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**“It's not necessarily about first or second. It's just we have different roles”: Gen Z's  
attitudes towards gender roles in heterosexual dating.**

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## Abstract

Strict adherence to traditional gender roles was once the norm in heterosexual dating. As society has progressed, younger generations have resisted and redefined how they want to act, based on their own preferences, rather than social pressures. To explore this shift, this research sought to understand the attitudes and experiences of Gen Z towards gender roles in heterosexual dating. The framework for the research was social constructionism, using Foucauldian discourse analysis to analyse the impact of power both discursively and to make sense of wider gendered issues of equality and sexism. I interviewed seven men and seven women between the ages of 18-26 years old, all living in Auckland, who identified as heterosexual. The findings highlighted two main discourses for men - The perfect woman, The 'place' for gender roles, and two for women - The toxic male is out and Are we equals? Men articulated the *perfect woman* as one who fulfilled their bid for connection, by speaking up having compatible interests, being 'attractive' and regulating their emotions. Men endorsed dominant discourses surrounding female sexuality which promotes modesty and purity in line with a romantic desire for romantic reciprocity yet maintaining sexual morality in public perceptions of 'their' woman. The *'place' for gender roles* illustrated men's self-perceptions of responsibility, alongside their responses to power issues in chivalrous behaviours. Women passionately spoke out against all tropes of the 'toxic male', asserting their preference for a man who instead prioritized traits of intelligence, courage, leadership, and capability. Throughout *Are we equals?* women outlined the fundamental transactional nature within dating, expending to their control of chivalrous behaviour which is in line with their predetermined limits. Their opinions surrounding gender roles were conflicting, as they attempted to construct a future of 'genderless' roles in dating, yet they frequently referred to the faults, both experienced and imagined, of how essential they are to successful dating. Overall, participants expressed a desire to redefine dating norms, but their language

consistently controlled, stereotyped and blamed the ‘other’ rather than taking accountability for their own subjectivity to gendered inequality. Both existing and newer constructions of gendered traits are emerging for Gen Z, showing that traditionalism still persists within the heterosexual dating landscape in Aotearoa.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Gender roles refer to the societal and cultural expectations placed on individuals relevant to their gender (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). These expectations often reflect traditional constructions of masculinity and femininity, thereby prescribing the normative attitudes, behaviours, and responsibilities people *should* follow (March et al., 2016; Vink et al., 2023). Consequently, these roles can restrict individual's opportunities based on their gender, thus perpetuating a gender inequality (Godsil et al., 2016; Zhu & Chang, 2019). While gender roles are one of numerous social roles, there is a common misperception that they are fixed, natural, and biologically driven concepts (Ayisi & Krisztina, 2022) and therefore more valid in society. This unconscious bias facilitates the creation and maintenance of other social phenomena, gender stereotypes (Godsil et al., 2016; Rice & Barth, 2017).

Defining what gender roles *are* often varies depending on the situation, where the masculine or feminine role is required, (e.g., son, mother, partner, teacher or boss). As a result, gender roles are intrinsically linked with other social roles in society. While gender roles affect all people in society, they do not affect all people equally. Racial and cultural minorities within Western countries, are found to be particularly affected by gender roles and stereotypes, compared to European ethnic groups (Kane, 2000; Wang, 2019). However, the more pertinent issue is the disparity felt between the sexes, with women overwhelmingly being more negatively impacted by them (Godsil et al., 2016; Swan & Wyer, 1997). Researching gender roles therefore takes an understanding of larger sex-based disparities that exist, which limit female agency and contribute to power inadequacies leading to gender inequality (Stewart et al., 2021).

There has been significant research done on gender roles in other domains, including the workplace (e.g., Beehr et al., 2003; March et al., 2016; Rice & Barth, 2017) and marriage/family settings (e.g., Chen et al., 2024; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1992). The focus of this research, however, will look at gender roles within heterosexual dating exclusively from a Generation Z (Gen Z) population. In heterosexual dating, gender role 'norms' traditionally expected men to be assertive, emotionally restrained, financially responsible and sexually aggressive (Lamont, 2015; Paynter & Leaper, 2016; Rubin et al., 2019; Siegel & Meunier, 2019). Meanwhile, women are expected to be sexually modest, emotionally sensitive, docile, and receptive to men's advances (Beere et al., 1984; Henley et al., 1998). These gender-based double standards have given men more power and privilege within the interpersonal dynamic, especially in non-western countries (Foschi, 2000; Mensah, 2022). Simultaneously, trends have shown an increase in egalitarian relationships among younger generations (Brooks & Bolzendahl, 2004; Buss et al., 2001). This shift away from these traditional gender roles may be attributed to many factors, such as women prioritizing their career over the desire to stay at home raising children (Cameron & Curry, 2020). Therefore, while research has explored gender roles within long-term relationships and marriage/family settings, there is still room to better understand these roles during the earlier dating phase.

Gender roles in heterosexual dating are the focus of this research for three main reasons. First, there is scarce research in this domain globally and within Aotearoa. Second, compared to other nations, Aotearoa carries a rich and diverse cultural makeup within the Gen Z population and because of this, it heightens the level of cultural complexity when defining and embodying gender roles. Third, discussions addressing gender and power imbalances have been trending globally in recent years, with the social media movements of #MeToo & #TimesUp (Kosar et al., 2023; Women, 2019) and controversial online public

figures such as Andrew Tate. While these discussions centre around more extreme and violent gendered issues, this research will instead look at the everyday experiences and perspectives of young New Zealand men and women, in order to encapsulate how micro-level interactions within dating, contribute to larger discussions surrounding gender roles.

This introduction will first discuss the social, cognitive, evolutionary and cultural theories towards gender roles. Next, I discuss the evolution of dating globally and a short history within New Zealand, to better understand the social construction of modern dating practices. Then, I discuss Gen Z including what makes them unique as both the ‘digital natives’ and their relationship to tradition. To conclude, I outline my research aims and objectives, to answer my overall research question.

## **Theoretical Underpinnings of Gender Roles**

There is a plethora of theories that debate the origin of gender roles, which can be broadly categorized into social, cognitive, biological, and evolutionary theories, and cultural theories.

### **Social Theories**

*Social learning theory* (SLT) was proposed by Albert Bandura (1977) and was built upon the previous work of the renowned behavioural theorist Skinner in the early 20th century. SLT suggests that children learn gender stereotypes by imitating the attitudes, emotions, and behaviours of those around them, progressing through four stages: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Demirbaş & Yağbasan, 2006; Miller, 2016). This process encompasses classical and operant conditioning, with the addition of two developments by Bandura (1977): the inclusion of mediating processes between stimuli and responses, and that behaviours are learned through observational learning in the environment.

Observational learning, i.e. modelling, is when individuals learn by watching others perform gender-specific behaviours and experiencing the social reactions that follow, including rewards or punishments (Miller, 2016). However, unlike Skinner, Bandura (1977) believed people are active information processors, utilizing higher cognitive processes that are able to mediate the learning process, to see whether a new response is required. Therefore, individuals do not automatically imitate modelled behaviour, rather they evaluate its consequences and decide how to act.

This theory suggests that the variations between males and females are a result of the unequal treatment that boys and girls receive from individuals in their lives, which is frequently connected to gendered stereotypes (Miller, 2016). For example, under Western norms of masculinity, if a boy wears a dress, teachers, parents, or peers may react negatively by teasing or criticizing him, leading to negative reinforcement over time. Consequentially, through socialization the boy would learn that his behaviour is not rewarded and cease to act in a similar behaviour again. This theory was later revised in the 1980s to Social Cognitive Theory, where Bandura placed more emphasis on the cognitive processes that intervene in learning.

A similar theory that utilizes socialization as a form of learning is *Social Role Theory* (SRT), developed by Eagly (1987). SRT suggests that gender roles, stereotypes, and physical differences are influenced by socialization and impact how men and women behave. These gendered expectations have been reinforced over time and limit acceptable behaviour (Diekmann & Eagly, 2000). Traditionally, social roles have been most visible in the workplace, where men are privileged in agentic, wage-earning roles, while women are expected to be communal and stay at home (Dunlap et al., 2019). According to SRT this is why men and women seek different attributes in a long-term partner (Chappetta & Barth, 2016; Eastwick et

al., 2006). As more women participate in the paid workforce there are changes in societal attitudes and stereotypes. Within the United States, there was a 26% increase of females in paid labour from 1950 to 1998, while males had decreased 11% (Diekman & Eagly, 2000). Similar increases are seen in New Zealand, with women currently making up 48% of the paid workforce, compared to 42% in 1986 when records started (Stats NZ, 2019). Moreover, evidence from Koenig and Eagly (2014) supports SRT, showing that as social roles change, so do stereotypes. These changes should be present in interpersonal encounters, including during the dating process, as individuals select and evaluate their potential partners (Cameron & Curry, 2020).

### **Cognitive Theories**

Another perspective on gender roles comes from *Cognitive-Developmental theory* (CDT), founded by Kohlberg (1966). Kohlberg proposed that children's gender development is due to a three-stage process that begins during toddler years and early childhood (Leaper, 2011; Martin et al., 2002). In stage 1 (*Gender Labeling ~ two years old*), children demonstrate their understanding of gender as a concept. The child can identify the gender of others around them, (e.g., their mother is female), in combination with the introduction of gendered pronouns (she/her) (Leaper, 2011). This continues until the child can recognize their own identity around age three. In stage 2 (*Gender Stability ~ four years*), children understand that gender is a fixed construct, though, during this time children equate a person's gender with gender-stereotyped attributes, for example, women wear dresses (Leaper, 2011; Martin et al., 2002). In the final stage (*Gender Constancy ~ five-seven years*), children realise that gendered cosmetic norms do not alter a person's sex, i.e. seeing their brother wearing a dress, they understand he is still a boy. These stages strengthen a child's motivation to adhere to these gender-typed norms, establishing the basis for adult cognitions (Ruble et al., 2007).

Building on CDT (Kohlberg, 1966), Martin and Halverson (1981) created ***Gender schema theory*** (GST). Originally, schema was associated with psychological writing and memory, but it was integrated into gender role development in the early 1980's (Frawley, 2008). Gender schemata hold two core functions; knowledge about the behaviours, traits, roles etc. which are unique to each gender and the extent to which this knowledge is used to process information and behaviour (Frawley, 2008; Shackelford & Zeigler-Hill, 2020). As children develop, they naturally absorb information from their surroundings and create mental associations that help them understand their own identity and the world around them (Shackelford & Zeigler-Hill, 2020). This process creates cognitive structures i.e., schema, that helps organize information needed to guide self-concept and further encoding of new information (Perle & Waguespack, 2011; Shackelford & Zeigler-Hill, 2020). Viewing the world through this framework relies heavily on a child's comprehension of their cultural views on gender. These views determine what is traditionally considered masculine or feminine and establish gender-specific distinctions and responsibilities. As a result, children tend to interpret new information through a gendered lens (Shackelford & Zeigler-Hill, 2020).

### **Evolutionary and Biological Perspectives**

Unlike previous theories which take a psychological understanding to gender roles, a distinct approach comes from biological and evolutionary perspectives. The biological perspective argues that biological attributes such as genes, hormones and brain function/structure are responsible for the difference in behaviours, attitudes etc. between the sexes (Ayisi & Krisztina, 2022; Martin & Dinella, 2001). The presence of either XX or XY as the 23rd pair of chromosomes determines the development of either male or female sexual

organs and later the production of sex (dominant) hormones (Martin & Dinella, 2001). For men, high levels of testosterone are responsible for traditional male features including facial hair, muscle mass, strength, sperm production etc. (Snyder et al., 2000), while for women high estrogen and progesterone are involved in the menstrual cycle, fat distribution, breast development etc. (Turner et al., 1994). However, beyond the role in physical anatomy, they also contribute to secondary characteristics that alter personality, e.g., testosterone is linked to aggression while estrogen is linked to sensitivity and mood disruptions (Pfaff, 1980). Other differences are evident in studies on cerebral brain function which show women are less lateralized, using both hemispheres simultaneously, which has been hypothesized as one contributor to differences in abilities and behaviours between the sexes (Martin & Dinella, 2001). Thus, from a biological perspective gender roles are intrinsically tied to these multiple biological mechanisms that shape males and females from birth to adulthood, irrelevant of the social environment.

Comparatively, the evolutionary perspective is drawn from Darwinian principles on evolution and natural selection when explaining gender differences (Bolhuis et al., 2011; Janicke et al., 2016; Martin & Dinella, 2001). According to evolutionary psychology, the focus is on individuals with reproductive fitness, whereby people who are more fertile and live long enough to reproduce and raise children, their genetics are more present in future generations (Martin & Dinella, 2001). Gender differences arise because in order to achieve reproductive fitness, men and women undertake different reproductive roles and parental investment (Trivers, 1972). Due to the mandated time responsibility of pregnancy, nursing the child and the restriction to only get pregnant once every nine months, women are theorized to have a greater parental investment than men (Trivers, 1972). Thus, women are more selective in choosing their mates, prioritizing a man with greater access to resources, while men prioritize a woman with qualities of greater care to raise his child, increasing the chances of

survival and passing on his genetics (Trivers, 1972). Later theorists like Buss (1994), narrowed in on these differences between how men and women endorse different gender traits in the opposite sex through *Sexual selection theory (SST)*. In SST two forms of selection, first in ‘intrasexual’ selection occurs when members of one sex outcompete others of their kind based on having more desirable traits (Buss, 1995; Puts, 2010; Zhu & Chang, 2019). The second is ‘intersexual’ selection members of one sex develop preferences for advantageous traits in the opposite gender (Buss, 1995). Thus, gender roles become a collectively agreed upon set of traits that are desired by each of the sexes and get reinforced generationally in order for better survival.

