must have impacted the connection between participants and me and, therefore, also our co-construction of narratives and identities. However, beyond noting the potential for these impacts and reflecting on them in my research journal following each interview, it has been impossible for me to identify them specifically or to tease out their influence in how I analysed and presented information in this report.

Such concerns aside, however, it is true that identities do matter in fieldwork (McDonald, 2016). Therefore, as a gay man myself, I was constantly negotiating as to what to reveal about myself and what to keep hidden during the interviews – an ongoing balancing act complicated by narrative research having no illusions of objectivity, foregrounding instead the researcher's subjectivity (Fraser, 2004). Therefore, "queer reflexivity" (McDonald, 2016) - the reflexive questioning of the categories I used to identify people, and a recognition of the shifting nature of researchers' and participants' identities - informed my interactions with participants, as well as my handling of the data throughout the research stages of data management, abstraction and interpretation.

In the interviews, I had leeway to deviate from the guide when necessary so that the interviews were "interviewee-oriented" rather than "instrument-oriented" (Fraser, 2004, p. 184). My intention behind this was to provide participants with autonomy by allowing them to lead the narration, to decide what they prioritised when recounting their journeys. When used in this way, storytelling has the capacity to reflect a person's identity and perspective as he or she organises important events into a meaningful sequence (Yuen, Billings, & Morant, 2019). Additionally, in the interviews, I drew on my own "empathy, experience, intuitions and imagination to develop an insider understanding of the life-story of the other" (Humphrey, 2013, p. 8). That is, true to the social-constructionist orientation of this research, narratives were co-constructed by myself *and* the interviewees (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Lastly regarding data collection, I digitally recorded interviews and transcribed data using TEMI software. I also edited and checked interview transcripts so as to ensure a good “soak” in the data (Schroder et al., 2003).

3.5 Data Analysis

As noted earlier, the narrative framework around which this research is orientated presents identities as the complex, unstable and socially co-constructed interface between Self and Other. In this section, I engage this framework, and attempt to detail the data analysis processes which I used. I also detail additional reflexive aspects that contribute to the iterative character of this qualitative analysis.

Narrative analysis is “an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honouring lived experiences as a source of important knowledge and understanding” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 17). Narrative analysis employs the lens of individual experiences to reveal social, cultural and institutional narratives and patterns within which people’s experiences are constituted, shaped and enacted (Patton, 2015). It offers the benefit of enabling the researcher to allow participants to organise past events and actions so as to construct personal narratives that claim identities and construct lives (Endo et al., 2010). Through narratives, individuals are able to tell their stories in their own words, and to make sense of their lived experience by negotiating individual and collective identities (De Fina, 2015). That is, narrative analysis aims to collect data to describe lived realities by locating the voice of the participant in a particular time and context (Richmond, 2002). In short, narrative analysis is a relevant research framework for exploring the construction of social identity (Clandinin, 2013).

Significantly, over the last three decades narrative analysis has also come to be commonly used as an analytic tool for “listening to the silenced voices of underrepresented groups” (Endo et al., 2010, p. 1025). Regarding the exploration of individual identity, particularly minority identities, the usefulness of narrative analysis hinges on “understanding the construction of belonging” (p. 1025). That is, it offers the potential to understand personal stories as essential elements in exploring the connection between individuals, other people and social groups. Through narratives, LGBTQI people are able to uncover how they construct their identities as Others within a dominant heteronormative framework that determines the limits of legitimacy and recognisability (p. 1025). As such, in this study I employed narrative analysis as a suitable method for understanding how gay and queer men contest, negotiate, resist, and perform masculinity. However, research occurs in the midst of lives, and “there will never be a final story” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 175), meaning that research outcomes can only be seen as insights into lives in motion at a specific point in place and time.

Regarding narrative analysis itself, Yuen et al. (2004) point out that there is no single method. Yet, research rigour and validity require the sticking of colours to one methodological mast or another. In my case, this was provided by Lichtman's (2013) inductive, iterative process of coding, dissecting, categorising, reviewing, and organising codes into: first, hierarchical categories, then categories and sub-categories, and then concepts and themes (p. 258). This approach, like any in narrative analysis, required that I "read and reread, looked at and relooked at" the transcripts (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 172).

However, stories are "symbolic interactions and ... political processes" (Plummer, 1995, p. 19), and gay and queer identities are the site of struggle (Yep, 2003). Minority identities and the narratives they produce are the subject of normative views and pressures. They exist within the struggle for legitimacy of narrative and discourse, and storytelling is linked to power. Gay narratives are never static or final: there are moments when they can be told, and other more precarious times when they are best "kept quiet" (Plummer, 1995, p. 28). Wishing to avoid such processes and silences, and to free the participants' voices from the influence of any suppression or struggle from me, I also turned to Fraser (2004) for guidance on narrative analysis.

Fraser (2004) describes seven phases of narrative analysis consisting of: interviewing, transcribing, interpreting individual scripts, scanning across different domains of experience, linking the personal with the political, looking for commonalities and differences among participants, and finally, writing academic narratives about personal stories. I particularly made use of stages four to six so as to not fixate on one perspective, and so as to be able to identify more closely dominant discourses within particular narratives. The process of identifying intersections and divergences between narratives was particularly useful as I embraced the subjective positioning of the researcher in the process of narrative analysis, and began to move into the writing stage.

Maydell (2010) points out that "the process of interpretation begins with transcription" (p. 6) and that any interpretation will always be from my unique perspective as the researcher. Bearing this in mind, but also wanting to expose the data for what they were, to further free their interpretation as far as possible from the influence of my own perceptions and presuppositions, I adopted the stance of epoché from the outset. This requires looking inside to become aware of personal perspectives before judging (Patton, 2015). I also employed bracketing as described by Ahern (1999) in order to attempt to delineate my personal involvement with the material, and to attempt to identify the data free of supplementary intrusions (McGaha & D'Urso, 2019; Patton, 2015). This involved noting where my own experiences, attitudes and perspectives as a gay man intersected and diverged from the initial codes, categories, themes and patterns I was identifying in the data. Furthermore, Plummer (1995)

notes that people who coax stories, such as researchers, “can play a crucial role in shifting the nature of the stories that are told” (p. 21), and so I cross-referenced the notations in the transcripts with those made in my research journal during and after interviews relating to my responses to participants and their narratives. Doing so provided rich insights into how my own perspectives were influencing the meaning that I was making from the data. Such reflexive moves demanded that I thought about my thinking, inquiring into my perceptive patterns through “self-questioning, self-understanding, and interpretation of interpretation” (Patton, 2015, p. 604). I found that doing so made space for the voices of the participants to be heard more for what they were, and less for what I believed they should be.

Additionally, I found this bracketing process provided ‘anchor’ points from which to scrutinise my own coaxing of meaning from the data, in so far as this is possible given that, in the social constructionist paradigm, all meanings are viewed as co-authored according to the indivisibility of researcher and object in a common context (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2018). Such a view foregrounds the researcher’s engagement with interview data alongside that of the participants (Maydell, 2010), highlighting that such reflexive steps were necessary to illuminate which parts of my own narrative contributed to my interpretation of results.

I also incorporated reflexivity elsewhere in the processes of analysis. Throughout, I employed subjectivity in a hermeneutic loop of “recontextualising, reinterpreting and redefining” (Krippendorff, 2004, as cited in White & Marsh, 2006, p. 34). In addition, I engaged in self-questioning and self-analysis throughout the research. In these ways, I was able to reach some kind of satisfactory interpretation of the data, and to progress to writing about the narratives (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2018).

Given the personal nature of this research, along with the tendency (as I discuss later) for gay men to label and categorise one another, these reflexive mechanisms were valuable in minimising the impact of my attitudes and perceptions on data collection and analysis, and on the co-construction of meaning and knowledge. People who entice others to tell stories can be instrumental in altering the essence of what is told (Plummer, 1995, p. 21). As such, I am fully aware that the validity of this research rests in part on my awareness of the role I played in the stories that were told, and of my handling and interpretation of the data they produced.

Finally, qualitative approaches, such as narrative analysis have no defined end point besides that at which data saturation is achieved (Lichtman, 2013). This was the case in this present study. However, to ensure that as a novice researcher I had been as systematic and thorough as possible in my analysis and presentation of insights and understandings produced by this research, I utilised the COREQ

checklist (Tong et al., 2007) (see Appendix E) that was developed specifically for in-depth interviews and focus groups.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Drawing on the tradition of Aristotelian virtue ethics, the purpose in this research is to embody *phronimos*, that is, to possess the highest degree of *phrónēsis*, or practical wisdom, in order to contribute to *eudaimonia*, or human flourishing of gay men (Emmerich, 2018). Such intent is significant given the social milieu within which this research occurs. LGBTQI populations have historically experienced widespread marginalisation, stigmatisation, pathologisation, criminalisation and discrimination (Dodd, 2013). They have had their voices silenced and their identities erased; they have been ostracised, arrested, and brutalised. Additionally, members of these populations have undergone “severe physical and psychological violations” (Tufford et al., 2012, p. 222) in medical and social science research, and the results have often been used to cause severe harm, not least to further stigmatise and vilify these populations.

Whilst significant progress has been made in understanding marginalised sexualities and genders in recent times, and the social discourse surrounding them has become more relevant and accepting, queer men continue to experience stigmatisation, and poor health and relationship outcomes (Fulcher, 2017). They constitute a vulnerable group who, due to contextual rather than internal conditions, can lack autonomy and may not be in a position to evaluate or refuse to undergo risk (Sieber & Tolich, 2015). As such, methodological aspects of this study, as outlined in the Participants section above, ensured the rights and welfare of the men involved were protected and promoted.

Narrative analysis adopts at its core a relational ethical stance, one rooted in ethics of care (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). Therefore, and given that this project involves personal narratives of men with marginalised gender identities, I took particular care with ethics of non-maleficence (Massey University, 2017). For many gay men such as myself, the intersection of aspects of gay masculine Self and those of other masculinities can be the site of challenging, possibly traumatic memories and emotions. Whilst engaging with these in narrative inquiry projects can be therapeutic for some men (Clandinin & Caine, 2013), others may be upset and triggered by doing so.

I addressed such ethical dilemmas related to the care of vulnerable groups (Recuber, 2017) in a number of ways. First, through discussing the potential for distress with participants during the consent process, and providing participants with details of how to access free counselling through the New Zealand AIDS Foundation. During the interviews, three participants narrated past experiences of

serious sexual and physical assaults. In each case, I acknowledged their trauma, and offered personal support. Lastly, I offered to follow up with participants via telephone one and four days after the interviews, though several participants declined this.

Privacy is understood as “the interest that people have in controlling the access of others to themselves” (DuBois, 2006, p. 108; Seiber & Tolich, 2015). Respecting participants’ privacy is ethically essential (Massey University, 2017), not least because doing so guards the integrity of the data collected against “the lies and subterfuges that some subjects will employ to hide some private truth or guard against an intrusion” (Seiber & Tolich, 2015, p. 155). As such, I provided full disclosure during the consent process about the measures that I would take to safeguard each participant’s privacy.

Further measures I took promoted the participants’ confidentiality, which is concerned with the management of identifiable information with respect to individuals’ privacy (DuBois, 2006). In this study, confidentiality was complicated by the small size of the gay community in Wellington, indeed in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In such communities, it is not uncommon for researchers and participants to have overlapping roles and social encounters that can magnify issues of confidentiality (Dodd, 2013). To address this, and to ensure confidentiality, I discussed with participants the possibility of non-study interaction prior to interviews. Further, I was particularly vigilant when writing up my research to avoid “deductive disclosure of identities” by participants (Seiber & Tolich, 2015, p. 16), given that some participants were known to each other (Dodd, 2013). Additional steps that I took to ensure participants’ confidentiality, included keeping all data and information to myself, with me alone having full access to personal details. I made these steps explicit to all participants in the information sheet (see Appendix B), where I also made it clear to them that all data would be de-identified. Doing so promotes the privacy, dignity and respect of participants, and their ability to talk with comfort and freedom (Frey et al., 2000) and was achieved by a coding system I employed to keep interview data and identities separate. Further, I changed all possible identifying characteristics, and I used pseudonyms in my final write up. I only listened to audio recordings in private. I also securely and appropriately stored all data (Massey University, 2017), and all recordings and interim data will be destroyed once my research report has been accepted.

However, de-identified data will be securely stored in digital format for five years in order that they are available to scholars for cross-checking and other legitimate research purposes. Requests to access the data-set from this research may be directed to my research supervisor, Dr Elena Maydell at Massey University.

That said, returning to issues related to interactions with the participants, and the handling of data they produce, ethics related to limitations on confidentiality also required consideration. Given the pressures commonly experienced at the interface of masculinity and homosexuality, it is not uncommon for some gay men, at some point, to engage in [extreme] risk taking (Adams & Neville, 2009). As I was aware of the possibility that participants may disclose such behaviours to me in interviews, I had relevant strategies in place. These were designed according to Massey University's code of ethical conduct for researchers (Massey University, 2017), and included my research supervisor. They were also stated explicitly on the the consent form that all participants signed.

Finally, in considering ethical dimensions of this research, I now shift my focus onto the project's aims. The burden of responsibility for ethical research falls on all of those involved (Iltis, 2006) and, as the primary researcher, I acknowledge my responsibility in this project. It is purposeful, respectful, and valuable research with concerns for "tika", or collective welfare, consistent with the Treaty of Waitangi's principles of partnership, protection and participation (Massey University, 2017, p.10). That is, the overarching ethics obligation addressed by this research is that it benefits rather than harms people. Specifically, this research is *about* gay and queer men, it was undertaken *with* gay and queer men, and it was conducted *by* a gay man, ethically aligning it with the social constructionist epistemology that underpins the methodology through which it was implemented.

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In the following section, I discuss the constructions related to how gay and queer men perform, negotiate resist, and contest homomascuine identities, and the effects that masculinity has in the lives of the participants. These observations and insights are dealt with according to three themes of homomascuine identity construction and presentation that I identified across the data set.

In the first of these themes, Homomascuine Self: The Stain and Mr Cellophane, I consider the role of heteronormative Othering on the development of homomascuine Self, with a particular focus on the lives of the participants in their youth, and prior to coming out. I also analyse and discuss the ways in which negotiating non-normative identities has negatively impacted some participants' sense of Self.

This is followed by the analysis of Homomascuine Identity Construction, in which I discuss participants' narratives of their negotiation and performance of gay male identities according to specific hierarchical hypermasculine identity categories and roles. I examine the sexual character of homomascuine identities, paying attention to the hegemonic role of femmephobia in the presentation of gay Self. More broadly, I also discuss the unstable, problematic nature of gay male identities, as well as analyse some of the contexts in which they are generated. I also consider the roles of media and violence in generating and influencing gay and queer men's identities.

In the final section, I consider the theme of Post-gay Identities: Beyond the Hierarchies. I examine the integration of aspects of homomascuine Self in the construction of queer participants' identities. I also analyse and discuss how these high-agency queer narratives of post-gay political identities contest the homohierarchy and move beyond heteronormativity, striving for a liberated presentation of individual Self where sexuality is no longer a defining characteristic but one of many on a spectrum. I then conclude with brief identification of takatāpui¹ identities as constructs with the potential to liberate non-normative individuals through cultural means.

That said, before I discuss these themes, a note first on decisions I made related to the organisation of this section, and then a brief comment on what I consider and present. Analysing and discussing the

¹ Takatāpui is a Māori term that describes same sex attraction, and it refers to men, women and transgender people. Takatāpui has emerged as increasingly popular since the 1980s in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It incorporates "a sense of indigenous identity as well as communicating a sexual and gender orientation" (Murray, 2003, p. 10).

negotiation and performance of gay and queer identities according to three themes was necessary in order to organise and present clear analysis and discussion. However, it is important to note that these themes are ultimately arbitrary, arising from my own perception and values. The lived reality of homomascuine identities is neither linear nor neatly organised, as my presentation of constructions in three themes might suggest. As Butler (2006) makes clear, men's studies encounter problems in the assumption that the terms gay or queer denote a common identity, since gender encompasses the cultural meanings assumed by the sexed body. That is, gender cannot be said to follow from sex in any singular way. Identities consist of multiple, sometimes contradictory, elements of Self that are presented alongside one another (Andrews et al., 2004). In what follows, it is my hope that I have succeeded in relaying the participants' narratives in a coherent and logical manner by exploring them across three broad themes, whilst also speaking truth to their individual stories and knotted social identities.

Furthermore, the analysis and discussion that I offer make no claims at universal truth or generalisability. Since narrative research has no illusions of objectivity (Fraser, 2004), the observations, insights and understandings I present embrace the subjectivity of my own perception, as determined by my individual experience, values and gendered gay identity performance. These constructions relate to how nine men in Wellington, Aotearoa/New Zealand narrated their lived experiences of negotiating and performing homomascuine identities during the global Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

Throughout the following sections, the narratives I examine and discuss are presented through the use of quotes selected by me from participants' interviews. These quotes are attributed to participants with assigned pseudonyms. In some cases, I lightly edited quotes for fluency and clarity, indicating any such edits in square brackets, or with ellipses.

4.1 Homomascuine Self: The Stain and Mr Cellophane

Gendered Self is the product of discursive and cultural processes (Butler, 2006), and the problem confronting all gay men in every aspect of their lives is balancing and integrating their sexual orientations and their gender identities in social and cultural worlds in which they are outsiders (Edwards, 1994). The struggles and drivers are complex for individuals negotiating and performing gay identities, given that they are located within broader social and cultural discourses that frame homosexuality as abhorrent, the deviant Other in contrast to which heterosexuality coalesces as normal and desirable (Foucault, 1990).

From quite an early age, many gay men report being aware of their gayness, their difference from the heteronormative (Taywaditep, 2002), due to the “processes that construct, establish and (re)produce” heterosexuality as the legitimate, moral, desirable, and superior sexuality (McDonald, 2016, p. 394). Heteronormativity promotes and positions heterosexuality as normal, whilst non-heterosexual identities are stigmatised as Others (Foucault, 1990) who are deemed less important, less worthwhile, less authorised and “less human” (Yep, 2003). The Other is an “exteriorisation of our own subjectivity ... a projection of part of ourselves we would deny, exclude and repress” (Carlson, 2001, p. 307). It is the dark shadow that completes the heteronormative ‘light’, and, from early in their lives, gay men are Othered as non-masculine perverted males, homosexual deviants from the heteronormative (Gutting, 2005). It is this positioning of heteronormativity *in relation to* gay men as ‘perverts’ and sexual Others that renders sexuality a form of power (Edwards, 1994). Furthermore, it is this heteronormative framing of homosexuality that accounts for the problematic nature of homosexuality within the identities of gay men.

This was illustrated by the consensus among participants that homosexuality was a significant component of their identities. However, while all participants also acknowledged that sexuality was not the only, nor even the primary aspect of their identities, they were also abundantly clear on the effects of heteronormativity on the Self stained by homosexuality.

4.1.1 The Stain of Homosexual Self

The majority of queer individuals demonstrate behaviours in childhood that do not conform to their ascribed gender role (Taywaditep, 2002). Indeed, often before boys are aware of their own attraction to other males, and probably before they can put a name to what it is they are feeling, homophobia makes them aware of their deviance. Young queer individuals learn from homophobic interpersonal contacts and mediated messages that their desires are shameful, hate-deserving and psychologically blemishing. Such heteronormative messages are implanted in their lives as internalised homophobia (Yep, 2003), affecting them in several ways.

Homophobia is commonplace, and through it, young boys understand that they must conceal and resist their homosexuality. Such erasure and undermining of the homomale Self constitutes considerable “psychic violence” (Yep, 2003). It also exerts great influence on the identities that queer individuals enact. It was unsurprising, therefore, that several participants in this study indicated that their homophobic awareness of the shameful ‘error’ of homosexuality had influenced their presentation of Self since they were children. This was evident, for instance when, as one participant stated, to be gay meant that “you just weren’t right” (Doug). Furthermore, several men reported

feelings of shame, secrecy and inadequacy at their non-normativity in a heterosexual world. For instance, as Kelvin said:

Being gay as well ... like in our society and stuff, there's quite a lot of stigmas and stuff. (Kelvin)

Additionally, the impact of heteronormative Othering on the Self of young gay boys was evident in how some participants perceived themselves. For example, in explaining that he was aware of the unacceptability of his homomasculine Self in a heteronormative world from an early age, Doug identified himself as metaphorically stained by the stigma of difference:

... this kind of stain of how I kind of grew up and how I didn't fit in ... I just never got rid of this feeling of, um, not living up to expectations, not living up to my parents' expectations ... It's the whole feeling of knowing something isn't quite right with you. (Doug)

Similar feelings of shame at the 'stain' of homosexuality were echoed by other participants. For instance, Mike, who recalled the fear that was associated with awareness of being different, saying:

"I always knew, from like five, um, and it was something you just pushed away. It was frightening really." (Mike)

What is notable is the young age at which Mike was conscious that being different was wrong and to be suppressed, pointing to the pervasive power of heteronormativity that gay men must negotiate and ultimately contest if they are to come out.

A person's agency rests in their ability to "contest and resist norms that have created and structured their Self in the first place" (McCormack, 2012, p. 36). Significantly, since agency is principally expressed through resistance (Butler, 2006), queer boys and men who negate gendered Self in response to heteronormative constructs cannot be said to negotiate Self with agency. Such feelings of low agency were described by several participants, one of whom said:

I was young and, and you know, I was, I was very scared about the fact that I was gay, and I really, I really didn't want to, whilst I knew that I really didn't want to have a girlfriend and put anyone through that ... I also decided that I may or may not come to terms with being gay, you know, that I would, you know, I was pretty scared about being gay really, and the ramifications. (Oscar)

Put differently, hegemonic heteronormative discourse valorises traditional gender performances, and Others non-normative masculinities. As a result, minority gay identities are negotiated and performed from a point of low individual agency, where the scripts and norms that are followed are not determined by the individual. Public discourses of what constitutes acceptable masculinity dominates individual identity negotiations, as evidenced by some participants indicating they suppressed non-normative aspects of masculine Self at a young age. For instance:

For a long time in my life [homosexuality] was unexpressed ... it was something that remained unexpressed until I was in my thirties ... so for a long time it was um, repressed, I suppose.
(Craig)

I knew that something was slightly off, so that basically you didn't want to be perceived to be in any way different. So, therefore, you just went along with what everybody else was, because you didn't want to stand out, because you, then you get bullied ... Um, but so you, you start at this very early age stripping off all the bits that you think that you might stand out. (Doug)

In effect, such early conditioning to conform to social scripts caused fear and shame in some participants. What's more, their low agency appeared to lead to some participants suppressing and delaying the development of their homomasculine identities. In part, this suppression of Self appeared to be linked to feelings of inadequate masculinity in several participants, and were seen to impact them in complex ways.

4.1.2 Inadequate Homomascularity: Mr Cellophane

Drawing on Goffman's (1959) concept of dramaturgy of the Self, where individuals constantly work to manage the impressions that they make on other players in the social arena, actual and perceived social norms can be understood as powerful factors in the construction and performance of homomasculine identities. People are keen to leverage Self to their best advantage by maximising the positive impact made on other social actors, and they achieve it through the performance of normative behaviour. That is, by compelling people to align their identity performances and behaviour with what they believe others to approve of, or to do themselves (McKenzie-Mohr & Schultz, 2014), norms operate to marginalise those who are non-normative. Therefore, normativity is infused with power relations through which certain values and behaviours are cast as 'normal' and preferable to others (McDonald, 2016), and individual and private Self is inseparable from social and public Self. In this view, individual identity comes to be seen as an articulation of Self in response to social norms and scripts, co-constructed in the ongoing process of interplay between individual Self and socio-cultural forces

and contexts. Furthermore, the degree of individual agency in the process of identity construction and performance can be seen to vary according to alignment, or not, with prevalent social mores and norms.

Such normative effects were evident in Francis's story where he attributed pressures around perceived norms related to hypermasculine and hypersexuality with generating significant anxiety about his own sexual performance. He makes clear the low agency with which individuals negotiate identities in relation to normative hypermasculine gender constructs and scripts:

I was so worried about, um, like premature ejaculation, because I was so anxious, that I thought, 'Oh well, maybe I'll just be a bottom.' ... That negative frame of what I was supposed to be able to achieve or perform as was one of the most destructive things that I've ever experienced. (Francis)

Normative gender scripts and roles position homomascuine individuals with low agency. Unsurprisingly, they were also found to cause some men to view their own performance of gender as lacking. Hegemonic, traditional masculinity gains definition by opposition to femininity and non-normative masculine performances, against which it is presented as the most honoured way of being a man (Connell, 1992; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Such compulsory masculinity is operationalised through homophobia and femmephobia (Anderson, 2005), and is communicated down every conceivable social and cultural avenue (Carlson, 2001). Put simply, as was reflected by some participants, all performances of masculinity are not equal according to the hegemony of traditional Western masculinity:

A strong feeling that I was not masculine came over me. That I did not make the grade with real men. (Peter)

I learned how to be more masculine because I realised it wasn't acceptable not to. (Oscar)

Furthermore, given this inadequacy of gay masculinity as articulated by homophobia, some of the participants narrated how they sometimes deployed defensive behavioural measures in response to feelings of their own inadequacy. As Oscar pointed out, some participants found these measures necessary in order to buffer their own performance of masculinity:

I was really quite embarrassed to be with anyone that was overtly feminine, because actually I didn't want to be sprung. So, I really shied away from anyone that was really feminine. (Oscar)

Normative traditional heterosexual masculinity demands a gender performance that is active, assertive and confident (Kehler, 2004). Therefore, some boys and men who negotiate homomasculine identities can come to perceive themselves as un-masculine by virtue of their deficiency in relation to normative, hegemonic masculine gender constructs. For instance, as Craig said:

I know this is a common experience of many queer kids growing up, I didn't have a strong sense of being, of identifying with the masculine as a, as a child and teenager. (Craig)

This sense of homomasculine Self as deficient and lacking was evident in a number of ways in the participants' narratives. In the first instance, some participants perceived themselves to be 'behind' other men, feeling that they were not as sexually adept or advanced as they felt they ought to be. On a fundamental level, traditional heteromascularity is negotiated and performed through sex. It is confirmed and promoted as the masculine domain of the man through sexual penetration. Therefore, normative gender scripts can be seen to hold that the masculinity of the person who does not have sex is delayed and lacking, and he remains a child, as Craig illustrated when he said:

I lived for a long time as a child when my contemporaries had, um, become adults. So, in terms of adults having, um, sexual relationships with others, that was something that I didn't engage, I didn't experience until probably 10 or 15 years, uh, sorry. Um, yeah, 10 or 15 years after my, um, my peers. Because, I suppose it was a delayed expression, um, expression of that, um, experience of being an adult man. (Craig)

Furthermore, normative traditional gender scripts prescribe valid masculinity as virile and sexually assertive, even hypersexual (Kimmel, 1994). Against these scripts, some participants constructed homomasculine Self as sexually lacking compared to others. For instance, Oscar indicated that his interest in sex is "not like other people," while other participants suggested that they were sexually 'behind' others, that they were non-normative late-arrivers:

I think ... I was kind of a late bloomer. (Doug)

I didn't have sex for the first time until I was like 19. I'll say I was kind of late on that end. (Kelvin)

Additionally, the effects of heteronormative Othering of homomasculine identities as deficient also manifested in most participants' perceptions of performing Self as lacking in relation to other gay men.

This was evident in the comments relating to how and when some participants had come out of the closet.

The act of coming out is an act of high agency in identity construction. It is the moment when Self is negotiated and articulated in defiance of heteronormative expectations and scripts (McDonald, 2016). In coming out, individuals step into and inhabit the Othered shadow of gay Self in defiance of heteronormativity (Foucault, 1990). Understood in this way, coming out is a personal process wherein homomasculine Self is further constructed. Yet, even here, several participants positioned Self in relation to perceived norms. This was evident in their perception that they had come out 'late.' As two participants made clear, this again hints at a sense of deficiency in their negotiation of homomasculine Self:

Well, I came out as a gay male when I was about 20 or 21, I think. So, you might say that's quite late compared to other gay males, especially in this day and age. (Conrad)

I was quite late, to kind of realising it. (Kelvin)

Tragically, it seemed that the participants suffered additional impacts from heteronormativity, such as self-doubt and self-loathing, and these appeared to be long-lasting in the construction of some homomasculine identities. Negotiating identities marked by a keen awareness of their own deficiency in relation to heteronormativity generated in some of the participants a sense of not belonging anywhere. Such feelings of Otherness, as well as their enduring presence in some participants' lives, were made clear by Craig who wondered:

Do I really fit into the world of, yeah, the gay world? Yeah. Do I really fit in here? and maybe it's around my own sense of whether or not I'm attractive, and my own sense of whether I'm acceptable. (Craig)

Indeed, similar feelings of deficiency and inadequacy were clearly evident in Doug's story. Aware of his own homosexual deviance from heteronormative requirements of masculinity, he narrated how, as a young man, he had negotiated an identity that obviated Self. That is, in order to conceal the stain of homosexual Self, Doug sought invisibility through normative conformity. As he narrated:

I was Mr Cellophane in the background ... I played the game - I never stood out ... I'm so forgettable. (Doug)

Beyond feelings of not fitting in and of wanting to disappear, the sense of being non-normative and deviant was closely connected by some participants to a sense of a personal loss, of wasted time. This arose from having to perform low-agency Self in order to conform to traditional gender roles. Some participants noted the impacts of such 'inauthenticity', the personal toll exacted from individuals over many years spent performing non-normative gendered Self according to traditional, normative expectations, for instance:

I've wasted many years of my life struggling internally with who I am. (Doug)

In hindsight, living as if I was straight, denying my gayness, I suspect affected my sense of masculinity and my confidence as a man. (Peter)

Additionally, my analysis indicated that normative stereotypes constitute a further influence on the ways that some participants performed Self. Some heteronormative social discourses cast gay men as sick sexual-outlaws controlled by their desires, in binary opposition to healthy, sexually normal, or 'controlled', heterosexuals (Carlson, 2001). Stereotypes produced by such discourses can cause gay men to contest and resist their own sexual identities *prior* to coming out. They can also influence their identity negotiation and performance *after* they come out (McDonald, 2016).

These effects were clearly evident in Oscar's story, for instance. For him, the stereotype of gay men as lonely, predatory individuals whom one must be suspicious and cautious of appeared to be a significant driver influencing his identity construction and performance. As he explains:

There were always some older gay guys sort of lurking around the bars who might try it on. I've always had this slight feeling that I wouldn't want to be perceived as one of those people ... What I was really worried about was that I wouldn't be accepted ... the one thing I was always nervous about being gay was that I would end up on my own. (Oscar)

What is clear is that stereotypes, heteronormative scripts and the shame and fear of being different can influence and delay the construction of homomasculine Self. Such self-doubt also damages and isolates the boys and men who, try as they might to perform normative gendered Self, always remain Others, isolated by their non-normative difference. In my experience, many gay men speak of the loneliness of the time before they came out, and of feeling like there was no else like them. Gay and queer men commonly describe that no matter how hard they tried to be normative – 'normal' – they could never fit in. For some participants, such as Craig, perceptions of Self stained by homosexuality, alone and apart from other people, continued even as adults. This was evident when he said:

I've often felt on the edge of the gay community and I've, uh, and I think this probably plays into, um, aspects of my own, um, sense of not belonging to groups in general. (Craig)

Yet, that gay and queer men do resist and contest heteronormative scripts and norms, choosing instead to reverse the discourse and inhabit the shadow and shame of Self stained by homosexuality, speaks of the courage and resilience of homomasculinities. Refusing to perform low agency identities, all of the men in the study came out as gay, in search of belonging and liberation of Self. As I discuss in the following section, homomasculine identities are complex, unstable social constructions that are context-dependant. They are also negotiated and performed with high agency, strategy and purpose, but remain highly susceptible to social discourses and the norms they generate, even after gay men have come out of the closet.

4.2 Homomasculine Identity Construction

Social players perform identities that are co-constructed in interaction with others. Identities are “fictional constructions” constituted through the “ritualised (re)enactment of normative gender acts” (McDonald, 2016, p. 393). Indeed, from a post-modern perspective “the stories that people tell about themselves are about many selves, each situated in particular contexts” (Andrews et al., 2004, p. 108).

Further, all gender identity is performative, and the dialectical product of dominant and subordinated groups (Butler, 1991; 2006; Carlson, 2001). Gendered identities are highly temporal and context-dependant, constructed along multiple axes besides gender and sexuality, such as race and class. Therefore, “identity is typically multi-faceted” (Endo et al., 2010, p. 1027), and Self is neither coherent nor continuous, never staying still long enough to fix its meaning (Carlson, 2001). Rather, Self consists of “Humpty-Dumpty-like fragments and partialities – sometimes inconsistent, contradictory even. Individuals’ stories about themselves are about many selves, each located in particular contexts ... the appearance of unity and coherence come from the narrative” (Andrews et al., 2004, p. 105; De Fina, 2015). Furthermore, gender is the accumulation of cultural meanings and understandings, and does not automatically derive from sex (Butler, 1991; 2006).