### **Cultural Theories**

Western notions of gender dominate theories and perspectives in psychology (Muthukrishna et al., 2020; Stewart, 2012). While it is not possible to unpack the stereotypes and gender roles of every culture, it is important to briefly point to how gender and culture are intertwined and then discuss Māori worldviews.

Cultural constructions of gender vary globally which adds to the complexity of defining and limiting what gender roles *are* for men and women. Patriarchal organized societies position men as being in positions of power over women, contributing to hegemonic masculine ideals (Connell, 1987). For example, patriarchal norms in Bedouin culture in the Middle East have meant women are largely reliant on their husbands (Alfayumi-Zeadna et al., 2019). In comparison, traditionally matrilineal indigenous communities like in the Navajo people in the USA and the Tsimshian Nation in Canada, see women in positions of power due to their role in vital decision-making and leadership based on their connection to Mother Nature (Baskin, 2020; Cesario, 2001). Traditional notions of gender are centred around

equality and respect for these communities, as women held specific responsibilities that saw them as wisdom-keepers, leaders and healers within their community (Baskin, 2020).

From a Te Ao Māori perspective, the construction of gender roles is distinct from Pākehā, particularly in pre-colonial Aotearoa (Marino, 2020; Pihama, 2020). Both men and women held integral parts of a collective union of whānau and a shared identity (Mikaere, 1994). Moreover, being a matrilineal culture Māori concepts of mana wāhine (Pihama, 2020; Whānau, 2018), conceptualize women's prestige, authority, status and how power was seen as equal between the sexes (Pihama, 2020). Before colonization, Māori women were not considered 'possessions' during marriage proposals as in the West, further signified by women retaining their surnames after marriage. Other unique signifiers of wāhine Māori were their use of similar garments to men, while practices such as pregnancy out of wedlock were not considered a social disgrace as seen by Pākehā. Similarly, "a man's house was not his castle" (Milroy, 1994, p. 2), meaning when the wider community held suspicions of domestic abuse, wider whānau were able to intervene to prevent and punish men directly. Another example Mikaere (1994) points to gender equality in Tikanga Māori is by Te Reo, with personal pronouns and possessive personal pronouns using gender-neutral language, a distinct difference to a Western understanding of gender identity. However, the introduction of British colonial rule in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century stripped women of all social power through the introduction of new social norms, including by forcing Māori women away from the collective whānau to the nuclear family in line with a Pākehā model (Whānau, 2018). Thus, women became isolated and dependent on husbands financially while also limiting their freedom to work as caregivers for their children (Mikaere, 1994). This timeline of Māori history, plus other global indigenous theories, exemplifies how gender is a social construct that is contextualised by the history, culture, and the specific point in time within which it is being understood.

## History of Gender Roles in Aotearoa

The history of gender roles in Aotearoa is distinct and innovative, considering it is a relatively 'young' country compared to the rest of the world. New Zealand was a pioneer in gender equality, granting women the right to vote in 1893, making it the global leader (Macdonald, 2017). As the 20th century progressed, global events such as World War I and II highlighted the importance of gendered roles within society (Macdonald, 2017). Men were sent to war while women stayed at home to take care of domestic duties and raise families. However, after the Second World War, the scarcity of potential male partners caused a major cultural shift in social practices such as dating. Societal discourse saw a shift in mindset, that dating could be about 'having fun', rather than focusing on marriage (Bailey, 1989). People began prioritizing individual preferences, seeking partners with desirable qualities rather than just using marriage for its transactional value (Markarian, 2019).

Towards the second half of the 20th century, the women's liberation movement emerged which challenged traditional views of women's roles in society (Cook, 2011) and brought more freedom in dating. More women joined the workforce and gained greater control over their reproductive health with the introduction of the contraceptive pill. This feminist movement advocated for radical change, leading to political discussions about domestic issues such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare as well as taboo topics such as sexual behaviour, health, abortion, and domestic abuse (Cook, 2011). These discussions elicited a range of responses, with some passionately supporting feminist change and others strongly opposing liberal ideas.

History also exemplifies how *power* has been negotiated between men and women, particularly within heterosexual relationships. Up until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, a married couple was legally considered one unit in society, with the husband having complete control over all

assets, money and property (Else, 2018). This left women with no rights over their husband's property, making it difficult for them to initiate divorce even in cases of physical abuse. Similarly, it was not until 1985 in Aotearoa that the outlawing of marital rape came into effect (Tombs, 2021).

In contrast, dating in the late 20th century saw women's groups challenging social sexual conventions that punished women more harshly than men for having sex outside of marriage (Allen, 2018). There were significant changes in community and state support offered to single mothers out of wedlock. Many of the earlier rules surrounding sexuality had evolved by the turn of the millennium, with the decriminalization of sex work in 2003 being a significant step forward, giving women more sexual autonomy (Armstrong & Abel, 2020)

However, current perspectives on gender roles and specifically their impact on dating are slightly more ambiguous, largely due to a lack of national and group-specific research. Recent attitudinal research from Gender Equal NZ (2017) found that 79% of New Zealanders agreed that gender equality is a human right. However, this survey still found some people held strong support for traditional gendered roles. On the other hand, their findings saw a growing tendency for egalitarian ideals between the sexes. For example, 83% of those surveyed agreed that contraception is the responsibility of both men and women (Gender Equal NZ, 2017). Overall, significant changes have occurred in the realm of relationships and marriage, but there is still work to be done to achieve true gender equality.

There is extremely limited research done within Aotearoa that has looked at gender roles within a dating context exclusively. Previous literature in Aotearoa has undertaken a different lens, for example Pacific youth perspectives on relationships (Savaii, 2018) or the effects of gender roles and sexism on parenting (Waddell, 2023). One noteworthy piece of literature was a Master's thesis produced by Trotter-Simons (2018), which looked at gender

norms on relationships, (including non-romantic and LGBTQ) using a Gen Z sample. Of the findings in this study, one finding relative to the ‘bro culture’ was significant, as it negotiated hegemonic masculine performances of young men within romantic relationships. These findings will be unpacked in the next chapter.

### **The unexplored Generation (Z) in neoliberal times – a rationale for research**

Gen Z, born between 1995 and 2015 is the largest living generation, comprising 32% of the world population (Glocalities, 2023). Shaped by noteworthy global events such as 9/11, the 2008 financial crisis, and the Covid pandemic of 2020, Gen Z members have encountered continuous anxiety and change (Tulgan, 2023). Individual differences aside, there are commonalities that are considered to apply to this generation. Their worldviews differ from their predecessors due to their high level of education and diverse ethics (Glocalities, 2023; Parker & Igielnik, 2020). They are known for being individualistic, doing things unconventionally, and advocating for change (Harari et al., 2023; Schultz, 2021). However, arguably the biggest marker of Gen Z is being the “digital natives” (Milkman, 2017, p. 1), possessing minimal experience of life without technology and smartphones. They think, learn, and communicate in a wireless internet environment that is readily accessible and limitless (Parker & Igielnik, 2020; Tulgan, 2023).

To better understand Gen Z’s attitudes, it is essential to also consider the political and economic state of the world. The persistent growth of neoliberalism in the west, especially in Aotearoa (McMaster, 2013), has had profound effects on Gen Z and their construction of gender roles (Esslinger & Chang, 2022). The movement away from cultural traditionalism, but instead ‘liberal individualism’, has meant a collective shift in the process of identity formation and societies view on ethical-moral values (Adams et al., 2019). According to Esslinger and Chang (2022, p. np) “as the division of societal responsibilities between the

sexes become increasingly blurred, gender roles in neoliberal societies are less clear-cut". At the core of this public discourse is often the role of women, however research indicates Gen Z males also struggle with societal expectations placed on them (Esslinger & Chang, 2022).

The socio-political climate has created space for women to be strong and assertive, while men are able to show their emotional side and break traditional stereotypes of weak men. In addition, Gen Z considers traditional gender roles and binary labels to be outdated concepts (Clifton, 2021; Lamont, 2020), and they are more willing to explore their own sexuality (Klein, 2022). This increase in sexual fluidity has knock-on effects for wider societal norms as Gen Z has a greater openness with their approach to dating, which changes a traditional mindset from finding the 'one', to finding the one that fits right now (Klein, 2022).

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to narrow down on Gen Z's attitudes and experiences towards gender roles in modern-day heterosexual dating, exclusively within an Aotearoa, New Zealand context. Although there are different interpretations of what constitutes dating, this study defines dating as the process of getting to know someone with the intention of pursuing a committed relationship. There is extremely limited qualitative research internationally or nationally which has exclusively investigated Gen Z participants on this topic. As previously mentioned, gender roles are a fluid and rapidly evolving cultural construct, so it is imperative to understand *how* New Zealand's current society, both with its rich ethnic diversity and technological influence, has affected the psychological evaluation process that occurs in dating. This research will remedy this gap in knowledge, by allowing men and women to share their personal preferences, dating narratives and perspectives on wider issues of gender equality, often a topic that is too controversial to be discussed openly, in a secure setting.

## **Research aims**

This research aims to explore Gen Z's attitudes towards gender roles in modern-day heterosexual dating. My research is situated within a social constructionist perspective, with a focus on power in discourse, enabling me to analyse how men and women make sense of gender roles individually and collectively. I focus on the explicit and implicit attitudes of the participants in this study and how these constructions relate to the wider issues of gender inequality and sexism. Hence, the research aims for my project were:

1. Explore heterosexual dating preferences and attitudes towards traditional gender role traits.
2. Explore how Gen Z discuss and experience gender roles in heterosexual dating.
3. Understand how Gen Z make sense of power in dating, including equality, sexism, and chivalry.

## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

This chapter pulls on existing research in the field contextualizing the need for this research. Due to the specificity and intersectionality of age, gender, and sexuality on gender roles in dating (exclusively), it has meant there is limited qualitative research to go off. Therefore, it is important to outline the research that has been done in adjacent areas. The areas that will be covered in this literature review will be sex-mate preferences, online dating, dating double standards, first dates and then move to sexism in dating. Lastly, gender and gender roles are socially constructed so it is also important to explore masculinity, femininity, and research that considers these in dating.

### **Sex: A basis for gender roles**

Firstly, it is important to distinguish the language surrounding sex versus gender in dating. Sex typically refers to the biological attributes to distinguish females and males, specifically reproductive organs and their functions (Doyal, 2003; Pagliassotti, 1993; Reale et al., 2023), thus heterosexual dating is between a male and female. On the other hand, gender refers to the “culturally determined, socially constructed and historically variant description of those acts that compose how an individual does ‘being male’ or ‘being female’” (Pagliassotti, 1993, p. 474). Consequently, this ‘knowledge’ surrounding gender (Foucault, 1978) informs individuals association to masculinity, femininity and their subjective sexual identity (Reale et al., 2023). Heterosexual dating therefore involves negotiating these constructions for the individual and in relation to their partner. Despite the terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ being indifferently used in discourse (Reale et al., 2023), the dichotomy between the two is not rigid as sex is intrinsically linked with gender identity and thus gender roles. Moreover, a majority of historical literature which explores gender roles in heterosexual

relationships has done so under the pretence of ‘sex differences’ (e.g., Buss, 1989), due to the recency of gender as a distinct concept to sex (Torgrimson & Minson, 2005). Thus, for this research I am using gender roles to encompass the preferences different genders have in their dating partners.<sup>1</sup>

### **Sex-mate preferences in dating**

Before understanding how traditional gender role preferences differ between men and women, growing evidence points to desirable traits which are consistent for both genders. For example, Valentine et al. (2019) found ‘kind and understanding’ as the highest rated trait in a potential marriage or long-term partner. In addition, ‘warmth-trustworthiness’ and ‘good parenting’ were more preferential compared to good genes/provisioning or status for men and women (Valentine et al., 2019). Similarly, Eastwick and Finkel (2008) found that cluster traits that were not sex-typed, such as being responsive, fun/exciting, to be the most desirable traits for both men and women. These findings conceptualise how ideal partner preferences in dating are not solely bound by traditional gender role norms, as individuals rightfully possess and desire unique traits in partners. Therefore, for this purpose of this research, it is imperative to understand how individuals desire and make sense of ‘traditional’ sex-based gender role traits.

Sex-based differences in dating preferences have largely been studied from a quantitative and evolutionary ‘mating’ perspective (Buss, 1989, 1994, 1995; Buss & Schmitt, 2019; Buss et al., 2001). Within this framework, theories such as parental investment (Trivers, 1972) theorize *why* women value resource-based qualities, such as income, education, status, in male partners, while men value reproductive qualities in women such as

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<sup>1</sup> Because the focus of the research is on heterosexual dating, I use the more biological labels of men and women but acknowledge that gender as a social construct includes more than these two categories.

physical attractiveness, virginity, age, caregiving (Buss & Schmitt, 2019). However, empirical evidence on the appearance of these differences has been highly mixed. One cross-cultural study from Buss (1989) showed only some traits to be rated significantly different between the sexes, across their 32-country study. For example, women rated ‘good financial prospect’ and ‘ambition-industriousness’ significantly higher, while men rated ‘physical attractiveness’ and ‘younger age’ as significantly higher, which lends itself to the evolutionary-hypothesis. However, the trait ‘chastity’ showed the greatest polarity cross-culturally, with New Zealand being one of the few countries that yielded no significant difference in the attitudes between the sexes (Buss, 1989). While this research is pivotal for its cross-cultural value, these attitudes are limited to the time of the study and their evaluation of only five domains relative to evolutionary traits (ambition/industriousness, earning potential, physical attractiveness, chastity, age). Nevertheless, the robustness of measure relative to evolutionary-based gender roles form the basis of the table of traits in this study. Moreover, these traits can be strengthened to be more culturally relevant to current times, including rephrasing and extending the list domains.

Buss et al. (2001) remedied earlier limitations of single studies, by outlining how trends in 18 gendered preferences had changed generationally during their 57-year study. Supporting Buss (1989), Buss et al. (2001) found chastity was the most rapidly declining value. For men it ranked 10<sup>th</sup> in 1939 dropping to 16<sup>th</sup> in 1996. Similarly for women it dropped from 10<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>, indicating the unanimous cultural shift on the value placed on virginity. However, unlike Buss (1989), the value placed on physical attractiveness, financial resources and domestic strengths increased significantly for *both* sexes during this time (Buss et al., 2001). They concluded their findings illuminate a growing convergence of the genders to a more egalitarian-based relationship dynamic, which favours men with domestic strengths and women with financial resources. Given these findings it would be expected that the

reported sex differences would show greater convergence now, compared to two decades ago, however follow-up data on sex mate differences is again mixed.

Inspired by the earlier work from Buss et al. (2001), Furnham (2009) asked individuals to describe their ideal partner, finding only some traits converging between the sexes. For example, ‘caring/loving’ was the most desired trait for women (64%), with men ranking it only slightly lower at (54%), whereas the second most desired trait for men was ‘Intelligent/capability’. Both of these findings, go against traditional gender expectations, from both a social role (Eagly, 1987) and evolutionary perspective (Trivers, 1972), which see men as agentic intellectuals and women embodying the caregiver position. However as these differences are slight, it would be bold to assume that gendered traits are not becoming more egalitarian. Moreover, methodological issues in Buss et al. (2001) and Buss (1989), including their choice of instrument, Mate Selection Survey (MSS) (Hill, 1945), may explain the difference in more recent results. For example, nearly 40% of the characteristics in the MSS are double barreled responses such as “emotional stability and maturity”, which Buss et al. (2001) notes may represent two distinct characteristics. In turn it may be better to group these traits either under one term for the underlying construct or separate them completely to be more conceptually clear for the participant (Boxer et al., 2013). The second issue is that some of the items are outdated or ambiguous. For example, characteristics such as “favourable social status or rating” demonstrate outdated social norms and relative terminology to the class system in the early 20th century (Boxer et al., 2013). Therefore, to build upon and strengthen these past works, when constructing the table of gendered traits (see Appendix E), I took into consideration both phrasing of traits, plus relevance to current applicability of gender roles with a Gen Z sample.

One significant methodological strength from Furnham (2009), is that participants were asked to self-report their desirable traits, without the use of a fixed measure. This serves two key purposes; first we are able to see how people organically curate their preferences and second infer how these preferences correlates to traditional gender norms. Comparatively, Bech-Sørensen and Pollet (2016), investigated willingness to marry relative to 12 traits (e.g., race, previous marriage/children). Supporting previous literature, women preferred financial resources while men preferred physical attractiveness (Buss, 1989; Furnham, 2009). Their findings are limiting their measure centered around sex differences in *marriage* preferences, with only 4 traits related to traditional gender roles (age, appearance, financial prospects, and intelligence). Evidence does show that men and women are more selective when they are searching for long-term partners compared with short term (Sprecher et al., 1994), therefore potentially altering gendered perceptions to these traits in dating. This is exemplified in the contradictory findings from ‘Speed-dating’ studies, which found physical attractiveness, financial prospects and personality characteristics showed *no* significant difference between the sexes, with both sexes rating these traits high for romantic interest (Eastwick and Finkel, 2008; Luo and Zhang, 2009). In addition, Luo and Zhang (2009) even found physical attractiveness as the most important quality for *both* sexes, opposing the prior evolutionary perspective that only men prioritize external beauty.

The second limitation for Bech-Sørensen and Pollet (2016) was that youngest age of participant was 18 years in 2015, in other words very limited Gen Z would be included in this study. Therefore, while the trends are congruent with evolutionary sex-based differences, their robustness of measure and sample quality limits the applicability to a broader understanding of gender roles by Gen Z.

It is important to look at how previous research has defined gendered preferences, as these constructions have a significant impact on participant responses. As mentioned previously, outdated terminology concerning gender roles (Bech-Sørensen & Pollet, 2016; Buss, 1989; Buss et al., 2001), impact the relevance to modern day and the validity of the results. Moreover, the power and significance in language is open to confusion e.g., what is ‘trustworthiness?’ as this could include co-operation, security etc. This list of traits that have been used across literature is extensive and has been summarised in Table 1.

*Table 1: List of Masculine and Feminine traits used across literature.*

<b>Traits for Men</b>	<b>Traits for Women</b>
Ambitious	Affectionate
Analytical	Intuitive
Competitive	Kind
Leadership	Cheerful
Confident	Warm
Athletic	Gentle
Strong	Doesn't swear
Independent	Dependent
Agentic	Communal
Decision making	Emotional
Rough	Devotional
Perseverant	Helpful
Stoic	Considerate
Dominant	Submissive
Never cries	Cries easily
Little need for security	High need for security
Active	Understanding
	Soft-spoken

*Note: Random selection of a traits, based on various psychometric tools used in previous research (e.g., Chappetta & Barth, 2016, 2022) including: The Egalitarian Sex Roles Inventory (ESRI); Bem Sex Inventory (BEM) and Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ)*

It is evident that a wide variety of traits used in research are often defined the same way for men and women. Taking this into consideration, when constructing my table of gender traits (see Appendix E), I did so by intentionally choosing items that were distinct and non-repetitive, to ensure this list was an effective summary of traditional gender roles, to facilitate participant discussion. Moreover, most previous studies (e.g., Buss et al., 2001) have asked men and women to discuss the same scale, containing one list of all gendered traits to see sex differences between preference ratings. For this research, due to the time restriction of interviews and aim to gather attitudes related to the opposite gender, two distinct lists have been created for men and women, with each participant receiving only the opposite gender list.

Notably, the most persistent gap in literature, is that all previous research has investigated heterosexual dating preferences from a quantitative methodology. While quantitative methods are useful for establishing cause-and-effect relationships and to compare the degree of correlation between specific sex-based gender preferences (Punch, 2008; Verhoef & Casebeer, 1997), it lacks the ability to disclose *why* men and women hold these preferences. Moreover, qualitative research facilitates rich discursive data than can describe processes, such as communication and decision making (Verhoef & Casebeer, 1997), therefore lending itself to this research. For that reason, this research will incorporate existing evidence on sex-based preferences, and expand on it through qualitative interviews, which ask for participants attitudes and lived experiences on gender roles in heterosexual dating, to understand how Gen Z within Aotearoa make sense of their place today.

### **Online Dating**

The previous section covered research on sex-mate preferences through self-report or survey measures to see if significant differences exist between the sexes. While this is one

method to uncover attitudes towards traditional gender norms, another is by exploring how individuals perceive potential dating partners, specifically through online dating. Online dating relies on individuals' ability to vet out potential mates, based on implicit and explicit attitudes (Paul & Ahmed, 2021). This often involves taking personal descriptions and profile pictures at face value and evaluating them using cognitive heuristics, to determine compatibility. It is important to note, while this study does not focus on online dating, I discuss key studies that negotiated the relationship between traditional gender norms and heterosexual dating, as these aspects are relevant to this study.

Chappetta and Barth (2016) and their replication study Chappetta and Barth (2022), aimed to uncover whether people prefer traditionally gender-role conforming or non-conforming partners, simulated through various fake online dating profiles. Based on SRT (Eagly, 1987), they hypothesized that people would prefer traditional gender-role profiles, (e.g., sports for men and cooking for women). Unexpectedly, their overall findings showed the opposite - both men and women preferred non-traditional gender role profiles in both studies (Chappetta & Barth, 2016, 2022). In addition, women were more concerned about physically attractive profiles, over their level of gender-role congruence (Chappetta & Barth, 2016), however both sexes valued physical attraction more in their follow up study (Chappetta & Barth, 2022). Supporting evidence from another online dating study, found physical attraction trumped all other attributes for women including warmth and income (Woloszyn et al., 2020). In fact, physical attractiveness was even a “deal-breaking criterion” (Woloszyn et al., 2020, p. 6), as other personality traits were immediately disregarded if a profile picture was rated low in physical attractiveness.

However, an one explanation on *why* physical attractiveness played a significant role in ratings is due to the construction of their profile tool, with the photo being a third of the

page size and tended to be the first thing participants saw (Chappetta & Barth, 2016, 2022; Woloszyn et al., 2020). Furthermore, the constructions of ‘physically attractive’ profiles were based on an online generator which only showed headshot images, limiting our knowledge of participant attitudes to other physical gender norms traits, such as body muscularity, body hair, or clothing choice. Therefore, in this study I aim to expand on physical appearance, by including multiple external physical characteristics specifically related to traditional and current stereotyped norms of men and women.

There were other limitations in the studies conducted by Chappetta and Barth (2016, 2022). These studies constructed fake profiles which they argued had greater external validity than a list of traits and self-report measures (McKenna et al., 2002; Rosen et al., 2008). However, this validity was limited to the context of online dating and did not consider real life and in-person dating which gives a more comprehensive picture of an individual. Moreover, each profile was generated from a predetermined list of gender-normed jobs, personality traits, hobbies, and dispositions resulting in 3136 possible profile combinations. This approach may have confounded the findings, as participants were not responding to specific gendered traits; rather responses were interpreted from general measures (e.g., Reysen’s Likeability Scale and Romantic Attraction Scale). Both of these studies only ask participants to rate their level of attraction on a 7-point scale to the whole package of each profile. Furthermore, the two measures that were related to gender roles: The Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) and the Egalitarian Sex Roles Inventory (ESRI), were only used to see how self-reported levels of traits influenced preference for gender role non-/conforming profiles. Echoing previous critiques, by solely using quantitative measures meant the findings only revealed the interactions between physical attraction against gender role congruence, limiting participants responses to gender roles. Nevertheless, these results still hold strong relevance to this research for a few reasons. First, the samples in both studies

carried a majority Gen Z sample, fitting the parameters of this study. Second, the construction of the online dating profiles, were done using characteristics of traditional gender roles while also extending to include occupations inspired by such characteristics (e.g., engineer, nurse) to give more variety in traits.

### **Dating double standards**

Double Standards are present when certain values surrounding appropriate behaviour are different for men and for women (Foschi, 2000). Despite an increase in egalitarian attitudes towards dating in recent decades (Brooks & Bolzendahl, 2004), traditional gender roles still persist in heterosexual dating (Robnett & Leaper, 2012). Over a 35-year span study Eaton and Rose (2011) found dating among young adults remained highly gender-typed in both cultural scripts (e.g., expectations, beliefs) and interpersonal scripts (e.g., interpersonal emotions, behaviours). Although a monumental piece of research, it is limited by only researching trends in the USA and not including Gen Z. This may not be an issue as Karmakar and Chandola (2023) found gender role beliefs between Gen X and Gen Z were not significantly different. This suggests that gendered attitudes may be stable across multiple generations despite age and cultural/societal changes.

Within heterosexual dating double standards, the discourse surrounding sexual liberty is often the most critical representation of the power differences afforded between the sexes (Crawford & Popp, 2003; Jackson & Cram, 2003; Lefkowitz et al., 2014). The 'male sexual drive discourse' is one of the most discussed discourses central to heterosexual relationships (Gilbert & Walker, 1999; Hollway, 1989), which legitimises men's desire for sex because of biological tales of the animal kingdom which state that men have an innate imperative to procreate, and thus the female complementary role needs to be highly selective in sexual choice. Within the context of this discourse, it allows men to feel entitled to have sex with

women but also contributes to the practice of sexual conquest and domination becomes eroticized (Hare-Mustin, 1994).

It is not only men who take up this discourse as seen in a study by Allen (2003) which looked at how New Zealand teens expressed their sexual subjectivities in relation to dominant heterosexual discourses. A significant majority of girls (aged 17-19) upheld this sexual passivity role being “victim to male sexual gratification” (Allen, 2003, p. 218). Women showed little resistance to this dominant discourse, overall reinstating sex for them felt the practice of sex “was [being] ‘acted upon’, rather than ‘acting’” (Allen, 2003, p. 218). Similarly, men upheld this entitled position with one boy stating his desire to have sex was instant, “I didn’t need time. I’m a guy” (Allen, 2003, p. 225) and that they appeared to be “always ready for sex” (Allen, 2003, p. 226), enforcing this entrenched ‘hard masculinity’ within Aotearoa’s cultural landscape.

An additional study in New Zealand with young women also looked at how participants negotiated the sexual double standards they faced (Jackson & Cram, 2003). As a repercussion for resisting this sexually repressed discourse, women spoke of being labelled ‘sluts’ while men were praised as being ‘studs’. However, unlike Allen (2003), these women positioned themselves as both agentic and resisted a construction of themselves (and women in general) as passive victims (Jackson & Cram, 2003). These facilitated new discourses including romance within sexual desire, therefore maintaining sexual morality as sex was constructed as ‘making love’, steering away from the position of being a ‘slut’. These studies illuminate two different perspectives emerging in the millennial discourse on traditional sexual standards norms within Aotearoa.