Consequently, several participants encountered difficulty in identifying what masculinity might mean for gay men, and the participants’ understandings and interpretations of it were as diverse as the men who offered them. Significantly, however, this is in spite of the fact that gay men rigidly enforce and apply gender constructs, particularly hegemonic aspects of masculinity (Sanchez et al., 2010). However, the participants were clear that homomascularity is diverse and subjective:

If you ask somebody for a definition of masculinity, you'll get a hundred different definitions of masculinity. (Mike)

Masculinity sort of flies all over the place. (Henry)

I guess I can't look at masculinity as this one thing that we have or hold. (Mike)

Additionally, within some men's narratives, the (re)performative, illusory and unstable qualities of gay masculinity were made clear:

But most of the rest of the time, I know I'm just, I feel like I'm acting. (Doug)

[The gay identity] is such a, it's just, it doesn't exist ... it's like the mental trope or frame that comes first to mind. And I have to say, no, that's not real. What is real is that, um, we try and recount it. (Francis)

Butler (1991) has articulated that there is no authentic gender, since all gender performance is imitation. That is, there is no shared or stable conception of what homomascularity is, beyond gay men as Others, the occasionally ridiculed and often feared shadow of heteromascularity. Indeed, several participants indicated their frustration with homomascularity identity construction, voicing their struggle with the slippery uncertainty of performing gendered Self. For example:

I guess it's hard because you, you share relationships or connections with people of a similar sex, but then ... I don't know, it's hard because it's not like a, I guess, a set rule. Like, I don't think masculinity is the same across the board. (Kelvin)

It's hard to know what it's actually okay to be ... Are there things I should or shouldn't do? Are there things that I'm supposed to do? (Francis)

While identities are the performative manifestation of individuals according to context (De Fina, 2015), it is the negotiation that is on-going between Self and the wider context that brings them into being. In effect, performative Self is the product of this negotiation, with all parties seeking to present Self to best effect (Goffman, 1959). Identities can, therefore, be seen as tied to individuals, whose performative reality is socially constructed by the negotiation that occurs at the intersection of Self with the present context and social actors. This was explored by Mike, who said

It [i.e.: gender identity] is very temporal. It's very context laden [with] different benefits in different contexts. (Mike).

Put another way, performative gendered identities derive from Self, and they also derive from the recognition and acceptance of others. As such, gendered identities are dynamic and always emerging, never settled (Andrews et al., 2004), as indicated by Henry, for instance, saying:

I, I don't think there's a single, um, thing that shouts out: this is masculine. I think, it's the way that that's done. That, and the way that that's been negotiated between the two people, explicitly or implicitly, um, consensually or not consensually. (Henry)

That is, gendered sexual identities are the co-constructed products of negotiation. However, social interactions are not always balanced affairs (Goffman, 1959), and the allocation of identity labels and behaviour scripts is not always up to the individuals concerned (Yep, 2003), as was reflected by several of the participants:

There's always this process of things being inscribed on me. (Francis)

Society's imposed those labels on us. (Mike)

People make suggestions about, you should do this, or you should be like that. (Henry)

Furthermore, as identities are complex processes of social construction (Eguchi, 2011), individuals are not able to control how others respond to their performances of masculinity. For instance, Kelvin voiced frustration at women applying the stereotype of a gay man as girl's best friend when they learn of his sexuality. Along with his frustration at the lack of agency regarding how he is framed and perceived, what is significant is Kelvin's suggestion that he is more than the limited summation communicated by the stereotype:

It's like you automatically, um, count for being friends, which I find quite an interesting summation of my sexuality, um, where other people are concerned. (Kelvin)

Additionally, homomasculine identities emerged in the interviews from a process wherein Self is co-constructed in negotiation with norms and public discourses. As I discussed in the previous section, social discourses and normative expectations and scripts are powerful forces that cause men to resist,

conceal and repress non-normative Self, with negative consequences. Further to this, normativity also appeared to impact participants' identities even after they had come out. That is, when participants negotiated Self with increased agency as publicly out gay or queer men, on-going negotiation with norms and social discourses appeared to be active in their presentation of Self (Milani, 2016). For instance, Francis draws attention to the endless interplay of negotiation, resistance and contesting that occurs between Self, norms, and Others in gendered sexual identity performance:

[Homomascularity is] a construction of how we see each other and how we think we need to be and how we think we need to treat each other... [it] aligns with maleness, and a way of how we demonstrate or construct the way that we want other people to perceive our maleness. (Francis)

However, in my experience, while gay and queer men are certainly impacted by the normative social discourses in relation to which their gendered sexual identities are negotiated and performed, they are also resourceful and resilient in their performances of homomasculine Self. That is to say, identifying as non-normative requires conscious awareness of the constant (re)positioning of Self in relation to wider social discourses and constructs, and endless interplay between contestation and submission (McCormack, 2012). Such constant and restless re-negotiation of gender begins with claiming Self and coming out of the closet, and remains a significant component of gay or queer Self.

4.2.1 Negotiating Non-normative Self

Negotiating homomasculine identities is a process that begins with deliberate and considered actions and steps, one of which is coming out of closet. In doing so, individuals claim agency by contesting and resisting heteronormative gender roles, and negotiating and constructing identities that reflect their minority homomasculine Self. These processes are evident in Cass's (1979) model of homosexual identity development which incorporates six stages: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis.

However, this "rebirthing experience" as Plummer (1995, p. 49) termed it is made harder in younger years by the shame and confusion that people commonly experience and must negotiate alone prior to coming out. Indeed, the difficulty of constructing a minority identity is compounded by the silence and invisibility of gayness (Carlson, 2001). This loneliness and struggle that associated with inhabiting minority identities was present in multiple narratives. For instance, in what Kelvin said:

I think also, the challenges of being gay. I remember, um, being gay and at an all-rugby playing Catholic school and being like, I feel like *there's no one*. I felt never more an individual than then, because I think that I realised if I was going to live this life, I was really going to have to kind of do it alone, be true to myself. I didn't think that there was going to be a massive amount of, just, support on that front. (Kelvin)

Significantly, however, in the perspective of queer theory, coming out and the performance of minority identities are equally the site of *resistance to* and *oppression by* hegemonic heteronormativity (Slagle, 2006). Identity categories are, therefore, the site of power and the means by which conformity to the extremely oppressive norms of modern culture is enforced and resisted (Carlson, 2001), as Doug illustrated when he said:

Oh, when we booked the hotel last week and I said, 'My partner will be bringing the car over.' And they said, 'Oh, what time, what time is she arriving at?' And I'm like *Him!* (Doug)

Consequently, coming out requires that individuals must restlessly contest and negotiate social power. They must act with agency, which is dependent on their ability to contest the norms that have created and structured Self (Butler, 2006; McCormack, 2012). After coming out, gay and queer individuals must perpetually struggle for agency in constructing non-normative identity categories. This struggle was articulated by various participants, such as Francis who said:

Being in the straight closet, being in the gay closet, being in the queer closet, sort of whatever, closet people are putting me in I don't want to be in any of those closets. I just wanna be out in the open. It's not very nice being in the closet. (Francis)

However, while coming out requires that individuals begin to act with agency and engage in the struggle for power in the negotiation of identity, it is also the means by which non-normative Self is set free. In resisting conformity and refusing to allow normative public identity constructions and gender expectations to dominate or define their individual gay Self, some participants felt themselves to be performing fundamental, core identities. That is to say, in challenging and confronting heteronormative super scripts of maleness, participants such as Craig began to negotiate coherent, connected gay masculine Self. As he said:

I think this is an experience common to many men, um, coming out and claiming aspects of myself that seemed to be, to be claiming the most fundamental, the most intimate, the most

important part of my being, my identity. And so, defining myself as a gay man was an, it was a profound act of claiming my, my, sense of Self, my identity. (Craig)

Yet, gay identities are not made static nor stable by coming out once (Craig & McInroy, 2014). Rather, coming out is continuous, a process in which non-normative individuals, those whose identities are Othered and otherwise invisible, must “constantly negotiate which of their selves to reveal to others and which of their selves to keep hidden” (McDonald, 2016, p. 39). Homomale Self is, therefore, always a work in process that is predicated on the considerations and tensions inherent to disclosing Self and coming out. It is also an ongoing process, as confirmed by several participants’ narratives:

I’ve had to constantly come out for my entire life. (Doug)

The coming out process is really continuous, I think, for me. So, it’s not, it’s never finished. (Craig)

However, this is not to say that every coming out experience is the same. Nor is it to say that gay men’s negotiations and performances of queer Self remain the same over time once they have come out, as Henry explained:

Masculinity has been a moving, flowing, developing concept for me ... now as a 60-something year old, masculinity has morphed. (Henry)

Indeed, the participants’ stories revealed that as they have aged, they have been able to see more clearly the oppressive and hegemonic constructs of homo(hyper)masculinity that they first encountered on coming out. They also suggested that their views and responses to these constructs changed, further indicating that homomale identities are complex and dynamic (Plummer, 1995). That is to say, as the participants’ agency increased over time, their authorship of identity categories and gender roles increased, and their adherence to prescribed hierarchies and hegemonies decreased. As the participants indicated, this shift in perspective and agency begins with coming out, but it also requires on-going negotiation and instating. For instance:

You can refuse to be the dominant man stereotype. Um, and that was the first step for me, I suppose an understanding, you know, actually I don’t have to be like other men. (Francis)

If I don't fit their tribe or what they deem to be aesthetically pleasing in the queer community, then they might just ignore me and that's fine. I would, I think, that's kind of normal behaviour. (Mike)

Finally, regarding the role that coming out plays in homomasculine identity construction, several participants identified gay bars and clubs – the gay scene – as the place to which coming out took them. Coming out is about creating an identity, and coming together after coming out creates a community (Edwards, 1994). Therefore, the gay scene can be significant to gay men when they come out as a place where everybody belongs and is welcomed, as Oscar's story indicated. For him, the experience of non-normative diversity in gay bars was notable, as he explained:

And there was such a variety of different types of gay people, different ages and that. It wasn't just for the really young people; it was for everybody. And I really liked that. (Oscar)

Homomasculine identities, like all gendered identities, are always in a process of melding and flowing, always emerging and yet never arriving (Plummer, 1995). Coming out of the closet introduces dynamism to individuals' negotiation of non-normative Self by altering some of the perceptions, understandings and motivations that underscore gender performances as social constructs. And, as the participants made clear, the gay scene is a significant performative context for gay male Self.

4.2.2 Qualities of Homomasculine Identities

Once they had come out of the closet and were no longer prepared to accept the normative gender roles allocated them by heteronormative social processes, the participants narrated Self as deliberately and purposefully constructed and performed. While coming out requires strategy and purpose of individuals, the participants indicated that they also performed Self to change social discourses, to meet sexual needs and to express multifaceted identities.

To be gay is to be non-normative, since social and cultural constructs and views of what is 'natural' and acceptable remain firmly rooted in the heteronormative (Yep, 2003). As such, making homomasculine identities visible and meaningful articulations of Self requires deliberate and purposeful resistance to traditional gender expectations and restrictions. As many gay or queer men would attest, one does not arrive at, nor inhabit, a homomasculine identity by accident or with ease. Indeed, the journey out of the closet and beyond is chosen with full knowledge of the difficult positioning of Self in relation to heteronormativity. As Kelvin explained:

It's not, like, an easier life by any stretch of the imagination. It's not a, um, like a walk in the park. I think there are definitely different things that you have to kind of go through, different rites of passage as it were. (Kelvin)

Accordingly, homomascuine identities are constructed in strategic and purposeful ways, and they involve a high degree of individual agency. For instance, when coming out, Doug searched with purpose through the metaphoric “gay brochure” for a community of others with whom to co-construct his gendered sexual identity. As he said:

I just looked through the gay brochure that we all get when we come out and, uh, I decided that I like actually quite fitted in more with the bear world than I did in any of the other ones. I could be accepted ... it felt more like home for me, the bear world. (Doug)

Interestingly, some participants indicated that gay men’s deliberate negotiation and performance of gender is sometimes strategically purposed as resistance and contestation of normative constructs. That is, some individuals who perform non-normative masculinities contribute to widening social discourse related to gender. Doing so may bring benefit to communities by, as Mike suggests, opening the way for others to follow suit:

I play with gender expression a lot. I can be very strategic. I can be working with some miners, and I might have some feminine stuff on and I've done it purposefully. I've done it to change the narrative around manhood, and to break the restrictions for straight men and gay men. (Mike)

Homomascuine identities are dynamic (Endo et al., 2010), and my analysis of the participants’ narratives revealed that gay men’s strategic intent informs sexual aspects of their identities. Gay identities are essentially *sexual* identities (Mosher et al., 2006), they mean sex (Edwards, 1994). What defines a gay man is his attraction to other men (Bartone, 2018), locating sex and desire at the core of the performance of gay Self. Unsurprisingly, therefore, sexual impulses and needs informed some participants’ strategic identity negotiations and performances. This was evident, for instance, in Peter and Henry’s narratives:

I was trying to be my image of masculinity ... I joined a gym and in my mid-thirties, was able to ‘get the guys’ with the bodies that were for me both masculine and met my desires. (Peter)

Oh, do I have to be a peacock in this situation, or am I the peahen ... in order to, to get some attention from somebody that you might want attention from? (Henry)

Finally, regarding the qualities of homomascuine identities, several participants narrated Self as multifaceted (Endo et al., 2010). These narratives presented a core identity, articulated for instance in the lists of adjectives offered in response to my question about how the participants would describe themselves. However, they also performed multiplicities of Self (De Fina, 2015), articulating that their gendered sexual identities were only one aspect of their otherwise compound identities. As Francis and Oscar explain:

It was never, like, this [i.e.: gayness] is all that I am. (Francis)

So many things make up a person, you know, and being gay is just one of them. (Oscar)

Such articulations of Self as complex and multifaceted speak to the manifold lived experiences of the gay and queer men I spoke with. As they made repeatedly clear, they are living, composite people whose complexity and depth far exceeds the limitations of social identity categories. Social identities can sometimes be contradictory (Andrews et al., 2004). As such, the participants performed strategic multiplicities of Self that exceed the rigid identity constructs, as well as the facile themes, I identify in this report. They also performed sexual Self as highly responsive to hypermasculine norms and constructs.

4.2.3 Hypermasculine and Sexual Gay Identities

It has been established that gay men fixate on the muscular body (Miller, 2015). However, what has not been settled are the reasons for this. Explanations of how hypermasculinity came to be embedded within gay masculinity vary from it arising from attempts to mimic and undermine masculinity, to it being a reaction to long-accepted views of gay men as effeminate in which gay men “embraced the bias of the oppressor” (Clarkson, 2006; Edwards, 1994). On the other hand, Kimmel (1990) has suggested that since the early days of gay liberation, queer men have responded to their rejection by traditional hegemonic masculinity by exaggerating their performance of masculinity, perfecting it. Such fetishised and stereotypical exaggerations can be seen in some gay men’s muscular physiques, aggressive sexual performance and dominant, assertive personalities (Mosher et al., 2006). Hypermasculinity rests at the heart of certain homomascuine identities, and is often valorised as the pinnacle of sexual gay masculinity, as Kelvin explained:

I think also, the more sex you have or your larger capacity to orgasm and to be able to perform sexual acts is also confused with an indication of masculinity. (Kelvin)

Further, because physical and sexual hypermasculinity is so finely premised on what, for many males, is simply unattainable, it becomes “an object of otherness or of desire” (Edwards, 1994, p. 69). That is to say, as Peter’s story revealed, for many gay and queer men (hyper)sexual desire and gender are inextricably interconnected:

This was a period where the erotic desire and my concept of masculinity were strongly fused. What I desired and what I thought a real man was, were fused together. (Peter)

Clearly then, hypermasculine norms and scripts, or as Doug termed them “the Tom of Finland thing,” are significant for the generation of certain gay identities. However, performing Self within a gender construct dominated by hypermasculinity can exact heavy psychological, physiological and social tolls. Such negative outcomes can include substance abuse, lowered self-esteem, extreme and risky sexual behaviour, and lowered interpersonal relationship quality (Eguchi, 2006; Frost & Meyer, 2009; Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2019). Hypermasculine norms and scripts are damaging to the gay community collectively (Bishop et al., 2014) and, unfortunately, negative effects were evident in two of the participants’ narratives:

There were expectations - ah, I remember the extraordinary social pressure that I felt to perform sexually, you know, to have long lasting erections, you know, that kind of be able to have sex forever, kind of the porn, um, porn ideal of sex, and my extreme anxiety around that, which then of course made sex far less pleasurable, um, and being much less capable of, of, you know, performing. (Francis)

Sometimes, you know, in my life when I've gone through cycles of like gone really big, hard at the gym and you know done the steroids. It - because it was like, I want to hit that circuit party, beautiful people. (Doug).

What’s more, in conforming rigidly to the expectations of hypermasculinity, gay men are doubly oppressed. First, as deficient Others against whom heterosexual masculinities claim legitimacy and power, and then as over conformists to destructive norms of male behaviour (Kimmel, 1990). They are caught in the double bind of being told that they are not men by traditional masculinity, and yet they are also told that they must behave and look like traditional men by homomasculine norms and

scripts. Said differently, the fetishisation of masculinity and the rigid enforcement of hypermasculinity oppress gay men through dictating norms, and also in relentlessly demanding of them a performance of perfect masculinity that is impossible to achieve (Edwards, 1994; Kimmel, 1990). This was evident in Doug's comments on the impossibility of performing Self in response to hypermasculine norms:

I was chasing the, um, the impossible of being, uh, wanted, uh, being, uh, desired. Stability...
I've fed this beast within me ... that I am not worthy. (Doug)

As discussed above, homomasculinities are essentially sexual identities. Gay male identities are constructs of gendered Self that are communicated and instated through sexual desire and performance (Edwards, 1994), as was made clear by Doug who, due to undisclosed health issues was unable to have sex. He was also unable, therefore, to perform a key aspect of his gendered sexual identity, and was left wondering:

Nowadays, [my sex drive] is gone ... You just don't feel masculine anymore. What have I got left? (Doug)

Sex, therefore, arguably constitutes a corner stone of some gay men's identities. It is through having sex with another man that desire and attraction (which on their own do not constitute homosexuality) are communicated as gay masculinity (Milani, 2014). Put another way, it is through performing sex that the gay male identity is confirmed, or made visible (albeit to a very particular audience). It is also through sex, along with femmephobia and other hegemonic gender roles and constructs, that gay identities are organised to form a hierarchy of homomasculinities.

4.2.4 A Hierarchy of Pecs and Penises

In the absence of enactment, gender disappears since there is "no gender identity behind the expressions of gender" (Butler, 2006, p. 34). That is, without repeated performance and instatement of gender, what remains is biological sex. Masculinity, therefore, is a homosocial construction, something that men perform together (Kimmel, 1994) within which masculine gender performance ascribes quality and validity to sex, according to social norms and mores. In this view, the 'value' of a person's gender performance rests in their adherence to normative gender roles and scripts (Taywaditep, 2002). As such, homomascularity rests in direct relationship to what is expected of all men in society, as was indicated by one of the participants:

It's like you get, you know, what you get is basically what's out there in society, you know ... masculinity for gay men is just representative of what masculinity is for straight people as well... it's drummed into us from an early age. (Oscar)

Identities exist within discourse, and language, therefore, is social power (Milani, 2016). It is through language that social processes such as Othering occur, allocating social power to certain groups, and away from others (Downing, 2008). As one participant said, illustrating this:

The labels are a real problem ... you know, language does matter. (Oscar)

Language is also the communicative means by which we understand reality, and one of the mechanisms by which we interact with it. That is, language is the framework by which we communicatively engage with our contexts, and communication is the means by which we understand ourselves and construct our social identities. Therefore, language matters on fundamental levels, where it has significance in how Self is framed. This was evident in the participants' narratives, within which several of them communicatively framed their gendered Selves through binary heteronormative gender scripts. What is significant is that, even in presenting non-normative homomasculine Self, some participants employed heteronormative framing which traditionally positions masculinity as virile, strong and confident, and femininity as inferior and submissive. For example, as Doug and Oscar said:

[Masculinity] is everything about procreation. (Doug)

I don't know if masculine is the right word, but [I feel] quite strong and sure of myself inside. (Oscar)

Language matters because it communicates normative gender roles and scripts. That is, framing and language transform into action and behaviour. Therefore, given the framing of homomascularity in traditional heteronormative terms, the narratives of some participants indicated that performative similarities exist between hetero- and homomascularity. This was made evident in, for instance, what Mike said:

Queer men can also act like straight men sometimes ... it's still a repetition of the straight man, and that's problematic. (Mike).

Additionally, homomascularity operationalises through organisational and hegemonic structures and mechanisms such as the application of normative gender roles and femmephobia, and the promotion

of straight-acting and hyper masculine identities (Milani, 2014). These practices implicitly valorise heterosexuality, and construct a hierarchy of gay masculinities which mirrors that of hegemonic traditional heteromascularity (Connell, 1987; Kimmel, 1994). Within the homohierarchy of masculinities, heteronormative gender constructs influence what is perceived as sexually desirable. Consequently, gay men are not equals by virtue of commonality (Edwards, 1994), and femmephobia is one of the means by which this inequality is communicated among gay men.

Echoing the binary masculine/feminine construction of gender upon which heteromascularity rests and from which it draws its hegemonic power (Kimmel, 1994), homomascularity appeared to be constructed by the participants around the polarities of masculine/feminine, and top/bottom. As some participants' narratives indicated, to be masculine is desirable, but to be masculine *and* sexually a top is even more so:

Masculine is much more attractive than being feminine... that's just a reflection of actual, society in general. (Oscar)

I believe we devalue everything that we feminise. (Mike)

Masculinity is the top, masculinity is the penetration, masculinity is the pounding. If you're bottom, you're somehow less than a top. (Doug)

The binary construction of masculine/feminine is an articulation of power that influences normative perceptions, and is active in the construction of a hierarchy of gay masculinities. Foucault (1990) observed how power operationalised some people, such as gay men, as objects *and* as subjects of control, with the effect being the internalisation of the norms of disciplinary control to the point of policing their own behaviour (Gutting, 2005). On the one hand, this process of internalising norms is the mechanism of self-loathing active in internalised homophobia (Rowen & Malcolm, 2002). On the other, it is the mechanism by which gay men reconstruct the hegemony under which they are Othered, effectively categorising and organising all homomascularities into a hierarchy of power, value and desirability (Edwards, 1994; Kimmel, 1994). This hierarchy is structured according to the desirability and validity of (hyper)masculine gender performances, in contrast to which femme and queer masculine performances are Othered as inferior and undesirable (Bishop et al., 2014).

In line with this, several participants offered that within the organisation of gay masculinities, the traditionally gender-role conforming masculine performances, and those that are sexually top, are allocated value, power and voice:

Masculine is being sort of stronger ... feminine is considered being inferior. (Oscar)

The top is always the masculine one because he's out there doing you. (Doug)

I think it functions in similar ways to heterosexual sex. I think there is a power imbalance maybe. Um, I do think sex is very imbued with power, no matter what way you look at it. I think it's unfortunate that we have bottoms. Even the classification of bottoms/tops, it's all just crazy. Um, being submissive, therefore, effeminate, and the tops being the more dominant. And then some bottoms have to reclaim that dominance by being a power-bottom. (Mike)

As has been noted by Edwards (1994), gay sexuality is essentially a sexist sexuality. This is articulated in some gay men valuing hypermasculine sexual tops over other performances of masculinity. It is also articulated in the misogynistic and femmephobic attitudes that accompany the valorisation of traditional gender roles (Demetriou, 2001). That is to say, within the communication of some gay men, hegemonic heteronormative controls are enforced, manifesting in anti-effeminacy attitudes, as was made clear by Mike who said:

Anything feminine can be seen as a big negative in our culture, in a patriarchal culture anyway. (Mike)

Furthermore, the role of normative anti-femme views in the performative construction of individual gay identities, and in their hierarchical organisation together, was illustrated particularly clearly by Doug. Throughout his narrative, he performed gay Self through the heteronormative identity of a "bloke." As he explained:

[Bloke is] ... very much kind of a straight-leaning term, the bloke rather than the, um, than the being gay... It's kinda like someone who can, yeah, talk football, drink beer. Um, he's a good bloke. (Doug)

However, hegemony cannot be created without the collusion of those who are being subordinated, and as Milani (2014) has noted, some gay men are able to display same-sex dominance by referring metaphorically to other men as feminine. Further, gay men who fear and reject femme-presenting men deploy femmephobia in order to justify and bolster their own masculinity (Eguchi, 2011; Taywaditep, 2002). Deployed in this way by gay men against one another, femmephobia can be seen to manifest in similar ways to those in which heterosexual men use misogyny and homophobia to subordinate

women and gay men (Demetriou, 2001) in order to promote and reinforce their own gender performance.

Seen in this light, the validity of Doug's heteronormative "bloke" identity appears to be under-written by masculinity as bolstered by anti-femme views. In fact, according to Doug's own narration, his "bloke" Self was affirmed by his positioning himself in contrast to femme-presenting men. This is particularly indicated by the final phrase of his description of his reaction to:

Someone who's flamboyantly loud as fuck. And it's just like, you sit there sometimes and go, 'Can you tone the gay down?' And it's like, who am I to be sat here judging people on their femininity and their masculinity? I'm not the person to be judging them, but I'm feeling embarrassed because other people are looking at us and thinking that I'm gay and it's that, that's completely, I should be okay with being gay, but I'm not *that*. (Doug)

In short, the gender binary of masculine/feminine that is articulated at the core of hegemonic heteromascularity is also present within homomascularity (Eguchi, 2011). Significantly, and in keeping with the homosexual core of homoidentities, it is the masculine that is enshrined at the centre of homomascularity identities, where it is valorised and eroticised. Consequently, to some gay men, it is masculinity itself that is the turn on, while femininity is devalued and pushed aside (Taywaditep, 2002). Masculinity, then, is seriously important to homosexuality and to gay men, and the parody of masculinity is a turn off sexually for gay men (Edwards 1994). As some participants explained:

I would not be attracted to someone who was, as I see it, someone who is exclusively camp or effeminate or a drag queen or whatever. I'm much more likely to be attracted to someone who is, um, who presents as masculine. Someone who's got a beard or someone who's got yeah, presents in ways that are more conventionally identified with the, with masculinity. Yeah. (Craig)

It's like when you see a rugby player, [he is] a lot more attractive than a male ballerina. (Kelvin)

You know, the images in my head when I have a wank. I mean it's all of these things that are - it's never sitting there wanking off to feminine people or what I would regard as feminine. (Doug)

Be that as it may, masculinity is not monolithic. Rather, it occurs at the intersection of various axes, one of which constitutes the gender binary. At this intersection, the normative presentation of physical

manliness is used by some gay men to organise a hierarchy of homomasculinities within which the co-construction of gay male identities is not one involving equals by virtue of shared gender (Edwards, 1994). Furthermore, Kimmel (1994) has argued that “the hegemonic definition of manhood is a man *in* power, a man *with* power, and a man *of* power” (emphasis in original, p. 125). It is these hegemonic qualities that, since the early days of gay liberation, have been translated by gay men into the homohierarchy of “pecs and penises,” as Doug termed it:

The hierarchy within the gay world is pecs and penises ... the hottest guys are the guys with the biggest arms, or you know, the hairiest chest or, you know, the chiselled jaws, and the sort of biggest cocks. (Doug)

Beginning with the denim-clad muscled gay clones of the early 1970s, replete with bulging crotches and moustachioed faces, hypermasculinity and its virile, working-man aesthetic has been viewed by some gay men as more valid and desirable than other performances of masculinity (Clarkson, 2006). Since then, the homomasculine hierarchy of pecs and penises has been constructed in ways that mirror traditional heteromascularity, where hypermasculine features such as strong physique, sexual prowess and an assertive manner are representative of the most valid and successful performances of being a man, and anything considered feminine is devalued (Taywaditep, 2002). This was articulated by a number of participants, for instance:

I think also people, really high, like higher ups in the hierarchy are of course people with lots of money, people who are like very fit, who work out, um, people with like lots of friends, or really desirable social lives. (Kelvin)

Kimmel (1994) has noted that all men are under the constant careful scrutiny of other men who “watch us, rank us, grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood” (p. 128), making clear the homosocial means by which men construct the hierarchy of masculinities. However, while it may be true that heterosexual men observe one another to assess their relative standing in the hierarchy of compulsory masculinity, gay men do so to establish the “hierarchy of what is seen as desirable,” as Kelvin described it. This perspective was echoed by all other participants, who also identified the hierarchy of homomasculinities as being constructed through gay men assessing, sorting and categorising one another.

Regarding such homosocial gender organisation, it was notable that some participants also spoke of the problematic aspect to identity labels (Slagle, 2006). While individuals do self-identify (Milani, 2016), labels limit individuals by framing and constraining their presentation of Self insofar as they gloss over

and mask the unique and diverse experiences and identities that they purport to represent (McDonald, 2016). This was evident, for instance, in Kelvin and Doug's narratives:

I find that it's um, not like quite challenging, but I find that it's quite intense to engage with, gay people because I think that there's, like I know a lot more of what goes on behind everything. (Kelvin)

The pigeonholing, the, the, if you're a bottom, you're somehow a less than a top. (Doug)

Furthermore, labels also position individuals within hierarchies of power wherein white, educated voices have, for a long time, been privileged and promoted at the expense of non-white and queer voices and perspectives (Milani, 2014; Yep, 2003). This was confirmed by some participants who identified that the hierarchy of pecs and penises allocates the privilege of voice and power to older, white men. For instance:

Well, I think the older groups have more voice because there's more of a legacy from them. So, when I talk about voice, I'm, and they're also, um, and you know, now we start to go into, uh, positions of power to have voices, and stuff like there. So, I think older gay, and probably white, males have, uh, a higher profile and, therefore, a bigger voice and, therefore, could be seen as the defining presence of the gay community. (Henry)

You do have your hierarchy. I would say I think that, um, as a white middle-class queer man, I definitely hold a lot more privilege than others. (Mike)

However, while identity labels and categories are problematic, impacting some gay men in significant ways, the participants' narratives indicated that they also have functional roles. Some gay men make use of identity categories and stereotypes to locate and organise the masculinities of other gay men in relation to their own, constructing "hierarchies of beauty" (Miller, 2019). As Doug termed it, "this fucking filtering system" enables the scanning, sorting and seeing who "feels like a match for me" (Francis). As another participant explained, the homohierarchy also allows "people to find tribes, common identity, um, family" (Mike) with whom to perform gendered sexual Self. What's more the hierarchy of pecs and penises allows men to "block out" those who are not attractive. However, as Doug explained, no one escapes the hierarchy of pecs and penises unscathed:

They, they become these fuzzes and all you can see then is just hot people. And then you've, you've, you've filtered – your head has filtered out – what it regards as people who are beneath

you looks wise and yet it then highlights all the people that you feel completely ugly next to.
(Doug)

For whatever purposes they serve, some gay men have imported into their identities certain hierarchical and hegemonic elements of hetero-masculinity (Anderson, 2009) such as the valorisation of (hyper)sexual performance and aggression (Yep, 2003). In this time of #MeToo, when victims of sexual harassment and violence are finding their voices, a clear pattern has emerged of powerful heterosexual men dispensing with consent and sexually assaulting women. Many women will attest to such predatory attitudes and behaviours being common to many men, not just the powerful ones (Haas, 2018) and, in my experience, many gay and queer men would attest to much the same issue. As Kelvin's story suggested, the issue is located in the hegemonic hypersexual behaviour of some gay men:

They don't look at you as a human. They kind of look you up and down. You know, it's the feeling of like fresh meat. I think it's very much like a, it's like, it's like a calculating first introduction. (Kelvin)

Significantly, Cannon and Buttell (2018) found that 26 percent of men in the United States experience sexual violence within their gay relationships, while Javaid (2018) notes the prevalence of sexually predatory behaviours in the wider gay community. In line with this, the participants' narratives indicated the prevalence of aggressive and predatory sexual behaviours among gay men. On the one hand, most participants described the existence of "some silent rules" whereby "there's a lot of touching and ownership" and "we can do what we want to each other" (Francis). This was echoed by another participant who explained:

I think most queer men can count, you know, on numerous occasions, where something untowards maybe happened to them. Um, and I guess that leads into, it ties into a lot of things. It ties into that hyper performance of masculinity. The ownership of bodies around you. It ties into, um, sexualised spaces that gay men operate in. (Mike)

Such hegemonic practices and constructs speak to the power that is enshrined in the hierarchy of homomascularity, whereby certain masculinities assert dominance over other performances of maleness. (Clarkson, 2006). In certain homosocial contexts, especially those where sex may be on the agenda, consent is dispensed with, and identity labels cloud out individually nuanced gendered sexual identities. In these spaces, individuals have limited agency in the construction of their own identities,

as they are automatically assigned a sexual identity category simply by being a male body in a homosocial space (Clarkson, 2006). As Mike said:

People are, um, prescribed certain roles or expectations of how they view themselves and how other people view them ... you can't escape that influence. (Mike)

Furthermore, in homosocial spaces that are characterised by hegemonic, hierarchical homomale behaviours, narratives about sexual identities as public bodies dominate, and stereotypes are imposed and inhabited. As Kelvin's narrative indicated, in masculine spaces the public domain dominates that of the individual, and the homohierarchy is constructed:

You're compartmentalised very quickly. You're either seen as like friendship or you're seen as the competition, or you're seen as someone who you're kind of like interested in – the bait or whatever. Um, and it's very like when you meet gay people, they automatically kind of rank you ... they kind of very quickly try suss out, like who you are if you're single, if you are in a relationship. And also, your sexual versatility comes into question a lot, a lot more before, than your personality and your temperament and what you're interested in and even what you do, which I find really interesting. (Kelvin)

What is evident then is that the hierarchy of pecks and penises in relation to which some men co-construct and perform their identities is hegemonic in character, similar in many aspects to the wider hierarchical gender system within which all men and women are positioned. That is, the homohierarchy is a social construction within which men reach for hegemonic gendered power and ascendancy over others, while simultaneously being disempowered by their positioning within the same hierarchy by other men. Yet, the complex co-constructed gender system within which some gay men perform Self is located within specific social, physical and digital contexts. This means that the social identities of some gay and queer men are specifically temporal and unstable.