Moving beyond the sexual double standard, it is imperative to see what other gender norms perpetuate a gendered power imbalance within literature globally. Paynter and Leaper

(2016) evaluated traditional heterosexual dating and courtship scripts relevant to the desirable behaviour for men and women across an undergraduate university student sample in California. They used the Heterosexual Dating Double-Standards Scale, where participants rated desirability of five traits relevant to gendered behaviours. Despite a large portion of the sample being politically liberal, overall men and women endorsed more conservative dating double standards scripts for heterosexual relationships. In addition, both sexes positively evaluated behaviours that reflected traditional scripts (e.g., men paying for the date) compared to nontraditional scripts (e.g., women initiating the date). Since this study was quantitative, it limited our understanding of if and how people positioned themselves within political or other discourses when justifying their preferences. But it is important to note that traditional gender roles were being used by Gen Z populations.

Lamont (2013) remedied this quantitative gap and undertook interviews with a female-only sample asking participants to describe their past and present romantic relationships, with a focus on all courtship and dating behaviours. Preferences for traditional dating behaviours were most preferred, specifically men paying for the date, men confirming the exclusive relationship and men proposing marriage (Lamont, 2013). Women's narratives often described essentialist beliefs that men *need* to be assertive, positioning them within a biological discourse enjoying the "thrill of the chase" (Lamont, 2013, p. 197). However, when women were asked why they refused to engage in non-traditional behaviours, such as asking the man out, they stated it "was due to [their] personality" (Lamont, 2013, p. 197). For example, Anna, a 26-year-old Lawyer, gave her reason for not embodying the traditionally masculine role of the being the 'pursuer', is "more because I'm shy than out of traditional gender roles" (Lamont, 2013, p. 197). While Lamont (2013) does not comment on this, I speculate women intentionally resisted an egalitarian discourse in dating as this removes personal responsibility for unfairly endorsing one side of traditional gender roles and

therefore gender inequality. This assumption is further supported as despite women supporting traditional courtship practices which involve men, nearly all participants described their ideal relationship as one where ‘female’ tasks, including housework, and child responsibilities, are split equally. This indicates that women seem comfortable endorsing traditional gender roles of males, as these work in favour to positively affect women, while simultaneously rejecting roles which position themselves with responsibilities, which are not self-serving. This also points to an important argument that dating may or may not be considered the same for men or women (discourses are quite different) and as pointed to earlier by Sprecher et al. (1994), looking for casual relationships may be different than searching for a long-term partner.

### **First Dates**

Men and women often reflect traditional gender role behaviours and attitudes during first dates (Cameron & Curry, 2020; Morr Serewicz & Gale, 2008). This is because during heterosexual dating individuals are largely influenced by gendered schemas, particularly when strangers have limited knowledge of each other (Cameron & Curry, 2020). Two studies conducted by Cameron and Curry (2020) and Morr Serewicz and Gale (2008) examined first date scripts in relation to gender roles, utilising college students in hypothetical first date scenarios. Congruent with the dominant male sexual drive discourse (Gilbert & Walker, 1999; Hollway, 1989), sexual behaviours (that extended beyond kissing) dominated men’s scripts (Morr Serewicz & Gale, 2008). Similarly, women who ‘asked out’ men contained more sexual behaviours in their scripts compared to women who did not initiate dates, assumably because they are comfortable breaking traditionally ‘masculine’ norms.

In comparison, Cameron and Curry (2020) recruited two samples, one of older adults and one of younger adults to compare gendered differences between age groups. The authors

then compared their findings against an earlier similar study from Laner and Ventrone (2000), to see whether gender-stereotyped attitudes had changed over time. They discovered individuals with less sexist beliefs (whether hostile or benevolent) and more positive beliefs surrounding women, were more likely to endorse egalitarian first date scripts in the young adult sample (Cameron & Curry, 2020). Moreover, gender itself was not a predictor for egalitarian scores on first date scripts. However, when these scores were compared to the young adult sample from Laner and Ventrone (2000), a majority of the gendered behaviours were still prevalent in first date scripts (71% for men and 86% for women). These findings corroborate Eaton and Rose (2011) earlier longitudinal findings, that traditional gender stereotypes continue to dictate first date scripts in modern generations, albeit slightly more equitable in Cameron and Curry (2020). A limitation for both Cameron and Curry (2020) and Morr Serewicz and Gale (2008) is their lack of open-ended questions and hypothetical scenarios, thus limiting our knowledge on how gendered attitudes impact real life dating behaviours. To remedy these gaps, I have chosen to not curate artificial dating experiences but instead ask participants on their idealized scenarios and first date experiences and then broaden the scope to include general dating experiences. In doing this, the findings will encompass gender role attitudes towards both immediate first impressions and the extended dating process, as people begin to familiarize themselves with a partner.

Another longstanding discourse of '*who will pay?*', has been evident across first dates literature. The social and economic advancement of women has meant that compared to previous generations, women are more equal in financial footing with men and thus their ability to pay for the first date. Yet, despite the push for more egalitarian gender roles (Lamont, 2013; Samardzic et al., 2023), evidence shows men are still unequally expected to pay. One study exclusively looking at paying the first date by Wu et al. (2021) found that most men paid the entire bill on the first date and were the main financial contributor on

subsequent dates. When asked who should bear the financial responsibility, both men and women agreed it was the man's job (Wu et al., 2021). However, women expected significantly less payment from men on both first and subsequent dates. This suggests that while most women allowed their male partners to pay for the dates, overall, they preferred a more shared approach to finances – although not necessarily a 50:50 split. Wu et al. (2021) worked exclusively with a recent millennial sample so this research will explore if generational similarities occur with a Gen Z sample.

There is limited research specifically analysing opinions on how finances should be dealt with within a dating context compared to marriage and family studies. Compared to other traditional gender role traits, money and financial authority arguably carries significant power implications as it provides both security and autonomy in all sectors of traditional and modern civilization. Research findings are conflicting as although both men and women agree that men should bare this role, there is contention to the parameters men can embody this position without women feeling uncomfortable. As there is little previous research to draw on, this role of being financially independent/dependent will be expanded in this research and included in both males and females list of traits to see how individuals make sense of money as a tool for power contributing to gender inequality.

### **Sexism or Tradition?**

Underlying gender roles in heterosexual relationships are deeper considerations relative to sexism and power imbalances within gender inequality. Sexism, like other forms of prejudice, stems from biases between different groups of people and has produced different socially appropriate behaviours for men and for women (Becker & Sibley, 2015; Bosmajian, 1972). Despite the social injustices sexism elicits, it is one of few social phenomena that present in both subtle and more explicit ways. Glick and Fiske (1996)

theorised through their Ambivalent Sexism framework, that most sexist attitudes are ambivalent through the collaboration of both hostile and benevolent sexist beliefs. Where hostile sexism is aggressive and reflects an overt antipathy of women (Hammond & Overall, 2015), benevolent sexism presents women as a weak and vulnerable group in need of protection and care (Eastwick et al., 2006; Glick & Fiske, 1996). Seemingly being positive, benevolent sexism ultimately reinforces a belief that women are the inferior sex and thus limits gender equality by restricting women's opportunities in social, political, and economic settings. Furthermore, this belief system contextualises how current and traditional gender roles of women such as caregivers and mothers, have manifested (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

Benevolent sexist attitudes often go unrecognised as a form of gender-based prejudice, due to their positive outward appearance. When comparing sexes, Glick and Fiske (2011) found women are far less likely to endorse benevolent or hostile attitudes compared to men. However, contradictory evidence from Connelly and Heesacker (2012) found both sexes frequently support benevolent sexism as they align with the conventional expectations in relationships. However, unlike Glick and Fiske (2011), research by Connelly and Heesacker (2012) looked at benevolent sexism through life satisfaction in multiple domains, not exclusively romantic relationships which limits its applicability to this study. In remedy of this, Gul and Kupfer (2018) investigated romantic attraction to benevolent sexism and found women preferred men with benevolent sexist attitudes over those without. One explanation for this is men who endorse benevolent attitudes are seen as partners willing to invest in them, supporting evolutionary theories of mate preferences (Buss, 1989, 1994, 1995). Overall, Gul and Kupfer (2018) proposed the benevolence as a mate preference hypothesis, as women rated men with benevolent attitudes more attractive despite simultaneously rating these men as undermining and patronizing. Interestingly, this finding was consistent with both low and high feminist-rated women, which indicates that despite

women being aware of the negative effects benevolent attitudes, it does not deter general attraction, even for women who do not endorse traditional gendered roles. While these findings indicate a preference for benevolent sexism through quantitative measures, I intend to extend on them to uncover how men and women make sense of benevolent sexism as an ideology which appoints different norms to men and women in dating.

The majority of research on benevolent sexism between genders focuses on its long-term effects and impact on relationship satisfaction (Casad et al., 2015; Hammond & Overall, 2015; Waddell et al., 2019). While existing research has focused on women's attraction to benevolent attitudes, less has been explored regarding men's attraction to it (Cross & Overall, 2018). In addition, understanding the role benevolent sexism plays in modern-day dating which this study addresses; determining if men or women who endorse traditional norms base their reasoning on sexist beliefs. In addition, the discussion and language surrounding modern-day chivalry further complicates the identification of benevolent attitudes in heterosexual relationships (Herzog & Oreg, 2008). Chivalrous behaviours have emerged over time, where once they were a fixed expectation of respect, have now become somewhat of a feminist debate for their practicality and perception in modern dating (Gouws et al., 2018; Wright, 2018). Traditional ideals expected men to performing acts such as opening doors or walking on the outer side of the footpath, however these behaviours have historical ties to sexist ideology. With this in mind, both on an individual and research level, it is hard to distinguish whether men who enact chivalrous behaviours are fulfilling this role out of kindness, benevolent sexism or traditionally rigid norms. Therefore, this study explores how men and women make sense of modern-day chivalry, as it relates to traditional gender roles in dating. Furthermore, this study explores how participants make sense of chivalry vs benevolent sexism, in order to establish if benevolent sexist attitudes contributes to gender inequality within heterosexual dating. Although this study does not exclusively focus on

benevolent sexism, it draws on related themes and ideologies regarding traditional gender expectations and power imbalances within

### **Two halves of a gendered whole: Masculinity vs femininity**

There is a balance between the masculine and feminine energy that individuals bring to heterosexual dating, with traits being traditionally classified as feminine or masculine according to a person's sex (Bem, 1974; Steiner-Pappalardo & Gurung, 2002). Modern interpretations of gender understand that masculinity and femininity are an interlocking set of practices, beliefs and norms that individuals possess (Tolman et al., 2016). Despite the various arbitrary constructions of what masculinity and femininity is, research into social justice and gendered equality has typically focused on the issues surrounding a 'gendered hegemony' (Connell, 1987). Functioning in collaboration, both ideologies create and reproduce a gender hierarchy that has constituted characteristics of femininity as subordinate and undesirable compared to masculinity (Connell, 1987, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Understanding how historical constructions of masculinity and femininity collectively create gender hegemony is imperative to challenge power injustices that permeate to all social, culture and political landscapes beyond heterosexual dating (Schippers, 2007). In the following sections I will outline various interpretations of masculinity and femininity, representing both longstanding hegemonic and more nuanced conceptualizations in order to make sense of traditional gender roles.

#### ***Hegemonic Masculinity***

According to Connell (1987, p. 185), hegemonic masculinity refers to the "maintenance of practices that institutionalise men's dominance over women". Connell (1995, p. 77) further contextualizes within this "configuration of gender practice", that legitimises the patriarchy as an accepted societal system with men in a dominant position and

women as subordinate. Hegemonic masculinity creates an idealized image of what a man should be, which encompasses desirable norms, attitudes, and representations (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The idea of hegemonic masculinity has often been labelled in various ways, from traditional masculinity (Scharrer & Blackburn, 2018) to modern-day interpretations of ‘toxic’ masculinity (Dossier, 2022). Common features of the hegemonic male include dominance, avoidance of femininity, high regard for sex, control, and negativity towards sexual minorities (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Hunter et al., 2017; Levant & Richmond, 2007). However, these attributes that consider someone a *real* man are culturally constructed and therefore vary dependent on the geographic point and time (Hunter et al., 2017). Thus, acting in line with hegemonic masculinity is a gendered performance, and not a fixed biologically rooted ideology that men are hardwired due to their sexual characteristics.

A core tenant of hegemonic masculinity is that it identifies and contextualizes its dominant ideology through gender hierarchies over women, but also against other forms of marginalized masculinities (Connell, 1987; Scharrer & Blackburn, 2018). Connell (1987) states, even if men do not abide by the cultural ideal of being a *real* man in line with hegemonic masculinity, evidence suggests that men still acknowledge the existence of it and are willing to sustain it as they reap the benefits from the subordination of women and marginalized males. This understanding of hegemonic masculinity, particularly within context of masculine hierarchies, is poignant when understanding how men act in heterosexual dating. Tolman et al. (2016) found masculinity ideation for boys was a stronger predictor than femininity for inequity in heterosexual relationships. Narratives from tenth grade students, found both girls and boys described their heterosexual relationships in line with masculine and feminine ideals. This was most commonly done through describing the sexual double standard which praised boys for being sexually promiscuous while girls were

denigrated if they desired for anything other than a monogamous relationship (Tolman et al., 2016). Interestingly however, both girls and boys naturalized boys who showed interest in being the sexual pursuer's, stating their "irrepressible desire" (Tolman et al., 2016, p. 14). These findings exemplify Connell's (1987) framework on gender hegemony as even girls partake and reinforce this social practice of patriarchal dominance through language 'naturalizing' male sexual privileges.