4.2.5 Contexts of Gay Identities

Identities are constructions in the present time, where individuals perform Self in response to their immediate contexts (Goffman, 1959; Butler, 1991) and along multiple intersecting axes (Endo et al., 2010). In consequence, social identities are also the unstable product of stories that we tell of ourselves, the interactional construction of Self in context (Andrews et al., 2004; De Fina, 2015).

Said differently, homomale identities are closely tied to the contexts in which they are performed. As one participant recalled understanding in his younger years, gendered Self is located within specific social domains wherein significance and meaning are constructed and understood:

In the post WW2 era ... the concept of a masculine man was one who would put his life in the line for the benefit of others, and in doing so created a comradeship, a fraternity of men. A men's space. Men belonged in men's spaces. And that was where true masculine men were found. (Peter)

Furthermore, the context-bound aspect of performative social identities is closely tied to them being constructions of plurality and polyphony (De Fina, 2015). In this view, rather than being static or essential representations of gendered sexual Self, identities are interactional constructions and dynamic responses linked to the contexts in which they occur, (De Fina, 2015), as one participant indicated:

There's just no singular queer person you could meet. I think there's so many layers and it would depend on the context. (Mike)

Additionally, the context-dependant aspect of social homomale identities requires that they be endlessly recreated (Butler, 2006). They are not normatively fixed but are discursively constructed and negotiated according to context (Milani, 2014). As such, performances of gay masculine identities can be seen as dynamic interactions within social situations, rather than representations of essential Self or qualities that one has (Milani, 2016). Identities are mere co-constructed approximations of what people believe others believe about their beliefs about masculinity. They must also be perpetually reinstated.

In such a view, gay masculine identities appear as nothing more than smoke and mirrors of Self - illusory, unstable and dynamic presentations of masculine Self according to context. Furthermore, and as Doug made explicit, the context-dependant quality introduces such artifice into the performances of gendered, sexual identities that individual Self may even be subsumed:

For a time, people probably can act or they can be, play the role of a master or they can play the role of the slave, but, you see them the next day, you know, at Starbucks and they're, they're just exactly like everyone else. Whether it's playing a role throughout your entire life or playing a role when you're on the scene, um, or you're just naturally masculine as those other different elements. We can play masculine. We can play, um, dress up, um. But that

doesn't alter who we are when we go back home, and we take that all off and have a shower and it's like, Oh, okay. (Doug).

Furthermore, for gay and queer men, (re)constructing and (re)performing unstable context-bound Self as a member of an (often) invisible, minority in a heterosexual and heteronormative world requires endless coming out (McDonald, 2016). Constantly reckoning with heteronormativity in negotiating and performing a minority gay Self in dominantly heterosexual and heteronormative contexts can feel lonely and vulnerable (Yep, 2003). Yet, when sexual minority individuals first enter LGBTQI spaces and contexts in which their non-normative identities are privileged and elevated, they recall a sense of arriving in a place within which their performative Self is liberated. Within these contexts, the participants spoke of the significance of having “come home” to a place where minority Self is no longer invisible or vulnerable, but Other difference is assumed and celebrated. As two participants said:

You know, Sydney Mardi Gras, for example, and you do the whole parade and you're with a group of people. I've had a couple of times where that's been the most electric time of my entire life and it's just, you know, it's people ... And the next minute I'm snogging on the float in front of hundreds of thousands of people, and I'm loving it. And it's just like, you know, Ah! ... It kind of banishes all of those kind of, uh, moments of um, um, I'm nothing. (Doug)

I remember in years gone by, going into a gay bar was something - you know, I'm thinking years ago, 20 years ago - was something incredibly exciting and, uh, and a sense of here were people that I felt, it was a group that I felt I didn't need to be afraid of, if you like. And especially at the early stages of coming out, I didn't need to be afraid of showing to other men that I was gay or queer. Uh, because I think certainly growing up there was that sense of, um, yeah, as a, as a gay man, a gay boy, you're going to be harassed and attacked by other straight men. So, going into a gay bar was something of an environment where I felt safe, where I felt that, um, it was incredibly liberating to be able to feel that if I was attracted to someone, I didn't need to hide that. (Craig)

Unsurprisingly then, the gay scene was also identified by several participants as a primary context for their ongoing identity performances. Several participants' stories indicated the importance of dedicated homosocial contexts as locales in which sexual Self can be negotiated, co-constructed and openly performed. Some participants confirmed gay bars and clubs as contexts in which non-normative gendered sexual Self is confirmed and reinforced. For instance, in describing a gay bar that he used to frequent, Doug had this to say:

It was a very masculine space. It was a hypermasculine space, um, which uh, suited it's brief of, you know, porn and, and you know, very much, um, heavy on the red and the black and the leather and um, those sorts of images of Tom of Finland and um, what we growing up regarded as masculine. (Doug).

However, in these contexts, the participants also indicated the significant impact on their identities of homomasculine norms and gender role expectations. Specifically, the participants' narratives reinforced that identities are constructed in relation to multiple intersecting axes that occur in social contexts and are temporally located (Andrews et al., 2004). The narratives also emphasised that identities emerge through semiotic processes, and that they are not representations of individual essences (DeFina, 2015). For instance, in discussing gay bars and clubs, Mike outlined the normative pressures that individuals can experience in gay contexts. As he explained:

It's still not a space where you can, I don't feel, as though you can necessarily be yourself because I still think you have to look a certain way to have some kind of, um, value in that space. Or some kind of cultural currency to participate in that space. (Mike)

Despite this, homosocial contexts have undeniably been historically significant for gay and queer men as affirming places to co-construct sexual gendered Self with others in safety. Unsurprisingly, the locations and purposes of these contexts have changed over time, as have the ways that gay men communicate within them. For instance, in the 1970s, gay identities were in-part negotiated via a handkerchief code, a form of semiotic communication. Although now-obsolete, this code was used by gay men to signal sexual preference – and to communicate availability – according to the colour of handkerchief made visible, and its positioning in the left or right pocket (Kacela, 2019; Villarreal, 2019) (see Appendix F). Primarily used by men on the street, this communication effectively extended the context of gay men's performative gay masculine Self well beyond the physical confines of a bar or club. However, with the arrival of the AIDS epidemic in the early 1980s, gay men's sexual behaviours were unrecognisably changed, and the handkerchief fell out of use (Kacela, 2019).

Like many aspects of social life that have moved online, gay identities are increasingly negotiated and performed in digital contexts. Digital spaces provide exciting and safe contexts in which individuals are able to control and curate their performance of Self (Connor, 2019). They have also become significant places for people with minority identities to negotiate and perform Self. For instance, Irish youth have been shown to generally use digital resources to explore gay identities, behaviours and lifestyles (Craig & McNroy, 2014), and 55 percent of LGBTQI Americans met another person through a social

networking site back in 2012 (Connor, 2019). Contrastingly, over the six years ending in 2019, 33 percent of gay bars closed in the United States (Mattson, 2019) meaning that digital contexts and gay social networking apps are increasingly replacing the physical contexts as the locale within which some gay and queer identities are negotiated and performed. In line with this, some participants indicated the growing significance of online contexts for performative gay Self that also offer rich opportunities for sorting and labelling the performances of other men. As Kelvin, for instance, said:

It's a representation of you, but just your online representation. And I think that people very much like to Facebook stalk, or go through your photos or look, look for personality, wealth indicators, um, like indicators of sexual preference, or like if you're a top or a bottom. (Kelvin)

Regardless of whether gay or queer identities are performed online or in physical contexts, they remain social constructs that arise along multiple intersecting axes (Andrews et al., 2004). The social contexts within which their identities are negotiated and performed have great influence over them. In addition, visual and print media, and the threat or experience of physical and symbolic violence are significant factors in the construction of gay and queer masculine identities.

4.2.6 Media and Violence

Located within the social constructionist paradigm, this study opposes the essentialist view of homosexuality, which sees sexuality as innate and repressed in society (Edwards, 1994). That is, throughout all stages of research, including designing the study, my interactions with the participants, and data analysis and presentation, I have viewed sexuality as a deeply socially conditioned phenomenon that does not constitute any form of separate entity (Edwards, 1994). Rather, viewing sexuality as natural or inevitable, I view it as dynamic and socially constructed, arising from multiple interactions (De Fina, 2015).

Traditional media, as well as new media such as websites and social networking sites, are critical to the identity development of gay and queer men (Craig & McInroy, 2014). Traditional print and visual media have long been a means by which people with Othered sexual identities have learned about and constructed a sense of Self, despite the secrecy and silence they encountered in wider social and cultural contexts (Plummer 1995). Further, new media have been shown to have intensified and expanded the capacity for people to “explore identities, behaviours, and lifestyles that might remain inaccessible offline” (Craig & McInroy, 2014, p. 95). Such findings were consistent with the participants’ narratives which identified all forms of media as instrumental in the construction of the individual identities, and in the arrangement of the hierarchy of homomasculinities.

According to Cass's coming out model (1979), boys and men undergo identity confusion and comparison in the early stages of identity development. The stain of homosexuality drives them to negotiate what Plummer (1996) describes as "a solitude, a secrecy and a silence" (p. 33) about gay male Self. However, this is not a period free from influence, since media such as feature films, advertising and television shows can mediate the social construction of masculinity by presenting particular performances as normative (Yep, 2003) in relation to which minorities are Othered as non-normative. In line with this, the participants' narratives indicated the formative role that television and the internet play in the generation of participants' homomasculine identities. Further, the mediated construction of homomascularity is closely connected to the generation of stereotypes. As one participant said:

So, the pictures, the communication, would be, you know, uh, an effete man with a fag, um, um, uh, and being, um, and not presenting as a proud person, but you know, someone that was sort of shrinking ... all of these stigmas and things that were hidden and that were part of the communication, um, they came through. (Henry)

However, heteronormative gender constructs and stereotypes require enforcing and enacting if they are to have consequence and impact. That is, the gender constructs that are generated in media are manifested through their importation into the identities of gay men, and through their articulation in social contexts. This was seen, for instance, in Oscar's early views of masculinity which appeared to have been framed and enforced through television. His mediated understanding of normative gender presentations located expected performances in a specific cultural domain; it also established the heteronormative standard for acceptable and desirable masculinity, which he came to view as:

"the regular Kiwi guy ... carrying around blocks of 4 x 2 in a singlet." (Oscar)

For Oscar, non-normative masculinities were presented by media as undesirable, often in the vehicle of parody and ridicule. For instance, viewing Julian Cleary, the gender-bending comedian on television "wearing makeup ... sort of quite camp" and being laughed at emphasised to Oscar "the fact that it's really quite funny being feminine and um, a male." For him, television-mediated gender representations generated perceived reality, apparently imprinting as heterohegemonic norms within his homomasculine identity and behaviour. As he explained:

I sort of feel that once I was old enough to click to the fact that that wasn't really approved of, I learnt to be more masculine. (Oscar)

However, the participants did not only perform Self in response to normative gender roles and negative stereotypes of gay men that were presented in media, they also did so according to hypermasculine norms that were presented and promoted. Within some participants' narratives, television and online pornography were instrumental in the fetishisation of masculinity, and in the generation of hypermasculine norms.

In the first instance, these media provided material that eroticised and fetishised the male form in subtle though intense and formative ways. Doug, for instance, made clear the means by which this occurred. In his interaction with me, Doug said about himself that:

I suppose I'm just, ah, a bloke first, and gay second, and a bear third. (Doug)

In explaining where he derived his understanding of what a "bloke" was and why it was significant for him, Doug identified the central role of television. He explained that he watched a lot of wrestling on television when he was young, and he attributed his sexually fetishised "bloke" masculine identity to what he saw on television. As he said:

Just a bloke with a bit of a belly and hairy chest do it for me every time, and it came from all those years of watching wrestling. (Doug)

Sports programmes on television presented images of visible masculinity that gained significance as Doug matured. They became central to his presentation of adolescent sexual Self, and remained significant in the construction of his adult, sexual bloke Self. As Doug explained when I asked what it was about blokes wrestling that was significant for him:

It's this the control thing, it's the guys, it's what they wear, it's the kind of fear of it. There's the, it hearkens back to my memories of when I was finally kind of kicking into the whole sexuality thing and ...my frantic, my frantic wanking while the television was on. (Doug)

That said, in today's digital world, television has now become one of many visual media. Gay men have been identified as heavy users of the internet (Connor, 2019; Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016), and blatant sexual and pornographic content is infused throughout many of the digital contexts in which they engage. Gay men are also more heavy users of online pornography than heterosexual men (Corneau et al., 2017). Unsurprisingly, therefore, several of the participants spoke of the instrumental role of online pornography in the generation of their sexual identities. As Francis said:

I think I was about thirteen, surfing the internet and downloading stuff and then just clicked through to a website, and then that was it. (Francis)

Several participants were in strong agreement that pornography was significant in the generation of homomasculine identities. As their narratives indicated, pornography plays a critical role in the generation of the hypermasculine and hypersexual norms and stereotypes that are central to the organisation of gay masculinities into a hierarchy of pecs and penises. This was seen, for instance, in what two participants said:

If you look at, um, porn or you look at gay magazines or anything like that, then you will see there are guys in there that are big sort of beefy, hunky guys. (Oscar)

It's always, I mean, the amount of times in porn, this big hairy guy and this skinny little kind of floppy haired guy being pounded because it looks good on camera. (Doug)

Additionally, regarding the role of media in the generation of homomasculine identities, the participants indicated that the mediated presentation of toned and gym-fit men generated in them particular perspectives of masculinity. Their narratives indicated that the pro-masculine, pro-muscular, and femmephobic attitudes and communication of some gay men may have roots in media framing and messaging. As Oscar said when describing gay pornography:

... it's quite a masculine point of view of what is attractive. The message is quite clear for the gay community ... masculine is much more attractive than being feminine. (Oscar).

Such hypermasculine and femmephobic view points and messaging have devastating consequences in the lives of some gay and queer men (Fulcher, 2017; Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2019). Further evidence of this was found in the participants' narratives. For instance, as Francis explained, the hypermasculine, hypersexual messaging of media plays a key role in generating destructive social discourses and normative behaviour expectations:

I've found the messages that I received and I, I thought I had to behave in line with – things like, um, you know going to beats ... and so I'd go to saunas, or that kind of beat culture or like the sort of silent, um, even the like let's not touch, the lots of fucking kind of, um, fuck as much as you can, and all that sort of messaging. It's just extraordinarily destructive of how relationships should work and do work when they're healthy. (Francis)

That said, as powerful as the effects of the mediated generation of homomascularity are, the participants also understood their illusory, fictitious nature. Identities are, at their essence, nothing more than the normatively-driven stories that we tell about ourselves in the hopes that they are the ones that others wish us to tell (De Fina, 2015; Yep, 2003). In line with this, several participants articulated clearly the artifice at the heart of mediated homomasculine gender constructs. Notably, they also lamented the damage and disappointment caused by the mediated presentation of what it means to be gay. As three participants, for example, said:

I come back to that, um, those, um, those ideas we see so much in the gay, some parts of the gay press or the gay media or, you know being gay is about going to a lot of parties. It's about having lots of sex. It's about being part of the world of beautiful people who dance, you know, dance, shirtless at a dance party, whatever, you know. I think probably that, I think a lot of gay men grapple with those, those sorts of issues actually. Yeah. (Craig)

We've got to get through all this awful shit that we're, I'm given, and from basically media representations and then I had to like unlearn, and then realising that, you know, it's just, we're just people. (Francis)

No, I guess, you know, my thing about gay, about coming out, is that you think that once you finally come out, that it's going to be great because you'll meet all these gay people and they'll be, you know, you're gay and they're gay so they're going to be really nice to you, and you actually realise that actually that's not really how it works. (Oscar)

Foucault (1990) observed that the generation of the modern homosexual identity occurred in the late nineteenth century as a result of the medical profession categorising and treating sexual 'abnormalities.' Since then non-normative, gay bodies and identities have come to be viewed as the site of institutional violence, corporeal texts to which physical violence and sexual harm have been ascribed by processes of normalisation (Yep, 2003). Socio-cultural narratives of disgust and fear have driven the extermination, incarceration and medicalisation of homosexuals in modern times (Edwards, 1994). Although much diminished in present times, when marriage equality is legal in Aotearoa/New Zealand and 29 countries globally, and certain social allowances and protections are afforded to gay and queer men, violence is still active in the generation of homomasculine identities. Heteronormativity remains the site of considerable, sustained institutional and personal violence for LGBTQI individuals (Yep, 2003), and violence is often still a marker of manhood (Kimmel, 1994). In short, physical violence and

the fear of it remain central to negotiating gay identities (Javaid, 2018), and, the participant's narratives closely aligned with this.

In the first instance, the ubiquitous presence of violence at the intersection of gay Self and heteronormativity was made clear by Craig. Interestingly, it is his remarks at the *absence* of the threat of violence that point our attention to the role of fear in negotiating non-normative identities. Furthermore, Craig's narrative reveals that the absence of threats of physical and sexual violence is contrary to what he was accustomed to living with. As he explained when narrating experiences of Self in gay contexts:

I didn't need to be afraid, if you like. And especially at the early stages of coming out, I didn't need to be afraid of showing to other men that I was gay or queer. Uh, because I think certainly growing up there was that sense of, um, yeah, as a gay man, a gay boy, you're going to be harassed and attacked by other, other, by straight men. So, going into a gay bar was something of an environment where I felt safe, where I felt that, um, it was incredibly liberating to be able to, um, feel that if I was attracted to someone, I didn't need to hide that. (Craig).

However, the reality is that the fear of violence by gay men is not misplaced, as heteronormativity is the site of "unrelenting, harsh, unforgiving, and continuous violence for LGBTQ individuals" (Yep, 2003, p.25). Consequently, more than just being a threat in the lives of gay and queer men, sexual violence is a weapon that is often used to enforce prescribed gender roles (Javaid, 2018). Unsurprisingly then, violence played an active and key role in the generation and performances of the identities of some participants. For instance, sexual violence delayed Doug's homomasculine identity negotiation and performance, negatively affecting his well-being. As he said:

An attempted rape and that kind of put me screaming back into the closet yet again. And so, uh, being comfortable with being gay, it took a long time for me to be actually able to say, yeah, I'm okay. (Doug)

Additionally, violence appeared to further influence the negotiation of sexual minority Self by reinforcing the persistent feelings of low self-esteem and worthlessness that are evident in Doug's narrative above, and which are common to gay masculinities due to them experiencing sustained internal and external homophobia (Yep, 2003). This effect was evident within other participants' narratives, though nowhere as strikingly as with Conrad.

Conrad's story was of returning home after a night out and of being picked up by a man on the street who said that he wanted to try gay sex with Conrad. However, soon after they had found a dark and isolated place behind a building, the man began a vicious assault on Conrad. Fortunately, Conrad was able to escape, but was chased, bloody-faced, down the street by his assailant. The attack ended when Conrad ran into a bus stop, and a member of public called the police. They were able to apprehend Conrad's attacker, who was dealt with by the criminal justice system.

Tragic and distressing as this incident is, it is notable that Conrad narrated it in a matter of fact manner to me. At no point did he blame the perpetrator. Instead, his narrative was free of anger or vitriol, and in telling it, Conrad held himself responsible for the assault that he experienced. Significantly, his self-recrimination suggests that violence is what he deserves, perhaps *all* he deserves, as a stained, deviant, Other gay man. As Conrad said:

Stupid me. In hind sight, I now know that I shouldn't, I shouldn't have done that ... he kicked and punched me in the face. (Conrad)

His own diminished self-worth assumed responsibility for someone else's heteronormative inscription of violence on his body, illustrating some of the harms and damage that is done to the Self of gay and queer men throughout their lives.

That other participants besides Conrad assumed responsibility for their own deviance from the heteronormative, for the 'wrongness' of being gay, highlights the hegemonic operation of gender as power (Carlson, 2001; Edwards, 1994). This assumed responsibility also constitutes an act of violence on the Self of gay and queer men. Foucault (1990) made clear the process by which the 19th century medical professionals categorised, pathologised, and 'treated' sexual 'abnormalities.' This was done according to the binary in which hetero was viewed as normal, healthy and sexually controlled, and homo was viewed as aberrant, sick, sexually inverted and promiscuous (Edwards, 1994). In this way, the power of categorising and stigmatising gay men was allocated to dominant heterosexual gender constructs and discourses, whilst responsibility for deviance and stigmatisation was simultaneously allocated to gay men themselves. Put simply, the masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual, normal/abnormal binaries that are used to label, categorise and socially organise identities also allocate responsibility and accountability for deficiency, undesirability and unacceptability firmly within the Othered Self. This was seen, for instance, in Oscar who delayed coming out to his father at the behest of family members who urged "You can't tell Dad because he won't handle it." Although undoubtedly motivated by love, such urgings by family members, and Oscar's subsequent compliance, illustrate the unbalanced power dynamics at play in the lives of gay and queer men. Oscar was compelled to assume

not only responsibility for his own masculine error, but also for his father's anticipated poor reaction, as measured by his "inability to cope." The issue, then, for gay men is not only that they are stained Others, but that they must also be ever vigilant to assume responsibility for other people's reactions to them being marked as different.

However, to be gay is also to be resilient. Facing down heteronormative violence and homophobia is not for the faint hearted. Accordingly, several participants' narratives may have been those of men impacted in complex and often negative ways by normative gender scripts and hierarchies, but they were not those of victims. Indeed, while hegemonic hetero- and homomaskuline norms and constructs seem to be unavoidable influences in the lives and identities of some gay men, the degree and extent of their impact appears to be in the control of some individuals.

4.3 Post-Gay Identities: Beyond the Hierarchies

To be queer is to journey through the hegemony and hierarchy of compulsory masculinity by confounding traditional and normative gender presentations. By allowing for Self to consist of integrated aspects of masculine and feminine, queerness challenges masculinity (Edwards, 1994). Queer identities are politicised by the articulation of Foucault's (1990) reverse discourse, and the dismantling of the language base of gendered power structures. Queer people upend expectations and inhabit Otherness by subverting institutional conceptions of masculinity (McCormack, 2012), and challenging the notion of heteronormativity (McDonald, 2016; Slagle, 2006).

Queer people can also be viewed as post-gay, politicised by their perception of binary masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual identity categories as "instruments of regulatory regimes" that must be abandoned (Milani, 2014, p. 261). Queerness then is a post-gay identity that enables the separation of sexual identity from other aspects of one's life, so that it ceases to be a defining characteristic of Self (Connor, 2019). As Mike said:

[Queer] is an umbrella term ... I think it's all encompassing ... for me it's freeing. (Mike)

Queerness, then, enables the liberation of homo-Self, locating a celebration of Otherness in the place of the shame of stained deviancy. It is a high-agency identity that allows for the inclusion of all aspects of Self.

4.3.1 High Agency Queer Identities

As narrated by the participants, high agency queer identities fundamentally articulate a determination to perform gender free from normative identity categories and scripts that generate binary us/them hegemonies and hierarchies that exert much dominance and control over gay identities (Butler, 2006; McCormack, 2012). As McDonald (2016) has argued, such queer individuals view identity as “fluid and malleable”, seeking to void it of “stable, coherent meaning” (p. 393). They also perceive that norms are best challenged by responding to them in unexpected, or queer, ways (McCormack, 2012). Queer subversion, therefore, is the means by which people are able to change the nature of their interpellation (Butler, 2006). This high degree of agency was echoed by the participants who articulated that living a queer life is about ‘breaking the mould of gender’.

Queerness is the struggle against those who would “discipline and punish the gay body” (Carlson, 2001. p. 302) by negotiating and performing Self with agency, and challenging the social conditions that “enable and uphold heteronormativity” (Milani, 2014, p. 262). Indeed, by stepping into and inhabiting the Othered aspects of Self that otherwise stand as powerless shadows to hegemonic gender constructs, queer individuals reverse normative discourse and un-problematise gender, liberating queer Self. As Mike said:

You don't have to be oppressed or to feel like you have to conform to one way of being. (Mike)

Therefore, resisting normative commodification and stigmatisation, queer is the construction of an empowering, self-affirming sexual identity that is marked by high agency of Self. This was made clear by the participants, two of whom, for example, said:

You can refuse to be the dominant man stereotype. Um, and that was the first step for me, I suppose an understanding, you know, actually I don't have to be like other men. (Francis)

I am in a position of being able to say, ‘Yes, I embrace my sense of masculinity. I embrace my sense of being a man and, within that, I embrace my sense of being a queer man.’ And in doing so, I, I sort of, if you like, I insist maybe, I embody, I demand, that being a queer man or a gay man, be seen as a valid expression of masculinity. (Craig)

As the participants articulated, queerness liberates people to claim their gendered Selves free of binary constructions, and to do so with agency and awareness of the ‘validity’ of *all* identities. When gendered sexual Self is liberated in this way, people are empowered and all individuals are promoted.

4.3.2 Queer Integration of Self

Some gay identities essentially seek conformity to identity categories and scripts, striving to perfect normative presentations of homomasculine Self. Contrastingly, queer men generally do not share such motivations, striving instead to dissolve the binary power structures of masculine/feminine, normative/deviant altogether (Slagle, 2006). As such, queer identities embrace the instability and dynamism inherent to performative gender identities (Butler, 2006), allowing for unlimited possibility of Self without the application of prescriptive scripts or performative expectations. Queer identities, as performed by the participants then, view human identities as performative across a spectrum, with no normative start or end point (McCormack, 2012). In line with this, and true to the political core of queerness, some queer participants called for the end of gender hierarchies and binaries altogether, in order to allow for the integration of aspects of Self. For instance, some participants said:

I feel very, um, I feel very aware of it [i.e.: gender] and I do spend a lot of time thinking and writing about it. Not so much just being masculine but also being feminine. Because I think that different, the different parts that I think that everyone has to like integrate. (Kelvin)

I think I'd take the terms masculine and feminine away from the whole, the whole thing really. Um, and just let people behave the way they behave without labelling people. (Oscar)

Why can't we just, you know, have sex and not need to label the power dynamics or positions - I'm going to say categorise - and I think it's really oppressive. (Mike)

As these perspectives make clear, seeing Self as a social construct located beyond the hierarchies of homomascularity that some gay men enforce, queer men call for a liberation of Self. In their perspective, such liberation lies in freedom from oppressive normative labelling of identity roles, and therefore, also in the myriad possibilities of Self that this opens up. Queer identities are, therefore, post-gay identities that dismantle hegemonic constructs and level the hierarchies that are articulated through gender as power (Milani, 2014; Slagle, 2006).

4.3.3 Post-Gay Queerness

Indeed, queer identities free homomasculine Self from the influence of hierarchies and gender binaries; they also enable the integration of gender and sexual identities. That is to say, queer people are post-gay, emphasising gayness as only one aspect of a multi-dimensional self-identity in contrast to gay identities that foreground sexuality as a dominant aspect (Carlson, 2001).

Heteronormativity holds that homosexuality is not masculine, and masculinity is not homosexual (Edwards, 1994). However, as queer individuals express an understanding that their homosexuality is *not* separate from their masculinities, their performance of Self is released from existing within such a binary construct. That is, for queer people, boundaries around previously discrete aspects of Self, such as sex, gender and sexuality are dismantled. Concepts of normativity are discarded, and individuals' identities are unbound to allow them to be fluid and multi-faceted (Andrews et al., 2004; De Fina, 2015). And, as several participants narrated, with such post-gay queer release, there is no gender-nonconforming Other, there is only queer Us (anyone of whom may also be them/they):

We're just people. Everybody is a body - we all dance the same dance. (Francis)

Being gay is just as valid an expression of being a man, is just as valid an expression of being masculine as it is to be heterosexual. (Craig)

It is now about my integrated Self. I am male. Therefore, I am masculine. I am gay and male. Therefore, I am gay masculine. I am a red head. Therefore, I am a gay red headed male. I do not have a 'gay' masculinity. (Peter)

As these participants indicate, and consistent with Butler's (1991; 2006) conception of gender as unstable and dynamic, the identities of the men in this study were multi-faceted indeed. Two participants narrated specifically queer identities that resisted the categories and gender roles of traditional gay masculinity. However, the remainder of the participants performed hybrid gay/queer identities, indicating that although traditional homomasculine norms and structures continue to exert tremendous influence over the negotiation and performance of their homomasculine identities, things have taken a distinctly queer turn since the days of Gay Liberation. As Doug narrated, reflecting on these changes:

I've been seeing younger people these days embracing different elements of the spectrum. I think it's great. I really do. I'm jealous that people can kind of come out so much easier. I'm jealous of that. People can do that nowadays. And I could never do that. (Doug)

In line with this, the participants all spoke in queer voices about the significant harm that stereotypes and hegemonic practices of labelling and categorising cause to gay men. They were unified in their calls for the dismantling of hegemonic Othering practices, looking for a place where all people, regardless

of whom they desired and how they liked to perform sexual, gendered Self, were able to socially co-construct identities free of the hierarchy of pecs and penises. For instance, as one participant said:

If I had the power, I would, I think I'd take the terms masculine and feminine away from the whole, the whole thing really. Um, and just let people behave the way they behave without labelling people. (Oscar)

Carlson (2001) notes that while identity may still be constructed as a relation between Self and Other, current identity categories are not permanent components of the cultural landscape. Self and Other *can* move toward a more equitable recognition, which is the queer vision. Accordingly, several participants spoke in queer voices, calling for systemic change that locates gender and other identity issues not within the individual, but within their complex socio-cultural contexts. They called for a system of openness and possibility from which all social players stand to benefit. Their vision was of an alternate way of perceiving individuals and their identity performances, one that releases individuals from responsibility for their difference and non-normativity. As some participants said:

I would change the dividing practices that we have. I would remove categories and the how we medicalise our bodies. Um, yeah, I think, I think that's what I would change actually. These wider systems rather than locating some of the problems within the individuals. (Mike)

The need for broader social, broader, much, much more inclusive social narratives about what it does mean to be, to be male, what it does mean to be masculine. So, we need a broader social narrative of what being, what masculinity is about. (Craig)

What society should, should do is, is change the way that they perceive masculinity, as a society. And that, therefore, however, um, takatāpui, or gay men, present their masculinity, that's masculinity, that's society's way of masculinity as well. (Henry)

That said, as a final point to consider in discussing the analysis of narratives in this study, such liberation of Self is not only achieved through queer identity construction. As Henry indicates in the last of the three quotes above, takatāpui identities may also be the cultural means by which some people in Aotearoa/New Zealand may perform liberated Self. This is made clear in what Henry said by way of explaining takatāpui as a specific Māori construct that views performative social identities as cultural integrations of diverse aspects of Self:

Takatāpui is a collective term that's been coined, since the, um, probably late nineties, and has been taken up increasingly by Māori who might otherwise describe themselves also as gay, queer, lesbian, and you know, things under the rainbow. So, uh, but what it does imply also is that the culture and how we see ourselves in terms of those, uh, uh, sexual orientation and other things, are intertwined. And so, when they're there ... you can't extract the culture from the way that we are sort of thing ... I might not even say that I'm actually gay, male, or anything. I would just say takatāpui ... it comes from a cultural perspective of looking at sexual orientation, gender. (Henry)

Perceived in this way, takatāpui identities are seen as a cultural accumulation of Self. They may also be viewed as the culmination of queer identity that several other participants endeavoured to construct in their interviews. Furthermore, although Henry was the only participant to perform a takatāpui identity, his narrative suggested that doing so may be the means by which core aspects of Self can be integrated and liberated in the specific context of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

That said, takatāpui identities, like gay and queer identities and all other presentations of Self that people enact, are not static nor finite (Andrews et al., 2004; Endo et al., 2010). All identities are constructs that arise through interactions with other people (De Fina, 2015), and are compound in nature, as complex to construct and perform as they are to navigate and understand. Be that as it may, however, homomasculine identities are also constructs of the social and cultural Self that have life-long significance for the men who negotiate, perform and resist them. As the participants made clear throughout this study, to be gay or queer is as much about reckoning with one's humanity as it about reckoning with one's difference. They also made clear that, despite all the reckoning, as vivid and real human identities, they can also be shadowy and elusive, (re)performative constructions of Self that occur at the complex, shifting intersection with public Other.

5 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Summary of Analysis and Discussion

This study has considered how gay and queer men negotiate, co-construct and perform homomale Self. It has sought to interpret and understand the meaning and significance of the lived experiences of gay and queer men whose identities are Othered and oppressed by normative social constructs. It has also sought to investigate the ways in which normativity is contested and resisted, and how doing so affects people and their lives.