While data is frequent to point out double standards which privilege men (Jackson, 1983; Lefkowitz et al., 2014; Mouzon et al., 2020; Sanchez et al., 2012), less is discussed on hegemonic ideals which negatively affect men. Antifemininity, another core tenant of the traditional masculinity, describes an internalized desire to avoid being perceived as feminine, by not engaging in typically feminine actions, thoughts, or behaviours (Smith et al., 2015). Often men are socialized to replace emotions with a 'bravado' exterior, avoiding any aspect of a caring and vulnerable disposition (O'Neil et al., 1986; Smith et al., 2015). One qualitative study found young men feel insecure talking about their feelings with women, in fear of the implications when doing so (Forrest, 2010). This idea was described as a "gender gap" (Forrest, 2010, p. 6), that privileges women but not men in relationships and is frequently overlooked in the discussion of gender equality. This gendered trait, often referred to as stoicism, is an expectation afforded to men, under frequent colloquial personifications as 'men don't cry'.

Trotter-Simons (2018) observed stoicism within her focus groups with young kiwi high school students. The students constructed the 'bro culture' with a level of 'macho-masculinity' as a gendered performance of men with their peers and girlfriends. One girl described a normative expectation for men to repress their emotionality as "men can't have strong feelings and if they do, then they should hide them and not burden the girlfriend with

them” (Trotter-Simons, 2018, p. 66). Students’ narratives constructed the hardened ‘kiwi bloke’, as a discourse embedded deep into the cultural landscape within Aotearoa, which was frequently resisted by women but not by men. These findings may be due to their use of focus groups, which have shown participants are less likely to give their honest opinions, especially when they go against a majority or in controversial settings (Sim & Waterfield, 2019; Smithson, 2000). It is vital seeing how women construct stoicism as it directly affects them in heterosexual dating. Moreover, a majority of existing literature on stoicism only explores men’s attitudes to stoicism, albeit in different sectors such as mental health (e.g., Branney & White, 2008; Li & Gal, 2022; Vogel et al., 2011) or in platonic relationships (e.g., Scoats & Robinson, 2020). With this in mind, stoicism has been included in the table of traits to see how women make sense of it and if they desire this antifeminine hegemonic masculine ideal. Additionally, this will expand on previous literature which has often investigated the effects of male participants through self-report measures.

A different perspective on hegemonic masculinity is explored by Dosser (2022) as he breaks down the use of nuanced understanding and discourse surrounding toxic masculinity. Toxic masculinity reinforces hegemonic masculinity by stating that ‘toxic’ male behaviours are separate from ‘healthy’ male behaviours (Dosser, 2022). This implies that toxic traits are something that can be fixed to fit the healthy ideal. Moreover, by externalizing toxic masculinity, the possibility is negated for men to carry both the healthy and toxic traits and their ability to contest it within society. This idea is exemplified in Lamont (2015) as college-educated men constructed their masculinity through narratives of “egalitarian partners” (Lamont, 2015, p. 277). Their responses expressed solidarity with feminists, being happy with “women taking the lead in relationships (Lamont, 2015, p. 289) while simultaneously positioning themselves as progressive by desiring ‘feminine’ traits such as emotional intimacy. While these findings indicate egalitarian scripts are increasing, Lamont (2015)

notes a contradiction in men's narratives as they accept gender inequality as a societal issue, but their individual-level discourses did not acknowledge how they were privileged by these norms and thus reinforcing gendered inequalities. In line with previous research (Bridges, 2013), men were able to “‘talk the talk’ but fail to ‘walk that walk’” (Lamont, 2015, p. 289), in an attempt to safeguard themselves against being labeled sexist by endorsing sexist ideals.

In a similar study by Eisen and Yamashita (2019), men weaponized a seemingly ‘positive’ feminine discourse, by constructing their own hybrid masculinity as superior to other forms of ‘traditional masculinity’. Men distanced themselves to the construct of the traditional man, most frequently by constructing an ‘immature’ man who held animalistic ideations in aggressive personality and athletic body ideals. Simultaneously, they constructed themselves as ‘mature’ men, by valuing feminine characteristics such as vulnerability and emotionality. While Eisen and Yamashita (2019) was limited by not focusing on masculinity in romantic relationships, similar to Lamont (2015), men reinforced a gendered hegemony and hierarchy despite their attempts to appear progressive through feminine traits. It is evident men are strategic with their language, whether consciously or unconsciously, to be positively received.

### ***Soft boys: A Gen Z construction of masculinity***

In the previous section I touched on the longstanding dominant discourse of what it takes to be a ‘real’ man from a hegemonic or ‘toxic’ masculinity perspective. It has been said that masculinity has been in a crisis for quite some time (Kimmel, 1987), as what it means to be a real man is an everchanging response to the changing definitions of femininity traits (Muldoon, 2023). However, within the age of Gen Z we are witnessing a cultural shift in how masculinity is both constructed by men and desired by women. The emergence of the ‘softboy’ is indicative of Gen Z perspectives to masculinity, as one of total rejection of

traditional toxic masculine traits (Muldoon, 2023). Most obviously showcased in media, the rise in A-list Hollywood young actors such as Harry Styles and Timothée Chalamet, indicate that these men represent the ‘soft boy’ as one who is skinny, young, fashionable, gentle and emotionally intelligent (Muldoon, 2023). While some welcome this new idolized image of a man in Hollywood, others may speculate that it is in direct response to the cultural shift in which stereotypic and traditional forms of masculinity are being criticized and labelled harmful. Despite Muldoon (2023) making note of the recency of the ‘softboy’ being particularly absent in academia, other research looking into the rise in popularity of feminine heterosexual men has been happening much longer (Hill, 2006). While it is becoming increasingly easier for men to be seen as feminine, it is evident heterosexual men who present non-traditionally, risk facing rejection and being perceived negatively by women who hold more traditional sexual scripts (Hill, 2006).

By recruiting both men and women in this research, I can build on these previous works by enabling a gendered comparison in discursive strategies, with an emphasize on discussing egalitarian relationships, to see if similar patterns are observed. Combining this with an evident ‘bro culture’ in Aotearoa (Trotter-Simons, 2018), this research is necessary to see if women are gravitating to this version of ‘soft’ masculinity or the more traditional and ‘hegemonic’ gender-based preferences to facilitate a richer discussion.

### ***Femininities and feminism***

The notion of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987, 1995) has been largely accepted within the sociology of gender, with a significant amount of empirical research (Schippers, 2007) and public debate centring around the ‘toxic’ male. However, as proposed by recent scholars (McCann, 2022; Schippers, 2007), attention is needed towards the gendered

counterpart, that is all forms of femininity. This section discusses the idea of hegemonic femininities and unpacks these in relation to gendered equality.

Beginning with Connell (1987), he first constructed '*emphasized femininities*', as an ideology which marginalises women who embody 'male sanctioned' undesirable traits, in order to uphold hegemonic masculinities (for example, prostitutes, lesbians, madwomen, spinsters, manual workers etc.) Later work from Schippers (2007) rejected Connell's construction that femininities were unable to be hegemonic and redefined the construct as "the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity" (Schippers, 2007, p. 94). Markers of hegemonic femininity include physical vulnerability, inability for violence and compliance (Schippers, 2007). We see how the symbolic and hierarchical mirroring between hegemonic femininities against masculinities uphold a gendered power structure, within "reoccurring pattern of social practice" (Schippers, 2007, p. 91) and the power sits largely with men in this instance.

In recent work McCann (2022) extends upon earlier works of emphasized/hegemonic femininities to include various femininities which serve to uphold a gendered hegemony. First, 'toxic femininity' can be thought as a pseudo-feminist position, where women can be recognised as equally toxic to males through processes such as weaponizing fragility, commonly seen in women feigning victimhood as a source of power over men (McCann, 2022). Often when individuals take up this 'pseudo-feminist' position, they are masquerading under the 'egalitarian' approach to gendered issues, in an effort to see what is wrong with femininity. Other forms of femininity such as 'normative femininity', reinforce idealised feminine norms, often including practices around the female body, for example body hair removal (Braun et al., 2013; Fahs, 2012). All these femininities, whether

inconspicuous or not, present as a key ideological and practical strategy for the maintenance of traditional gendered norms from a seemingly 'positive' perspective. Understanding if and how men, but more importantly women, prescribe to these various femininities will highlight how various gendered traits and dating norms, are being enforced beyond the stereotypical 'masculine' oppression.

### ***Feminism***

*Feminism* is a social movement focused on power and seeks to challenge these 'toxic femininities' that enforce patriarchal dominance (Downing Hansen, 2002; Henley et al., 1998). Within the sociology of gender, the interrelation of feminist ideology in heterosexual dating is crucial, as these relationships "may reflect and perpetuate, on an individual and dyadic level, societal gender inequity and traditional role expectations" (Backus & Mahalik, 2011, p. 318). Encouraging recent research from Samardzic et al. (2023) found women were contradicting dominant discourses linked to femininity (goodness, niceness, and silence) seen in previous research (Jack, 1993). While analysing discourses surrounding what constructs the 'ideal' girlfriend, women spoke of the tensions between 'silencing versus communicating' positions women could take. In order for girls to be perceived with an innate "coolness" (Samardzic et al., 2023, p. 134), they spoke to traditional conceptions of women needing to 'shut up' as a form of self-sacrifice embedded in traditional femininity discourses (Abbott et al., 2021). The position of the "bad bitch" (Samardzic et al., 2023, p. 138) was a position that some of the women took in order to resist a hegemonic control, but instead present as a woman who was confident, independent and 'bad ass'. This subject position illuminates a growing (re)presentation of women against a traditional gender norm, echoing the findings in the previous female-based study from Lamont (2013).

Feminism has evolved in response to the changing socio-political climates, with recent developments in ‘neoliberal feminism’ being significant to how women make sense of gendered equality (Dabrowski, 2020). This form of feminism takes an individualistic approach, focusing on women empowerment and ‘choice’, yet simultaneously rejecting cultural and socioeconomic barricades which shape a woman’s life (Dabrowski, 2020). This ideology navigates tropes of the strong, independent women, who can and *should* do it all, focusing on themselves and not *needing* a man. While this research does not configure around hegemonic femininities or feminism directly, research has shown how these social practices are markers for romantic preferences and egalitarian relationships. One female-only study by Backus and Mahalik (2011) found feminist identity was a significant predictor for partner preference. Specifically, women tolerating patriarchal culture, denying sexism and endorsing traditional gender roles all reported their ideal man as one who conforms to traditional masculine norms such as emotional control, dominance etc. Whereas the opposite effect was found for feminist-identified women who rejected these as preferences. However, their use of Conformity to Masculinity Norms Inventory (Mahalik et al., 2003) may have limited their findings. This is because masculine statements were phrased in extremes or using negative language, for example assessing the trait of ‘winning’, it asked “winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing” (Mahalik et al., 2003, p. 17). This could cause bias in the results as by rating statements, instead of just the construct, participants could be primed with a response. Secondly, the measure used only described hegemonic masculinities, despite their aim to explore attitudes towards masculine gender role norms generally and thus reinforces only negative depictions of masculinity (Dosser, 2022).

This study will use single constructs or simple statements with neutral language surrounding the table of traits to facilitate conversation that is not propositioned with feminist or masculine hegemonic ideologies. In addition, this study investigates attitudes towards

egalitarian relationships, which particularly aligns with feminist ideology and thus it will be interesting if men and women resort to this discourse in justification of responses. This study will also interview *both* men and women to see if men or women (un)equally support this reconceptualization of the ideal 'feminine'.

### **Literature review summary**

Based on trends in sex-mate preferences, outdated concepts of a strict gender binary are eroding, with men and women's preferences on the 'ideal' dating partner converging. However, contradictory findings scattered across literature, both within Aotearoa and abroad see a negotiation in gendered traits, privileging some as in 'need' of maintenance, while others are condemned as oppressive. Combining this with the continual cultural (re)imagination of various masculinities, femininities and benevolent sexism, it adds a layer of complexity to understanding how people make sense of dominant and resistance discourses surrounding gender roles. Acknowledging this will allow me to explore dating preferences, and the power dynamics present in social practices such as chivalry, to understand Gen Z's viewpoint to issues of egalitarian relationships and equality.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of how I conducted my research. Firstly, I will explain my ontological and epistemological positions and then introduce discourse analysis and explain why I selected this method for data analysis. After that, I will outline the ethical considerations that were taken into account, including my positionality and reflexive process. I then outline my recruitment process and how I curated my table of gender traits. Lastly, I will systematically outline each stage in the data collection process, starting with the semi-structured interviews, transcription, and final data analysis before proceeding to the write-up.

The purpose of this study was to understand the attitudes and experiences of Gen Z regarding gender roles in heterosexual dating. This was explored by analysing both their gendered preferences in line with traditional norms, as well as their general perspectives on larger power issues relative to benevolent sexism, egalitarian relationships and equality.

#### **Social constructionism**

Social constructionism (SC) is the epistemology for this research, which asserts there are multiple versions of knowledge within the world that are legitimate (Burr, 2015; White, 2004). It is concerned with how humans create and reproduce knowledge through various social processes (May & Mumby, 2004). Unlike other epistemologies, SC does not have one fixed school of thought, nor does it have any fixed rules that a researcher must employ (Burr, 2003; Lock & Strong, 2010). Rather there are key assumptions that a social constructionist would endorse (Gergen, 1985; May & Mumby, 2004). The first and arguably overall tenet of social constructionism is that individuals take “a critical stance towards taken-for-granted

ways of understanding the world (including ourselves)” (Burr, 1995, p. 3) Originating out of the post-positivism era, SC rejected essentialist ways of understanding phenomena as ‘natural’ or ‘biologically rooted’ and that knowledge could be revealed through scientific observation (Burr, 2015; May & Mumby, 2004). This radical anti-essentialist stance contests the mainstream psychological understanding that all aspects of the human psyche (for example thoughts, beliefs, memories, feelings), exist as fixed psychological structures which are consistent across the population (Burr, 2015). Instead, the emphasis is placed on the social world and, moreover, *social processes* as the core entity that curates our ways of being. This criticality is pivotal in this research, as SC encourages individuals to challenge current world perceptions (May & Mumby, 2004), especially social categorization such as gender, as how we come to understand the world may “not necessarily refer to real divisions” (Ore, 2003, p. 5). Utilising a social constructionist perspective allowed me to treat each participant interaction as unique, while cautioning myself not to generalise or assert my way of understanding onto participants understandings of gendered roles.

The second assumption for the social constructionist is that people construct meaning between one another, through their daily interactions. This everyday engagement is seen as the *social practices* which construct and reproduce shared versions of knowledge (Burr, 2015; May & Mumby, 2004). For example, encouraging girls to be passive while boys to be aggressive perpetuates the ‘knowledge’ surrounding gender. These constructions are largely based on the knowledge surrounding masculinity and femininity, which are social constructions by definition, rather than natural characteristics linked with sex (May & Mumby, 2004). Interactions of all types are included in social practices; however, the use of language is of paramount importance to the social constructionist. As social and cultural contexts vary globally, knowledge cannot be universal, rather there are infinite ways of understanding (Burr, 2015). Therefore, for SC the sociology of knowledge is concerned with

how historical and sociocultural forces influence knowledge. Moreover, Burr (2015) proposes, knowledge is not specific to a culture or moment in history, but rather it is the byproduct of culture and history. For this reason, SC is uniquely suited for understanding how cultural identity and history influence participants allegiance or rejection of traditional gender roles in dating. Furthermore, this sample contained men and women from a variety of ethnic backgrounds within Gen Z, taking a social constructionist perspective enables me to consider cultural significance specific to one generation on sense-making of gender norms and issues.

As mentioned previously, the importance of language-in-use is imperative for SC, but language additionally serves as a conceptual framework for understanding the reality of our world (Burr, 2015). The plethora of language that is available to use, brings with it its own unique constructions of understanding. People learn how to conceptualize phenomena and categorize the world based on the language that they have learnt and reproduced consistently throughout their lives. Therefore, Burr would suggest that language provides the “pre-condition for thought” (Burr, 2015, p. 10), as how an individual chooses to describe and categorize their world, aligns with it the meaning they attribute to it. A radical and necessary example of this distinction is between gender and sex. For the large majority of history, taken from the biological perspective, humans could be classified into male or female (Pryzgodna & Chrisler, 2000). However, the turn of the twentieth century saw a change in this mainstream understanding with the emergence of gender as a separate construct to biological sex (Delphy, 1993; Torgrimson & Minson, 2005). According to SC we need to consider how the construct of being a ‘man’ or ‘women’ in itself, may reflect distinct attributes of being human rather than a fixed concept. This ambiguity in defining gender becomes more apparent with examples like gender-reassignment surgery or reproductive disorders like hermaphroditism are present (Davis & Preves, 2017). We begin to see how naturalistic categories become intertwined with our social construction of gender and thus, how we prescribe masculine and

feminine traits is culturally based. For this reason, SC seems an appropriate fit for this research topic, as I am wanting to uncover how people construct their ideal mate in line with their prescription of masculine or feminine norms. Furthermore, SC will allow me to take a critical stance on how people relate to traditional understandings of gender and if they resist or endorse these descriptions.

### **Discourse Analysis**

Discourse Analysis (DA) is a methodological approach to qualitative research founded in the 1970s, underpinned by Discursive Social Psychology and a spectrum of theoretical assumptions (Potter & Wiggins, 2007). Discourse is often situated to an instance of language use (Burr, 2015); however, discourse is a multifaceted medium that encompasses texts of all kind including visual, verbal, and written facets (Cruikshank, 2012). The objective for discursive psychologists is to examine how speakers construct their language in order for them to appoint meaning and identity (Burr, 2015). However, while DA is interested in immediate language in use, it broadens the scope to examine the real-world consequences certain discourses produce (Cruikshank, 2012). As human beings, we can use the same words yet apply different meanings to those words. What constitutes words as either good or bad goes beyond the individual, but instead is placed in the hands of the larger macro entity of society. Language as a system therefore does not reflect our reality, it instead creates meaning (Hall, 1997).

### **Foucauldian Discourse Analysis underpinned by Social Constructionism**

For the Social constructionist, there are two ways of approaching DA; either concerned with the micro or macro effects of social construction of knowledge (Burr, 2015). While *micro* social constructionists like Gergen (1985), are concerned with the everyday interactions of people in discourse, the *macro* social constructionist like Foucault (1972) goes

beyond to evaluate the constructive power that language holds and the effect it has on social structures, relations, and institutionalised practices (Burr, 2015). Studies on gender, and particularly the imbalance in power relative to gender relations, is therefore suited with a macro social constructionist-led analysis. While there are multiple ways a researcher can carry out DA within qualitative texts, as Frohmann (1994, p. 44) emphasised, Foucault-influenced discourse analysis (FDA) is concerned with “serious speech acts” as institutionalized rules and practices rather than studying speech as conventions of mundane talk. For this reason, I have chosen FDA to be used in interpreting and analysing my data.

According to Foucault (1972), there are infinite discourses that surround any one given object, as they simultaneously compete to construct it in a unique way. Each discourse brings with it a unique angle to a topic, raising different issues for discussion and ultimately yielding different implications for what and how people should be (Burr, 2015). Thus, discourses seek to construct the phenomena of our material world for us, with each discourse carrying with it its own perception of objective truth different from the next. However, as Foucault (1972) states, the concept of discourses claiming to carry the objective truth and knowledge is flawed, and is a core tenet which contributes to discussions of power, identity, and change. Furthermore, discourses are not a reflection of an individual’s lived or internal experience, nor can they be seen as a fixed manifestation of one's personality, attitude, or temperament (Burr, 2015). Instead, discourses can be thought of as a long vine that has intertwined with the fabric of our social world; a discursive world that individuals inhabit and take part in. Any singular discourse does not of itself own any words or sentences, rather the meaning of any given words depends on the discursive context, embedded in a larger conceptual framework (Burr, 2015).

## The Power in Discourse

Foucault (1982) was particularly concerned with power as an entity which constitutes knowledge, how discourses are positioned, endorsed, and legitimised in the wider societal landscape. Power cannot be externalised as an object to be obtained, rather Foucault conceptualises its omnipresence as a ‘metapower’ that permeates society, where “regimes of truth” (Foucault, 1988, p. 18) have been legitimised and negotiated as correct forms of ‘knowledge’ (Foucault, 1972, 1982, 1991). These ‘truths’ go beyond arbitrary arguments of what is right, rather they carry real life consequences in our social world. One common example Foucault (1979) provides is his works concerned with ‘discipline and punish’ within the penal system. He exemplifies how power demands obedience through subjugation, inspiring such institutions operation of punishment for behaviours that have been given the truth of ‘crime’. Other examples are visible ‘closer to home’ within academic writing. The use of slang is considered objectively wrong as a result of how dominant forms of ‘truths’ in language must be used, thus giving authority for its penalty in marking. This interplay between discourses, power and punishment is intrinsic to FDA and this topic of gender roles, as cultural expectations of *doing* masculinity and femininity ‘correctly’ have evolved and what was once considered right, may now be now considered wrong.

Within an “economy of power relations” (Foucault, 1982, p. 780), there is an apparent bias in how we label equal and traditional relationships. Take for example a man who holds ‘traditional’ values pays the first date, may be labelled in a positive light as “chivalrous” or a “gentleman”. Yet, when his traditional values mean his preference is for soft, caring, and feminine woman, he may be labelled “misogynistic” or “toxically masculine”. Both traits align with a traditional male, yet some preferences within dating have been given unequal weighting in discourse among traditional gender roles. Words have the power to both liberate

some while simultaneously punishing others (Marcoccio, 1995). When individuals partake in these discussions, through their positioning (Weedon, 1987), their choice of words both deliberately and subconsciously effect our understanding on such a given issue and further influence our perception of the individual. Every event presents an opportunity for social practices, allowing individuals to either act, feel, or think in compliance with the norm or go against it. Those who reject dominant discourses are then subject to marginalisation for their way of acting (Burr, 2015). This is particularly relevant when we see how the power in discourse shapes people's expression of dating preference. According to Clegg (1989, p. 159) "identities are not absolute but always relational; one can only ever be seen to be something in relation to something else". This research intentionally captures how individuals construct, position and subject their romantic partners to their own power situated within their preferences and how this constructs their own identity. Heterosexual dating is a social practice (Foucault, 1972), which exemplifies longstanding and contemporary dominant discourses of what is desirable and 'normal' in dating attitudes and behaviours. Taking a Foucauldian lens recognises the deep-rooted entrenchment of discursive power in the social world which invisibly implicates participants preferences, as one that is solely not harmless choice.

For FDA it is essential to evaluate the role of discourse at the macro-sociological level (Talja, 1999). Discourses are not singular nor abstract ideas that are placed together to construct ideas. They are instead intimately connected to larger institutional and social practices, which historically and currently guide how people live their lives (Burr, 2015; Foucault, 1972). While individuals have individual autonomy to govern their speech, it is only within the parameters that larger more *powerful* groups of people decide on how discourses are sorted and given the "stamp of truth" (Burr, 2015). One example given by Burr (2015) is the acknowledgement that men compared to women, hold a more powerful place in

our society so therefore the prevailing discourses surrounding femininity ultimately uphold this power imbalance. However, Foucault (1979) was strongly against the misinterpretation that *power* can only be conceptualised from a negative perspective as one which ‘represses’ or excludes, “...in fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” (Foucault, 1979, p. 194). He invites us to view *power* as creative, working within, rather than operating *on* something or someone (Townley, 1993). Leahy (1994, p. 3) adds to this stating, “people are not passively recruited into subject positions by discourses” at random, rather individuals are agentic when taking up positions. While discourses may restrict the quantity of subject positions possible, people are still able to choose between discourses, subject positions in discourses or choose to create a new subject position (Leahy, 1994). This individual liberty therefore gives rise to possibilities for new discursive constructions and thus make change within social practices. Within FDA, the human subject is agentic with their own discursive power, to either support or resist dominant practices surrounding masculinity and femininity (Townley, 1993). Thus, FDA for this research enables me to explore how people associate with traditionalism in dating whilst paying attention to power of language in use, the subject, and the cultural context in which the power has exhibited.

### **Procedure**

I constructed a table of gendered traits for men and one for women primarily as a tool to elicit focused conversations about gender (see Appendix E). The tables included a list of traits from various sources to ensure a well-rounded representation of physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and personality traits. Due to the contention and subjectivity in how individuals define what is ‘traditional’, for this research I defined traditional males as those embodying traditionally masculine traits, while traditional females embodied traditionally

feminine traits. Thus, when researching the characteristics of these traditional roles, sources varied in their definitions of traditional gender roles, with earlier measures labelling them as sex-typed characteristics and modern literature focusing on culturally based attributes. In order to work around this, I used many sources of traditional gender roles and preferences which are outlined below.

I referred to the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1974), which is one of the earliest instruments created to measure aspects of masculinity and femininity as independent characteristics. However, due to the age of this measure, some traits were excluded from the table as their current discursive connotation could be misinterpreted. For instance, the feminine traits of being 'gullible' and 'childlike' were not included in the table. Inspiration was also drawn from the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996) as it is a relational measure that evaluates how men view women. This measure is useful in situations of romantic and relationship settings and thus relative to this topic. Moreover, this topic discusses benevolent sexism which is a term coined by Glick and Fiske (1996).

Another theoretical framework drawn upon was Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987). Diekmann and Eagly (2000) produced a measure based on this theory which was factor-analysed which assessed masculine and feminine stereotypes of people. Other research studies which evaluated multiple dimensions of both masculine and feminine adherence were recruited (Bosak et al., 2017; Hentschel et al., 2019), as well as studies that evaluated males' perceptions to traditional masculinity (Iacoviello et al., 2021). The majority of sources I used to inform my table contained large cross-overs in the categorization of traditionally female and male traits. Therefore, I am confident that my table was both succinct and representative of general understanding of the traditional male and female.

The participants were sent a table of traits for the opposite sex via email, to familiarize themselves with the information before the interview. The table allowed me to maintain consistency between interviews and was very useful in eliciting in discourse related to traditional male or female roles. Participants were not asked to systematically review each trait or rank the list. Instead, they were asked to choose the traits that they wanted to discuss based on their preference, and those they were compelled to discuss on which they did not agree with. In the interviews I chose to explain some statements in order to firmly define the characteristic. For women, one example was avoidance of femininity to distinguish this meant 'males engaging in feminine practices, not just men who avoid women'. For men, the cognitive trait of being artistic/creative was also written as "not intellectual", which was explained as 'relevance to career and general hobbies driven'. This approach allowed participants to guide the discussion of the interview based on their beliefs, which allowed for better freedom of speech and to let their thoughts flow organically. Most participants were comfortable with this approach, as there were at least a few traits about which they held strong opinions and warranted deeper questioning. As a result, some traits were not discussed by each participant, as they fell in the middle of the spectrum, and were often referred to as "don't care either way". This was also done to preserve time and reduce participant fatigue, as there were a significant number of traits on each list.