I discussed the analysis of the interview data according to three themes of identity negotiation and performance. The participants provided evidence that identity construction and development is neither linear nor simple, and that it does not occur in phased stages, as has been established in previous research (Andrews, 2015; De Fina, 2015; Plummer, 1995). Instead, the participants presented themselves as multi-faceted, complex individuals whose identities were located within immediate social and cultural contexts, consistent with Butler's (1991) and Goffman's (1959) conceptualisations of Self as performative and dynamic.

Under the theme of Homomale Self: The Stain and Mr Cellophane, I considered how the participants, particularly in their younger years, negotiated and performed Self in a heteronormative world within which they were framed as non-normative outsiders. I examined clear evidence of the effects of heteronormative Othering and homophobia, in relation to which participants typically performed Self with low agency. The effects of heteronormativity included feelings of shame, fear and secrecy, and the need felt by queer boys and men to conceal non-normative gendered Self, often from a young age. These effects aligned with those identified by Taywaditep, (2002) and Yep (2003). I also analysed how some gay and queer individuals' feelings of being 'stained' by homosexuality are accompanied by the perceptions of inadequate male Self in some men. Some men narrated Self as deficient in relation to compulsory traditional masculinity as prescribed by public heteronormative discourses and gender roles.

In response to hegemonic heteronormative gender norms and stereotypes, in their younger years, some participants were undermined by poor self-image, self-loathing and feelings of deficiency. These normative effects that I observed in the participants' narratives align with those identified by Bartone (2018) and Eguchi (2006). However, this research also extends earlier work by these scholars by further identifying the mechanisms deployed by non-normative individuals in response to normative discourses and stereotypes. In this regard, I found evidence of some participants suppressing and

obviating non-normative homomascuine Self, and several participants delayed coming out of the closet. Additionally, in some participants, the effects of heteronormative Othering included feelings of delayed arrival at manhood, perceptions of their own sexual inadequacy, and feelings of not belonging or 'fitting in'. These effects were similar to those observed by Rowen and Malcolm (2002), and were seen to be powerful in the narratives of some men, for whom they were long-lasting.

In examining the theme of Homomascuine Identity Construction, I discussed how the feelings among the participants that they were sexual outsiders who did not belong as Others in a heteronormative world eventually caused them to come out. They began contesting and resisting heteronormative gender identity roles and constructs in ways that broadly aligned with Cass's (1979) model of homosexual identity development. Contesting and resisting heteronormativity caused the participants to search for social communities and contexts within which to negotiate and perform non-normative gendered sexual Self with increased agency than before.

I also discussed how the participants were unsure of what constitutes homomascuinity, further indicating that there is no original gender nor authentic gender performance, as argued by Butler (1991; 2006). Despite this, however, the participants were clear that homomascuinity plays a significant role in their lives. In line with this, the analysis indicated that the participants negotiated and performed gay or queer Self with high-agency purpose and strategy. However, gay or queer individuals are not always able to control the negotiation of meaning that underpins the social-construction of their gendered sexual identities. Accordingly, the participants' narratives indicated that gay masculine identities are highly unstable, and require ongoing performative (re)negotiation and (re)instating in order to be made visible. I identified that this was undertaken by the participants according to social context, and often as resistance to normative gender scripts and roles.

Further analysis indicated that, similar to compulsory heterosexual masculinity (Milani, 2014), for some men gay masculinity is heavily influenced by norms and stereotypes. These contribute to the hegemonic quality and hierarchical structure of mainstream gay masculinity (Edwards, 1994; Kimmel, 1994). The participants indicated that hypermasculine, hypersexual gay male identities exert hegemonic power and dominance over the physical and sexual performances of some other gay men (Bishop et al., 2014). As such, I identified some gay identities as being negotiated and performed in response to rigid identity categories and gender roles that create a hierarchy of peccs and penises. Within this hierarchy, traditional performances of masculinity, along with those that are hypermasculine and hypersexual, are promoted and valued above all others (Clarkson, 2006; Miller, 2015). Several participants made clear the problematic aspects of this hierarchy. These included that individuals' agency in the negotiation of their identities is limited in relation to the public construction

and application of homomascuine categories and roles, and that within the homohierarchy, social power is sometimes articulated in predatory sexual behaviours and in violence. However, most participants were in agreement that normative labels and stereotypes also offered the benefit of enabling gay men to locate one another for social and sexual purposes.

Straight-acting gay men fear and reject femme-presenting men who negotiate and perform gender role nonconforming masculine identities in ways that are similar to the misogyny communicated by some heterosexual masculinities (Eguchi, 2011; Taywaditep, 2002). However, extending existing understanding of the communicative functions and effects of femmephobia, I identified that femmephobia is used to bolster and validate the gender performances of some hegemonic gay men, sometimes beginning in childhood. Such hegemonic performances of gay Self subordinate, ridicule, and perceive as less desirable the masculinities of femme-presenting gay men, further contributing to the hierarchical structure of homomascuinites.

Homomascuine identities are also context dependant (Butler, 1991; De Fina, 2015; Goffman, 1959). Bars and clubs featured within the participants' stories as significant contexts for gay and queer men to socially co-construct and perform non-normative sexual and gendered identities safely. The importance of such places in providing some men with a sense of belonging, of feeling normal despite the heteronormativity of reality, was clear.

Consistent with Milani (2016), I also identified that physical contexts offer individuals opportunities to perform sexual Self, and that this was significant as performing sex with other men forms a cornerstone of gay and queer men's identities (Edwards, 2004; Plummer, 1995). However, even in these spaces, some gay men's identity performances were heavily influenced by hegemonic, hierarchical gay (hyper)masculine norms and gender roles. Specifically, some participants narrated issues related to consent and accessing of one another's bodies in gay spaces that negatively impacted their identity performances.

I also explored how the performative contexts of gay identities continue to change, and digital spaces emerged as significant contexts in which gay and queer men perform Self, consistent with findings by Connor (2019) and Mattson (2019). However, regardless of whether individuals negotiate and perform sexual, gendered Self in physical or digital spaces, I identified that the contexts within which homomascuine identities occur are significant. Social identities are context-dependant (De Fina, 2015), which I identified as contributing to the polyphony of gay and queer men's identities. Further, the participants identified the performative artifice of homomascuine identities that is revealed when they are decontextualised.

Regarding the generation of homomasculine identities, the analysis identified media as a significant factor (Connor, 2019; Craig & McInroy, 2014). Consistent with this, television mediated the presentation of masculinity for some participants, generating heteronormative constructs of traditional masculinity as desirable and 'normal'. For some participants, these mediated normative constructs also stood in contrast to sissyphobic social discourses which parodied and ridiculed gender role nonconforming presentations of masculinity. I identified these gender constructs to have significant impact in how some participants negotiated and performed their homomasculine identities, often pushing them towards straight-acting presentations of gay Self.

Similarly, pornography was a key source of hypersexual, hypermasculine and femmephobic gender norms and sexual stereotypes (Corneau et al., 2017). I found pornography to greatly contribute to the hegemony of hierarchical gay masculinities. I also examined how pornography generated norms and stereotypes that impacted individuals' well-being, with effects in the lives of some participants including substance abuse, lowered self-esteem, sexual and physical assault, and lowered interpersonal relationship quality.

Overall, media were found to generate a fictitious representation of gay identities and lives. These mediated representations of gay masculine identities disappointed some participants in their failure to translate into lived contexts and experiences.

I found violence to be ubiquitous in the negotiation and performance of gay and queer identities. Contesting and resisting heteronormative power and primacy invites violent oppression and enforcement of the us/them dichotomy that underlies the hegemony of social and sexual gender constructs (Javaid, 2018; Slagle, 2006; Yep, 2003). Sexual and physical violence caused some participants to resist and delay constructing gay male identities. Some participants also emphasised feelings of responsibility for their deviance and, therefore, perceptions that they were 'deserving' of assault and personal violence.

The final grouping of constructions related to the theme of Post-Gay Identities: Beyond the Hierarchies. I explored how queer identities dismantle normative identity categories, and abandon gender roles to perform Self free of the binaries of dominance and oppression that I identified as defining, limiting and damaging some gay identities. I explored how multifaceted queer identities are negotiated with high agency by individuals, and how performative queer Self is the product of uniquely integrated aspects of sexuality and gender. These explorations were guided by previous studies (Connor, 2019; McCormack, 2012; Milani, 2014). I also identified that queer identities liberate Self by

'breaking the mould' to enable some participants to construct empowering, self-affirming identities. These identities were narrated by participants as offering endless presentations of Self that exceed traditional masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual binaries. Additionally, I identified Māori takatāpui identities as cultural culminations of integrated, liberated homomasculine identities in the specific context of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Finally, given the harm hegemonic labels, stereotypes and normative gender roles have in the lives of some gay men, I described how the participants were unanimous in calling for systemic change to the social construction of gendered sexual identities. I identified that the participants all called for changes in social discourses and the gender constructs that they produce, in order that all men and women may flourish. The participants were unified in this, suggesting that removing identity issues from their current problematic location within individuals and placing them within the social discourses and binary constructs that problematise minority identities is key to dismantling hegemonic and hierarchical gay masculinity.

5.2 Implications of this Research

This study has contributed knowledge related to how gay and queer men negotiate and perform identities that resist and contest heteronormativity. It has contributed data and insights regarding the diversity of masculinities, illuminating some of the lived realities of gay and queer men in Wellington, Aotearoa/New Zealand. It has complemented existing sexuality and men's studies scholarship that identifies the hegemonies and hierarchies within which gay men co-construct their social identities, and how they contest and resist these. It has also illuminated the post-gay benefits of political queer identities that dismantle gender as power (Butler, 2006), and liberate individuals to perform Self beyond limiting and oppressive binary constructs.

As such, this research further reveals gender-based systems of oppression that act on the Selves of gay and queer men, illuminating the means by which they support and also resist these oppressive systems (Eguchi, 2011; McDonald, 2016; Taywaditep, 2002). These insights may be helpful to those who participated, and to other gay and queer folk, in throwing light on the structures of power that are privileged and maintained by the valorisation of hypermasculinity and hypersexuality. These observations may also be helpful for gay and queer men in understanding and accepting the aspects of themselves that have been influenced, formed and, in some ways, damaged by powerful heteronormative social and cultural forces. Indeed, such insights may be of use in helping gay and queer men to understand not only Self, but Other as well, leading the way to social constructions of gendered and sexual identities that are embracing of difference and tolerant of divergence.

The voice and visibility are significant that this narrative approach to homomascuine identity negotiation and performance has given to the participants involved and, by extension, to their communities of gendered sexual minorities. To be gay or queer is to sometimes live in the shadow, to be invisible, ignored or even negated by heteronormative social realities. However, in telling their stories of gay and queer Self, the participants have made a significant contribution to showing they matter as people, and to making minorities visible and heard within broader social discourses. This is the means by which diversity is created and nourished, and when that happens, everyone benefits.

5.3 Limitations of this Research

Like any practical research, this study had limitations. It was intended to be exploratory and subjective, reflective of the experiences and narratives of a wide range of gay and queer men in Wellington, Aotearoa/New Zealand. However, despite efforts to ensure otherwise, the participant cohort was notably homogenous, thereby limiting the study. Most of the participants were affluent, well-educated and Pākehā, meaning that the snapshot that this research offers is of more limited aperture than was intended.

Relational ethics are at the heart of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2013), central to which is a commitment to relationships and reciprocal respect, to honour participants and their stories. Scope and length limitations on this project, however, made it impossible to include and explore in depth and according to appropriate Māori cultural context the takatāpui identity performed by one participant, Henry. This represents an unfortunate limitation within this project given that the central purpose was to examine narratives of homomascuine identity formations in Aotearoa/New Zealand. To include and honour takatāpui identities in their appropriate cultural context, whilst also exploring them at the intersection of gender and sexuality, requires a future study with a larger scope. However, doing so will greatly increase the cultural relevance of all research on this topic in Aotearoa/New Zealand to local individuals and communities.

Similarly, the scope of the project, and the length of the report it produced limited the research focus in additional ways. Besides those of gay and queer men, multiple other gendered sexual identities constitute the rainbow community in Wellington, Aotearoa/New Zealand. The inclusion of only gay and queer masculinities, and the exclusion of other identities such as those of transgender and bisexual men is, therefore, another limitation on this research.

Finally, limitations related to the construction of knowledge are to be found in the subjective orientation of this study. The data produced through interviews with the participants were extensive, ranging across very diverse topics, themes and issues related to gay and queer masculinity. As I noted in my research journal, this wild heterogeneity in the data may have been narrowed by questions that were better conceived and formulated than mine were. Be that as it may, necessity required that I draw boundaries around sections of the data in order to make them manageable. I made decisions about what to include, and what to leave out that were fundamentally guided by my own interests, experiences and priorities. Although true to the post-modern epistemological view of meaning as the product of subjective social constructionist interactions (Gutting, 2005), such decision-making processes also represent limitations on what knowledge this report actually produces. On the one hand, these research constructions are infused with rich subjective meaning and insights. On the other, they are limited by the subjective decisions regarding knowledge boundaries that I was required to make in order to present any analyses and discussions whatsoever. Ultimately, of course, this is an unavoidable limitation, though a limitation nonetheless.

That said, boundaries of all sorts, including those around knowledge and understanding, are also often the site of contestation and expansion. With this in mind, I now turn attention to my view of what lies beyond the insights and knowledge that were generated by the research participants and myself in this study, to consider where further research might occur.

5.4 Future Research

Gay and queer men were shown by this research to construct Self in specific and strategic ways according to context. Physical contexts and spaces have traditionally been important places for non-normative folk, myself included, to negotiate and perform Self. However, online spaces have increasingly become significant contexts for gay and queer individuals (Connor, 2019; Craig & McInroy, 2014). Given this, comparative studies into the motivations and consequences that are attached to the use of different physical and virtual contexts of performative gay and queer Self may be worth undertaking. Such studies may offer much understanding as to what gay and queer men stand to lose or gain in the shift online, and whether those who use them ought to be fighting harder to keep more physical contexts from disappearing (Mattson, 2019). Additionally, such studies may reveal similarities and differences in how gay and queer men perform and negotiate Self in different spaces and contexts, potentially exposing salient issues that may arise from the move online.

Furthermore, given the growing significance of online spaces to homomale identity negotiation and presentation (Connor, 2019), research into the effects of the infusion of pornography and

hypersexualised messaging through those digital contexts may yield important knowledge related to, for instance, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and to the sexual and mental health of gay and queer men. Such work may also contribute to understanding of issues related to gender as power by researching how normative hegemonies and constructs such as hypermasculinity and hypersexuality have transliterated across from performative physical contexts to form a hegemonic hierarchy of performative digital homomasculine identities.

Future research will be well-considered to expand the scope of the projects beyond the cultural limitations of this one. Further exploration of issues related specifically to the negotiation and performance of takatāpui identities in the context of Aotearoa/New Zealand is the obvious starting point. Examination of cultural convergences and effects at the intersection of queer and takatāpui identities may be another valid point of departure, along with consideration of bi- and trans-men.

Lastly, scholars interested in the lived experiences of gendered and sexual minorities in Aotearoa/New Zealand may choose to begin exploring other cultural communities, for instance fa'afafine people of Samoan heritage, Wellington's emerging Drag King scene, or the predominantly lesbian roller-derby communities of Wellington and Auckland. Such research may offer new understandings of the range and complexity of people's social interactions and identity constructions. They may also add to existing understandings that individual people are all different from one another, opening the way to society becoming more accepting of difference and, therefore, more inclusive of all people.

6 REFLEXIVE POST-SCRIPT

Although this project has focused on the participants and examining their narratives and performances of Self, it also embraces and inhabits the subjective position of qualitative research. Insofar as it is about the participants, it is the product of the person I am, the life I have lived and the perspectives and values I hold. In actuality, then, it has much to say about my own experiences as a Pākehā, queer man, arguably aligning it with autoethnography as a research method (Cilliers, 2017), despite that not being my intention in this project. Be that as it may, as with other things, the subjective positioning is strengthened by being defined and made visible. Accordingly, in what follows, I attempt to outline myself within this project in order to reveal more clearly how the knowledge within this report has been filtered, framed and articulated.

To be a gay man is to reckon with oneself in ways that are deep and complex. To construct and perform a gay male identity is to know intimately your difference, to hold deep inside the knowledge that you are marked unlike most other people. To be gay is to learn to accept, understand and one day, if you are lucky, to love the parts of your gay male Self that you have been told are wrong, dangerous, or filthy.

The narrative of my own life tells that living as a gay man also requires constant, exhausting vigilance at the interface of normative and non-normative, and the ceaseless reckoning of my positioning in relation to heteronormativity. This interface is the site of difference, personal vulnerability, and social conflict. As such, it requires attention and action. Put another way, reflexive consideration of our non-normativity is central to how we gay and queer men live out our storied Selves. Reflexivity informs who we are and what we do as non-normative gay men, and has, therefore, been imbued throughout this research project.