## **Participants**

The study invited men and women born between 1997 to 2004, aged 18-26, who identified as heterosexual and were based in Auckland, New Zealand, to participate. People with other sexual preferences were excluded for two reasons. Firstly, gendered roles in dating have traditionally followed heteronormative norms of a man and woman in a relationship, leading to power imbalances between the sexes. To effectively analyse the persistence of

gendered roles in current times, individuals needed to align with their sexual preference. Secondly, narrowing the findings to focus on heterosexual relationships allowed me to discuss what the two genders consider in terms of equitable relationships. The research focused on gathering perspectives from Generation Z so both men and women were recruited. The aim was to have an equal proportion of men and women, with a final split of seven men and women. A summary of the participants demographic details can be found in Table 2.

*Table 2: Participants demographic details*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Tatiana	Pākehā	25	Student/Retail	Female
Zayn	Iraqi	24	Student/Builder	Male
Neutron	Iraqi	22	Accountant	Male
Carlisle	Pākehā	24	Corrections officer	Male
Neville	South African	24	Christian worker	Male
Yuki	Japanese/Pākehā	22	Student/ Medical receptionist	Female
Edward	Pākehā	21	Christian worker	Male
Dwayne	Samoan/Pākehā	26	Strategic advisor	Male
Vien	Vietnamese	21	Student	Male
Barbie	Croatian/Pākehā	26	Flight attendant	Female
Sharapova	Pākehā	24	Dietetic assistant	Female
Eve	Pākehā/Japanese	24	Student/Events	Female
Peggy	Pākehā	22	Student	Female
Bella	Pākehā/American	25	Student/Hospitality	Female

## **Recruitment**

Recruitment for participants began in July 2023 and commenced in August 2023. Due to the time restriction associated with a Masters project, my goal was to recruit between 8-14 participants. A printed advertisement poster of the study was put in the AUT Akoranga campus library noticeboard. The head librarian was given an information sheet about the study and gave consent to share the advertisement. Posters were also placed around Massey Albany University library after consent was given from the Massey Student hub following the information sheet. This recruitment strategy was effective as this sample was restricted to Gen Z, which is a significant proportion of university populations in New Zealand (Figure NZ, 2022).

Snowball sampling (word of mouth) was also employed, where participants who showed interest were offered an information sheet via email, to give to individuals they potentially thought could be interested in this study. This was highly effective as many students were in university and knew other students in the same age bracket who were also keen to join. Participant interest was rapid after advertisement. All potential participants contacted me via either phone number or email to show their interest. An information sheet regarding the study was then sent to all participants (see Appendix A), informed consent form (see Appendix C) and list of traditional gender traits (see Appendix E) as email attachments. To show appreciation of their commitment to the study participants were given a \$40 Westfield Gift Card after the completion of each interview.

## **Interviews**

Data was collected between August and September 2023. Each participant had one interview, and after they returned signed consent forms, we arranged optimal interview times. I asked the participants if they preferred face-to-face interviews or interviews via Zoom

(Zoom Inc., 2023). A third of the interviews were conducted face-to-face and the rest via Zoom. Zoom interviews with the camera on provided an ideal alternative to face-to-face interviews, with real-time interaction possible. However, potential downsides of online interviews include a lack of rapport and the inability to read non-verbal communication (Oliffe et al., 2021). Throughout my research, I did not experience any technical difficulties, and I was able to build great rapport with my participants. At times, we laughed and enjoyed the conversation as one that is trending in public discourse. Additionally, the participants noted that this research topic was highly debatable in their own social circles and was socially relevant to Gen Z, which was rewarding to hear.

Semi-structured interviews were utilised as they allowed for a more conversational approach to data collection, building greater rapport between the researcher and participants and their ability to enrich data (DeVault & Gross, 2012). Due to this topic's sensitive and controversial nature, as a female researcher, particularly when interviewing male participants, it was imperative to make a disclaimer that individuals were encouraged to be completely honest. I reinforced that regardless any of their opinions which might be seen as offensive, controversial or conflicting within the interview questions, I wanted honest responses. I made a point to emphasize listening rather than speaking in line with my interview schedule I created (see Appendix D). Participants were asked to bring up the list of traditional gender traits that has been emailed to them up on their screen. This served two purposes: first, to ensure that participants understood the conceptualisation of traditional male or female partners and their characteristics; and second, to provide a reference point for participants when answering questions.

Generally, participants were forthcoming with their opinions and experiences, however sometimes responses fell short to likes and dislikes. In these scenarios, I would

provide probes and prompts to encourage deeper thought from the participants about the meaning and ‘*why*’ behind their attitudes. For two questions, I gave participants a brief overview of the literature regarding egalitarian relationships and benevolent sexism in order to affirm their understanding before they gave their personal viewpoints. Overall, participants were eager to share their personal preferences and dating experiences with me, which allowed me to embrace the role as a listener easily. Recording of interviews happened on one device: the otter application (Otter, 2023) on my laptop. After completing the interview and stopping the recording, I allowed some time for off-record conversations to ensure participants left feeling good and validated in the research. I then asked participants to email me their postal address for their vouchers to be sent to them.

## **Transcription**

All interviews were first AI transcribed using Otter (Otter, 2023), before being proofread by myself and transferred into a Word document. Each person was allocated a pseudonym in their transcript from the beginning in order to familiarize myself with each person straight away. Various aspects related to the interview, including pauses, changes in tone, going off-topic, as well as my own comments and linking themes between participants, were included. The transcription process was lengthy, but it allowed me to re-familiarize myself with the data. However, in order to effectively reduce some of the wider and unnecessary information, conversational richness was sacrificed at times. To finalize the transcripts, I went through them one last time while listening to the audio with the full text present. This allowed me to dive into the experience one last time to ensure that I caught every aspect of discourse and my interpretations were consistent and missed nothing. In accordance with the consent forms, participants were emailed their completed transcripts with the possibility to amend and comment on them, so promoting autonomy and transparency

throughout this process (Massey University, 2017). Participants were given seven days to reply to the email if they wish to change anything and if no response was received then their approval of transcript would be inferred. None of the participants requested any changes in their transcripts.

## **Reflexivity**

Qualitative research is heavily influenced by the researcher due to its subjective nature (Dodgson, 2019; Willig, 2013). The process of research is closely linked with the researcher from all stages beginning with the chosen epistemological stance, to gathering data in an interactive process with the participants, to the end when data analysis occurs and the final results are written up (Willig, 2013). The researcher's previous life experiences, assumptions, and beliefs can intentionally or unintentionally impact all aspects of the research process. Therefore, it is essential that the researcher engages in a reflective process (Shaw, 2010) to ensure the research is conducted in quality manner.

As a researcher, it is important to acknowledge the intersectionality and relationship between the researcher and their research. My position is as an insider within this research for multiple reasons. Firstly, I belong to Generation Z, which gives me an understanding of growing up in the digital era and how people use modern platforms to connect with one another. Secondly, as a heterosexual female, I understand the complexities of navigating gendered roles in dating. My own journey has presented multiple experiences of engaging with traditionally masculine and feminine men, which has positioned my attraction to them as a long-term partner. This shared understanding and empathy helps me identify how conflicting traditional roles restrict my generation, which is one of liberal and progressive thinkers. This gives me an edge over an outsider who may not understand how people contextualize heterosexual dating, including the language and terminology used when

describing preferences and typical dating scenarios (Hockey, 1993). From my teenage years and into adulthood, I have found myself drawn to connecting with men in hopes of finding my potential match. This journey has led me to vet, meet, and date multiple men, which has created a deeper passion for understanding how individuals try to find their true mate. I am driven to uncover difficult and often controversial conversations within a 'woke' era that condemns individuals who go against liberal viewpoints for fear of being labelled oppressive, internalised misogynistic, and 'trumpist'. I have met men and women on both sides of the argument, those challenging neoliberal ideologies of gender being a social construct and therefore having limited weight in social and romantic interactions. Furthermore, growing up I have felt there has been a lack of traditional masculinity in all sectors of society, particularly when engaging with potential partners which has often been a point of personal contention for myself. I wish to utilise these experiences as a driving force for understanding and positioning myself as a researcher working with relational female and the outsider of male perspective.

Being an insider within research, brings many advantages including building greater acceptance between the participants and myself. Overall, this builds a stronger relationship which facilitates open dialogue, built on trust. This is particularly important in my research, which focuses on gendered issues, which can be a controversial and sensitive topic. I do note that I am an outsider from the male perspective so as a female researcher, I considered that it can be hard for males to talk about such issues with me. However, being a Gen Z insider, I hope to encourage people to share their personal experiences and attitudes, which may not have been discussed openly before. People tend to be more open with someone who they feel is one of them, making the data richer and more accurate (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Hockey, 1993). This understanding helps me in constructing relevant interview questions and engaging in conversations with participants.

There is a risk of bias in being an insider, as the researcher is too familiar with the topic (Hockey, 1993). To avoid this, I am careful not to shape the interview questions and conversation to fit my preconceived familiarity with the specific phenomenon being studied (Berger, 2015; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). I also kept a self-reflective journal throughout my interview and analysis process (Smith & Trede, 2013). By doing this my own subjective opinions, emotions and reflections were documented consistently. Keeping this journal allowed me to track and critique my own personal stance towards the participants' responses to my interview questions. It also helped me identify my own frustrations and distinguish them from the perceptions supplied by the interviewees. Moreover, this enabled me to dissect which perceptions were my own and which were supplied by participants. Given my own strong opinions on the topic, it was crucial that I did practiced reflexivity at all stages of the research to ensure that the opinions of the participants in this study were accurately gathered and recurring discourses were concluded (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Interestingly I found the men's data much easier to analyse due to interest and more of an outsider status. For the women, I had to work hard reflexivity to keep my experiences (and judgement) distinct from the participants.

### **Ethical Considerations:**

I completed a full ethics application with the Massey University Northern Committee, as my topic involved personal stories and therefore was sensitive in nature and a cause for potential distress in participants (Ref number OM2 23/27). Specifically, the areas covered in the full application included obtaining informed consent, recruitment, recording, potential harm to participants, privacy, and confidentiality in line with the Massey University's Code of Ethics (Massey University, 2017).

## **Informed consent and Confidentiality**

Taking knowledge from Hydén (2014), I viewed informed consent as both an initial and an on-going process throughout my research, subject to negotiation with participants. As participants were between 18-26, I felt individuals were substantially capable of understanding the benefits and risks for their participation. However, since the participants may not have been aware of the questions beforehand, they might have felt unsure about continuing with the research at a later stage but feel obliged to continue. To mitigate this, I obtained written informed consent (Massey University, 2017) and carefully monitored behavioural changes including posture, tone of voice or any signs of dysregulation (American Psychological Association, 2013) which may indicate personal reluctance. Additionally, to honour an ethic of care, I consistently checked in with participants between each section of questions, offering breaks or options to pause the recording if needed. Fortunately, none of the participants required any breaks, and they did not show any negative reactions throughout the interview process. After gathering all consent forms and completed transcripts, they were digitally uploaded to a password-protected computer to prevent third-party access. All data was deidentified by assigning pseudonyms in order to protect participants' anonymity.

## **Minimising Harm to Participants:**

During my research I was aware of the potential for unintended harm to participants, particularly male participants, due to the sensitive and potentially controversial nature of the topic (Smith & Trede, 2013). To avoid any feelings of awkwardness or discomfort, I initiated the interview with a casual conversation on informal topics, including general knowledge about the participants' lives and daily activities. I reciprocated by sharing some general knowledge about myself, my university and my journey towards my thesis. This helped build rapport and trust, which in turn helped to ease the participants' stress. Before starting the

interview, I gave a general disclaimer to all the participants, letting them know they could take a break at any time, pause the recording, skip questions or stop the interview if they became distressed. I also made it clear that the research topic could be potentially controversial for some people and that I, as the researcher, would not be offended by any opinions they held. Instead, I encouraged them to be completely honest in their responses. To avoid any bias, I asked questions in a neutral way that did not portray traditional gendered roles in a positive or negative light. During the interviews, I noticed that many of the male participants showed signs of nervousness, particularly through laughter, when I probed them further on their responses related to their ideal female partner. I expected this since they did not want to offend me or feel embarrassed that their views would be condemned for aligning with traditional viewpoints. After every nervous reaction, I reassured and validated the participants that I take no offense to any opinions they express, and their honest opinions are what I am seeking. After concluding the interviews, I made sure to bring the conversation back to more light and general topics, such as the participants' plans for the day/week, to help them decompress from the interview. I was pleased to learn that most of my participants commended my research topic as an exciting and current topic of discussion that they loved to talk about.