I think that many gay men will attest to having wrestled in personal ways with their sexuality. I certainly did, finding that it took time to accept that I am gay, unchangeably. It has also taken me time to better understand why it is that this is the way that I am, and to be more accepting of that than I was a younger man. That said, this time has not been spent alone. From the dormitories of my boarding school in the Zimbabwean bush when I began my own journey to a place of acceptance and love for my gay Self, I have been partnered by many kind and wise people. I am also fortunate to have spent a large part of my adult life in Aotearoa/New Zealand, amongst progressive people who value freedom and diversity.

Be that as it may, my homo Self continues to grow and change, emerging in mid-life as more queer than gay, and less interested in being the *gay* man that I feel I ought to be, and more engaged by being the man that I *am*. Although I was initially unaware of it, this project has been a key part of my process of thinking and learning about what that means and how I might do it. Through the stories of the men who participated in this project, I have come to know the story of myself better, and to accept my narrative for what it is. It is my hope, therefore, that in reading this report, which is the product of my own narrative of Self as much as it is the product of theirs, the participants will also come to understand their own stories better.

Discourses and stories about gay men abound, and it is also my hope that in reading their narratives as I have written them here, the participants will feel understood and honoured. The last few decades have seen public narratives emerging that honour, respect and promote gay and queer masculinities and the men who live them, and I feel fortunate and grateful to live in a place where such views are embraced and promoted. I also feel privileged to be trusted with the participants' narratives about deep and sensitive parts of who they are and how they came to be. However, from the time of the first interview, I have been concerned with honouring participants and their narratives, while also using their lives and experiences as data to analyse and explore. I have found myself completing endless reflexive turns and, occasionally, encountering dead ends. Internal deliberations have been ongoing for me, particularly regarding how I have handled the participants' stories and what they say about their lives. Did I take more care with the representation of some men than others according to my own responses to the stereotypes of gay and queer identities? Which narratives did I listen to more closely than others? How did my own positionings within the hierarchy of gay masculinities affect my interactions and research decisions? We were, after all, gay and queer men and the effects of hierarchy and hegemony were as powerful as they were pervasive in the ways that we all negotiated, performed, resisted and contested our gendered sexual Selves. I would be a fool to think that any of us were immune from the processes and effects of it. In such circumstances, reflexive awareness has been my best – and only available – approach to presenting a clear, subjective view of diverse and changing identities.

It is not uncommon for people to comment with surprise at the discovery on their part that I am gay. While such responses reveal much about pervasive heteronormative social discourses and expectations, they also reveal much about my straight-presenting queer masculine Self. My teenage years were spent in a boarding school in 1980s Zimbabwe, and the brutality and terror that I encountered there played a formative and foundational role in my negotiation and performance of Self. Bullying and corporal violence were infused throughout the social system according to rigid and traditional heteronormative prescriptions of masculinity as tough, unemotional and unyielding. At

every level of the social system, school boys' bodies were public bodies, subject to regulation, physical assault and discipline. The gender roles and scripts for performances of acceptable masculinity were narrow indeed, and the risks of performing non-normative gender roles were considerable. They were also made abundantly clear.

Take, for instance, the 14 year-old boy who was run to death by College Prefects in the late-afternoon heat of southern Zimbabwe during my years in high school. His offense? Refusal – or perhaps more accurately, inability – to submit to the brutal enforcement of heteronormative gender scripts of hypermasculinity. Word among those of us left behind was that he was asthmatic, and that the older boys refused his pleas to be allowed to stop and use his inhaler, believing that he was just being 'soft' and needed to be toughened up. He collapsed and died on a stony dirt road surrounded by thorn scrub.

Horrific and tragic as this incident was, more tragic by far was that there was no consequence to his death (murder?) that I was aware of. There was no inquest, not even an investigation – no discipline for those responsible. No pausing to consider how it came to be that a boy was dead because he was not man enough, not *right* man enough. Yet, in the silence and inaction, the message was clear to my young homosexual Self: stand out, and die.

And so, I concealed who I was behind who I needed to be. Although I do a lot less hiding these days, the socio-cultural context in which I grew into my own adolescent homomascularity lingers in myself, an ever-present cautionary tale that lies at the heart of the story that I tell myself as a queer man. There is no way to account exactly how the death of that boy affected the man that I am today. Similarly, there is no way to specify how the man that I am has affected this research. However, in narrating one story of my own gay Self, I hope to open a small window through which the outline of myself as a researcher may be glimpsed within the narratives of the participants.

Finally, the unusual context within which a significant amount of this research has occurred needs acknowledging. Following the second interview I conducted, Aotearoa/New Zealand shut down in response to the rapid development of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the bulk of data collection, analysis and write up was completed while the participants were locked down in their own homes, and I was contained in mine with my husband, our six year-old daughter and our young dog. For me, this has been a time of considerable uncertainty, fear, and change, underscored by the sustained pressure to complete this research. Apart from stressing and distressing me, such circumstances must have re-traumatised and triggered my own anxieties and perceived inadequacies related to the negotiation and performance of my own non-normative gender identity. Such

circumstances require acknowledging as significant influences on all of us involved in this research, illustrating yet again, that the identities we perform depend on the people that we are with. That is to say, the narratives of us all are the products of the times and places in which our social Selves encounter one another. As such, this research tells the stories of nine gay and queer participants and one homomasculine researcher in search of better understanding of who it is that we are, together.

7 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is no understatement to say that this project would not have been possible without the participants. My deepest thanks then to you all for the trust you placed in me, and for being prepared to hold your inner Selves open so other people may learn more about themselves and about how we can live better lives together.

My thanks and gratitude also to my wonderful supervisor, Dr Elena Maydell, for sharing your wisdom and knowledge. You have taught me so much. Thank you for making me believe that I could do what I have done here, and for your enthusiasm from the get go. Your kind, compassionate ways, and your patience as I found my way through the maze of qualitative research, have been invaluable and much appreciated.

For keeping me in tea and encouragement, and for being the man at my side almost every step of the way through my adult life, thank you, Mark. I am more grateful than these few words can say for your being there, for believing in me, and for making everything possible. To our daughter, Flo, and her mum, Harri, thank you for your patience and support. I love you all and know that I am the luckiest man alive.

For showing me the way to myself, and for loving me for the man I am, I hold deep and eternal gratitude also to my Mum and Dad, and my sister, Michelle. Thank you for your interest in whatever I have going on, and for all the proof-reading. I love you.

For urging me on and showing me the map of how to reach new places, my thanks too to Jo Woods.

Finally, my thanks must go to Alba for being at my feet every step of her doggy life, and for knowing when I need taking out walking in the hills to think.

8.1 Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Poster

GAY & QUEER men

research participants WANTED

This research aims to explore the diverse and complex ways that **gay and queer** men understand, communicate and respond to their own **masculinity** and that of others.

Participation will take the form of a one-hour, audio-recorded interview.

Participants will be given a \$20 koha as a gesture of **thanks and respect** for their time.

This research is being undertaken as part of a study towards Master of Communication at Massey University.

For more information, please get in touch:
Martin.Kaulback.1@uni.massey.ac.nz
 021 044 7573

THANKS !

Research participants needed
 Contact: 021 044 7573 or
 martin.kaulback.1@uni.massey.ac.nz

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8.2 Appendix B: Information Sheet for Participants

[Print on Massey University departmental letterhead]

[Logo, name and address of Department/School/Institute/Section]

The communication of masculinity amongst gay and queer men

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for participating in this research.

My name is Martin Kaulback. I am a gay man studying Master of Communication at Massey University.

About this research

This project aims to understand the interaction of sexuality and gender.

I am looking to include a diversity of 'types' of men in it. I am interested in interviewing gay or queer men aged eighteen years or older who are available for interviewing in Wellington. I am also interested in men who identify as gay or queer to some degree, though they do *not* have to be connected to a gay or queer scene or community.

If you agree to take part, you will be interviewed for approximately 30 to 60 minutes duration. This interview will be audio-recorded, and you will be given \$20 koha as a gesture of respect for your contribution, inconvenience, time or travel.

You will have the opportunity to ask questions or raise any concerns before the interview begins. You are also free to choose to not answer some questions, and to withdraw at any stage before 29 May, 2020. Should you choose to withdraw, you will still be offered the koha, and you will not be penalised in any way. In the event of you withdrawing, all information and data related to you will either be destroyed or returned to you at your request.

The interviews will be free of judgement or blame, where everyone's experiences and opinions will be respected and valued equally. However, there is a chance that you may become upset during the interview, given the personal nature of some of what may be discussed. Should this happen, I will offer you appropriate personal support. You will be given details of how to access free

counselling through the New Zealand Aids Foundation, and I will follow up with all participants by telephone one and four days after the interview.

How your information will be stored and used

This research is *strictly confidential*, meaning that no identifying information will be used in the final write up. This means that I will allocate pseudonyms and remove or change any identifying details. Only I will be aware of your identity.

Confidentiality will cover all aspects of your participation in this research, apart from situations of serious concern about you or others being in danger of harm. In such an event, I will act according to the Massey University Ethics Guideline, consulting first my supervisor and then the University's Ethics Committee.

All information and data related to this research will be stored securely in password-protected files or under lock and key. Interview recordings and all other research information will be destroyed once my dissertation has been accepted by Massey University.

Your rights as a participant

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question
- withdraw from the study before 29 May, 2020
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview

Human ethics in this project

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Prof Craig Johnson, Director, Research Ethics, telephone: 06 356 9099 ext. 85271; email: humanethics@massey.ac.nz

Project contacts

Researcher: Martin Kaulback

Role: Master of Communication student

Contact: Martin.Kaulback.I@uni.massey.ac.nz

Supervisor: Dr Elena Maydell

Role: Senior tutor, School of Journalism, Communication and Marketing

Contact: elena.maydell@massey.ac.nz

+64 (06) 356 9099 ext. 63550

8.3 Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

The communication of masculinity amongst gay and queer men

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

- I have read, or have had read to me, and I understand the Information Sheet for Participants. 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. I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time before 29 May, 2020.

Yes ☐ No ☐

- I agree to the interview being audio recorded

Yes ☐ No ☐

- I would like to receive a summary of findings at the end of this research

Yes ☐ No ☐

- I would like to receive a copy of the final research dissertation that is produced from this research

Yes ☐ No ☐

- I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet for Participants

Yes ☐ No ☐

Signature: _____

Date: _____

8.4 Appendix D: Interview Guide

Introduction

Remind participants about

- confidentiality
- stopping recording or interview at any time
- not answering questions

Check if happy to be recorded

Ask: Do you have any questions or queries before we get going?

Say: Thank you so much for your time, and for agreeing to take part.

Due to self-isolation measures introduced in response to Covid19, we are not able to meet face to face. This means that I am not able to get you to sign a form consenting to taking part in this research. Are you okay to give oral consent instead? I will start the recorder, and then read through the consent form. There are five statements in it. At the end of each, please either say yes or no. Please note that I will not be saying your name, as this interview is anonymous and confidential. You okay with all of that?

Great. I will now start recording

Start recording

Say: This is interview Number _____ held on _____. I'm going to read through the consent form related to your voluntary participation in this research. Please indicate at the end of each statement whether or not you consent to participate.

Okay. Thank you so much for that. Shall we make a start?

I'm going to ask you questions about your understanding of gay masculinity.

- 1. What was it about this research that attracted you?**
- 2. How would you describe yourself?**
- 3. If you were to introduce me to some other gay/queer men, who might I meet?**
- 4. What can you tell me about the gay/queer part of yourself and your life?**

5. **When you enter a space such as a bar or outdoor event where there are other gay men, can you tell me what you feel or think?**
 6. **How do other gay or queer men respond or relate to you?**
 7. **What do you understand masculinity to mean for gay or queer men?**
 8. **How do you feel about your own masculinity as a gay/queer man?**
 9. **What is your opinion of how other gay/queer men show their masculinity to each other?**
 10. **Can you describe how gay and queer men behave towards each other?**
 11. **What do you feel about the role that masculinity and sexuality have played in your life?**
 12. **What is your opinion of the relationship between masculinity and sex for gay/queer men?**
 13. **If you had the power to change how gay and queer men behave and communicate about being male, what would you change?**
 14. **Do you have any final questions or comments?**
 15. **Is there anything I have missed or not asked about?**
- Would you like to revisit any part of what we have spoken about today?**

Stop recording

Debrief

- Thank participants for their time.
- Check in with participants emotionally
- Ask how they felt about the experience: interview style, questions
- Distribute NZAF counselling information.
- Remind participants that I will be making follow up calls to them one and four days after the interview.
- Remind participants that they are free to contact me or Elena at any point to ask questions if they wish.
- Remind participants about confidentiality.
- Give koha

8.5 Appendix E: Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Studies (COREQ): 32-item Checklist (Adapted from Tong et al., 2007, p. 352)

A checklist of items that should be included in reports of qualitative research. You must report the page number in your manuscript where you consider each of the items listed in this checklist. If you have not included this information, either revise your manuscript accordingly before submitting, or note N/A.

No. Item	Guide questions/description	Reported on Page #
Domain 1: Research team and reflexivity		
<i>Personal Characteristics</i>		
1. Interviewer/facilitator	Which author/s conducted the interview or focus group?	i
2. Credentials	What were the researcher's credentials? E.g. PhD, MD	i
3. Occupation	What was their occupation at the time of the study?	i
4. Gender	Was the researcher male or female?	2
5. Experience and training	What experience or training did the researcher have?	26
<i>Relationship with participants</i>		
6. Relationship established	Was a relationship established prior to study commencement?	21
7. Participant knowledge of the interviewer	What did the participants know about the researcher? e.g. personal goals, reasons for doing the research	80
8. Interviewer characteristics	What characteristics were reported about the interviewer/facilitator? e.g. Bias, assumptions, reasons and interests in the research topic	25, 26, 77, 78
Domain 2: study design		
<i>Theoretical framework</i>		
9. Methodological orientation and Theory	What methodological orientation was stated to underpin the study? e.g. grounded theory, discourse analysis, ethnography, phenomenology, content analysis	18
<i>Participant selection</i>		
10. Sampling	How were participants selected? e.g. purposive, convenience, consecutive, snowball	21

11. Method of approach	How were participants approached? e.g. face-to-face, telephone, mail, email	21
12. Sample size	How many participants were in the study?	22
13. Non-participation	How many people refused to participate or dropped out? Reasons?	22
<i>Setting</i>		
14. Setting of data collection	Where was the data collected? e.g. home, clinic, workplace	23
15. Presence of non-participants	Was anyone else present besides the participants and researchers?	23
16. Description of sample	What are the important characteristics of the sample? e.g. demographic data, date	21
<i>Data collection</i>		
17. Interview guide	Were questions, prompts, guides provided by the authors? Was it pilot tested?	23, 83
18. Repeat interviews	Were repeat interviews carried out? If yes, how many?	NA
19. Audio/visual recording	Did the research use audio or visual recording to collect the data?	24
20. Field notes	Were field notes made during and/or after the interview or focus group?	23, 26
21. Duration	What was the duration of the interviews or focus group?	23
22. Data saturation	Was data saturation discussed?	27
23. Transcripts returned	Were transcripts returned to participants for comment and/or correction?	NA – not enough time
Domain 3: analysis and findings		
<i>Data analysis</i>		
24. Number of data coders	How many data coders coded the data?	24
25. Description of the coding tree	Did authors provide a description of the coding tree?	24
26. Derivation of themes	Were themes identified in advance or derived from the data?	25
27. Software	What software, if applicable, was used to manage the data?	24
28. Participant checking	Did participants provide feedback on the findings?	NA – not enough time
<i>Reporting</i>		
29. Quotations presented	Were participant quotations presented to illustrate the themes/findings? Was each quotation identified?	Yes

	e.g. participant number	
30. Data and findings consistent	Was there consistency between the data presented and the findings?	Yes
31. Clarity of major themes	Were major themes clearly presented in the findings?	73 - 76
32. Clarity of minor themes	Is there a description of diverse cases or discussion of minor themes?	Yes

8.6 Appendix F: The Handkerchief Code

(Kacela, 2019)

COLOR CODES (Handkerchiefs)

Left	Color	Right
Greek Active	Dark Blue	Greek Passive
FF'er	Red	FFA Receiver
Has 8" +	Mustard	Wants 8" +
69'er	Light Blue	No 69
Anything	Orange	Nothing
Golden Showerer	Yellow	Receives G.S.
Has Uniform	Olive Drab	Wants Uniform
Hustler	Green	Buyer
Scat Top	Brown	Scat Bottom
Master	Gray	Slave
J/O	White	Gives J/O
Whipper	Black	Whippee

DOING AMERICA WITH BOB DAMRON is a new monthly column featuring updates on various cities of special interest through out the United States and locales covered in the ADDRESS BOOK. Watch for the column in your local gay newspaper or magazine.

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