### **Recruitment ethics**

Recruiting participants for a research study raised an ethical concern due to the bias that can arise from snowball sampling. To ensure an unbiased and diverse sample, I placed posters at Massey University and AUT Akoranga campus for recruitment. To manage the referrals from snowball sampling, I mitigated risk by providing interested participants with an information sheet that they could share with others who might be interested in participating. The information sheet contained my contact details so that interested parties could contact me

directly. Participants were informed that there was no reward or risk associated with passing on the information for the study. I then had an initial conversation with the referred person, where I explained the research and emphasized that participation was voluntary and non-obligation. If we discovered that we knew the same people, I advised them against taking part to avoid any potential bias. However, I did not need to take this step with any of the participants and most participants were eager to take part in the study when referred to it.

### **Cultural Responsiveness**

In evaluating the cultural responsiveness of my research, I was mindful of the longstanding colonial injustices experienced within Aotearoa, New Zealand. All research conducted in Aotearoa must contribute towards supporting a Tiriti-based future, that serves to empower both Pākehā and Māori simultaneously (Hudson et al., 2010). Throughout my research, I considered the Tiriti o Waitangi principles to promote partnership, participation, and protection amongst participants. As this research was exclusive to Gen Z, I welcomed the involvement of all ethnic groups, particularly Māori, to have a representative sample of this age cohort in Aotearoa. Before starting my research, I consulted a cultural advisor at Massey University to determine the correct approach to take when interacting and interviewing Māori participants in line with Tiriti o Waitangi. This included offering kai to share in interviews, beginning a session with my pepeha, and opening a discussion with a karakia. However, despite my efforts, no Māori participants came forward to be a part of this research, and thus, I did not engage in such tikanga Māori practices. As personal demographic information was not obtained until the meeting for the interview, I was initially unaware of the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of participants. However, after first introductions, I made it a point to gather such information and asked participants if there were any cultural traditions they wished to engage in, but no one offered any cultural reference or practice.

## **Data analysis**

There is no one fixed way to perform FDA as Foucault himself over the course of his career changed the ideas and method relative to his research. My analysis was informed by Willig (2021) guide to FDA in combination with Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2017). The reason for combining methods was while Willig (2013) is a renowned qualitative researcher, she notes her methodology lacks some specificity to Foucauldian method and thus encourages in her article the guide from Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2017) to supplement the work. Moreover, core to Foucault's work is analysing discourse beyond an instance of text, but a set of rules, divisions and larger systems which govern a particular body of knowledge (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). Therefore, special attention was paid to power within discourse, both individually and collectively, which reproduced and legitimised the 'knowledge' surrounding gender roles. The full step by step process will be outlined below.

### **Step one: Familiarizing with the data**

I first used Otter.ai online tool to transcribe the entire interview as it was being recorded. At a later stage, I began proof reading of the full transcript, line by line in order to check for any inaccuracies and fill in any missing phrases/connotations that the speaker used. I retracted any off-topic discussion and removed/renamed any identifiable data within the data. Simultaneously, during these initial reads I highlighted key phrases of text that stood out and include notes to be referred back to. This became more prominent in later transcripts as I began identifying reoccurring themes and remarks, which would need to be later addressed. Overall, this process was time consuming, but it allowed me to dive deep into the richness of the data and form a tentative path of enquiry.

## **Stage 2: Selecting a corpus of statements and discursive constructions.**

After all 14 transcripts had been finalised, I began the process of identifying the discursive objects of the data (Fairclough et al., 1997; Willig, 2021). Identifying the discursive object(s) is one that is relative to the research question(s) of a project (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). Due to men and women having different table of traits, I chose to separately analyse men's transcripts to women's, throughout the analysis and write up. For my topic, there were multiple discursive objects that ranged in significance from surface level preferences (e.g., 'modesty' for men, 'stoicism' for women) to deeper accounts of importance (e.g., 'power', 'gender inequality'). Beginning at the most frequently discussed gender preferences I identified all of these as discursive objects before moving to the next step. I then identified how these objects were constructed in the text. To do this, I went through and highlighted each time each object was mentioned in all the transcripts. To further categorize, I chose different colours for each object/participant and created a key for myself to use on a Microsoft Office Excel spreadsheet (see Appendix F). Constructions included both direct use of an object's *word* but also included instances where indirect use of the object was discussed. This ensured that implicit and explicit expressions could be captured, as by someone intentionally not making an explicit reference, it can also inform how people relate to an object (Willig, 2021). I then selected a corpus of statements which accurately reflected these constructions separately for men and for women.

## **Stage 3 : Identifying discourses**

After identifying all sections which related to the construction of the discursive objects, the focus is now the difference between these constructions. During this stage, I identified similar and conflicting object constructions, located in wider discourses throughout the entire text. I began looking *how* and *why* constructions were done, the implications of

certain discourses and why specific language was normalised to be spoken in a specific way. This was done within each gender before moving between genders, relative to the different interview questions and overall research aims. An example was that some individuals who endorsed gender roles did so under the biological discourse, stating/infering that the sexes were fundamentally ‘biologically’ different, and thus egalitarian relationships are not ‘natural’. This stage also centred around the practical implications associated with discourse. I analysed the ramifications for constructing the object of gender roles in a particular way in text both for the speaker and for the opposite gender to which they were referring. How discourses functioned were analysed both singularly and relationally to other constructions in surrounding text. However, during this stage I found some discourses either lacked discursive substance, overlapped with others or were outliers comparative to the data set. Thus, finishing this stage I ranked all discourses from the most to the least discussed by participants to find the strongest, and then (re)analysed smaller discourses to either merge into a bigger one or omit from the write up.

#### **Stage 4, 5 & 6: Positionings, Practice and Action orientated language**

Having previously identified the main discourses containing various discursive constructions, I now focused on the varying subject positions. Occupying a subject position “involves the construction and performance of a particular vantage point” (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017, p. 117), thus each person offers their own version of reality within a verbal interaction. Simultaneously, this positioning places individuals in a moral location and thus ‘moral order’ (Cuff, 1993), and serves as practical technologies for truth speaking (Hodges, 2002). Furthermore, identifying subject positions then exemplifies the various cultural repertoires of discourses which participants are able to choose between and embody (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). Within the male/female sample some discourses held high

variance in subject positions which at times became difficult to surmise, while others held more consistent positioning from participants. Next, I investigated how discursive constructions and the subject positions occupied within them, either enabling or restricting opportunities for action (Willig, 2021). By participants constructing their versions of truth surrounding gender roles, these discourses can limit what can be said or done to reproduce or sustain social norms. This stage was pivotal for deconstructing power from the social constructionist and FDA perspective, as I spent ample time going between how language played into traditional gender hegemony or if it sought to revolutionise gender constructs in a current setting.

### **Stage 7: Subjectivity**

In the final stage I explored how individual subjectivity related to discourse. As there are infinite ways of seeing and experiencing the world, discourses make visible these differences (Willig, 2021). Discourses create both social and psychological realities, with discursive positioning playing a significant role in their genesis and maintenance (Willig, 2021). Therefore, this stage is concerned with the consequences of individuals embodying different subject positions based on their subjective experience of the world. Where the previous stage was focused on what could be done in practice, this stage focused on the feelings, thoughts, and experiences within different subject positions. This was particularly significant during questioning of egalitarian relationships and benevolent sexism, as participants levels of support of these concepts, was seen most visibly to be based on their subjective life experience. One example was of participants positioning within their cultural and religious identity to explain and justify their feelings surrounding gender roles, as if to avoid negative external and internal manifestations of judgement if they did not endorse 'equality' of the sexes.

## Chapter 4: Findings

I present the findings in two main sections: men and women. The reason being it was crucial for me to conduct a gendered analysis. Therefore, by analysing the discourses within each group, I was able to provide a clear representation of their attitudes. In addition, as men and women were given a different table of traits (relative to different gendered norms – see appendix E) so some discourses were distinctly different as a result. Hence the findings are set firstly for men and then for women. In the discussion chapter I will compare female and male discourses in relation to gender role ideology, power, and sexism.

### Findings men

There were two main discourses for men: the perfect woman and the place for gender roles. These were constructed and negotiated in different ways as outlined in the table below.

*Table 3: Male main discourses and constitutive parts*

<b>The perfect woman</b>
Bid for connection <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Women speaking up</li><li>• Compatibility</li><li>• Attractive women</li><li>• Emotional maturity</li></ul>
The sexual woman <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does the past define the future? (purity vs sexual advances)</li><li>• Modern modesty</li></ul>
<b>The ‘<i>place</i>’ for gender roles</b>
A man's responsibility – being a provider. Treat men and women as individuals We’re biologically different. Sexism in chivalry?

## 1. The perfect woman

This discourse details how men navigated their dating preferences to construct their ‘*perfect woman*.’ This discourse contained various discursive objects relative to the most important and discussed gendered traits, however differing subjectivities meant consistencies were present for some traits, while others were difficult to reconcile. Two main parts constituted *the perfect woman*. First, a *bid for connection* showed the greatest action orientation and subjectivity (Willig, 2021), allowing men to be constructed as both an equal partner while simultaneously attributing to their feelings of love and validation. Second, the positioning of *the sexual woman* was the one that governed acceptable levels of female sexuality (Foucault, 1991) and the implications this has on a man’s level of internal and external value.

### 1.1. Bid for Connection

The overarching desire/preference for all male participants was wanting a partner who fulfilled their *bid for connection*. A *bid for connection* was the main discursive object which formed men’s *perfect woman* and was constructed in four main ways: women speaking up, compatibility, attractive women, and emotional maturity. These constructions, for the most part, transcended traditional gender norms for women, and instead presented an opportunity for mutual satisfaction between men and women and continued success in the dating relationship.

#### 1.1.1. Women Speaking Up

Although agreeableness was not included as a gendered trait, the expectation for women to speak up went against traditional conceptualisations of a ‘docile’ women (Beere et al., 1984; Henley et al., 1998). Men preferred a partner who was interactive, transparent, and

willing to voice their opinions: to speak up. For men, a woman who spoke up was the ultimate validation as it recognized their efforts and fulfilled their *Bid for Connection*. Men often discussed their own insecurities surrounding dating, such as Zayn, who wanted a woman to vocalize her thoughts in the form of “*getting feedback*”, that she enjoyed “*the shit that I paid for*”. By constructing women as agentic, he rejects a traditional construct of female submission to men. However, this also designates women as having the moral responsibility of expressing gratitude. Compared to other men, Zayn exhibited the most visible signs of agitation if a woman embodied traditional expectations of female passivity. His subjectivity interpreted this as disappointment for his date, which manifested in his own feelings of disappointment. Women speaking up and being thankful was also more than getting direct “*feedback*” but also linked to connection through active conversation. Thus, most men yearned for a “*critical*” partner, that was able to challenge their own mindset. For Carlisle women speaking up shows a level of intellectual inquiry:

*“like if someone's like a bit like critical of life yeah, part of it is like, I guess like not being gullible as well. And sort of like being able to, evaluate things as well. I feel like it's such a common thing, right? ... Or even then like it's not necessarily even about like, me and what I think, like I love being with someone that I could like learn from.”*

Carlisle constructs criticality as an object which facilitates connection and growth in the relationship. This use of language is action orientated (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017) allowing space for women to be in equal power to inadvertently position him as partner who respects female authority. However, he then switches his argument to projecting that it is not about his needs (“*what I like*”) but places female critical thinking as an active

behaviour in the relationship, that serves to teach him something. Similar constructions of female criticality and agency were seen by Dwayne and Neutron:

*“If you can't stick up or like if you still need to be able to hold your own in terms of like discussing something or have your own opinion rather than just being a sheep.” (Dwayne)*

*“I can think you know, I know what's best or I know what's right but I really value someone that can challenge my way of thinking. I think that's a very strong characteristic. Obviously, not someone.. like, obviously, like reasonably, like, first of all, it shows that like, you love and respect me enough to tell me when you think I'm wrong.” (Neutron)*

Similar to Carlisle, Neutron attempts position himself as morally upright and fair towards gender issues. However, his language is not consistent with this positioning and instead limits how women can act in practice (*obviously, like reasonably*) (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017; Foucault, 1982). Compared to surrounding constructions from other men in text, Neutrons discourse was the only one which placed limits on women speaking up, as by doing so, this still keeps him in a position of power as he believes, *“for the guys like to lead and the girl to like, I guess submit”*.

Women speaking up was about balance within a gendered interaction, and a level of critical thinking for women, bringing more authentic levels of connection within the relationship. Traditionally women have been expected to play a passive role within heterosexual relationships, with socialised gender expectations mandating they ‘self-silence’ and put the needs of others first, in an effort to fulfil the emotional and sexual desires of men (Avery et al., 2022; Harper et al., 2006; Jack, 1993). Gender hegemony traditionally place

women as subordinate to men (Connell, 1987), however most men's talk created space for seeing women as an equal.

### *1.1.2 Compatibility*

Compatibility was never mentioned explicitly as a dating preference, rather it was a frequent underlying object in the data, often stemming from participants referring to their own subjectivities and personal qualities. For example, when discussing the traditional preference for wanting a smaller woman, Vien uses his own subjective experience as a physiotherapist to justify his preference:

*"I'm pretty active. So when in the event she's bigger than me, in that sense, like BMI and I guess you're reaching that diabetic, like obesity. I'm not a fan of that - somewhere because my interest and hobbies are pretty active. And that is a reflection of you, of their lifestyle."*

He use of first person here ("*I'm pretty active*" / "*because my interests*") exemplifies how he is looking for a partner that mirrors his lifestyle and therefore, his version of being compatible. His subjectivity is clear in his talk, as he sees the world within the guise of female physical largeness as a deeper "reflection" of other internal manifestations. Simultaneously, by positioning himself within a discourse of health and fitness, it legitimises his preference as being related to health, but also may serve for him to feel or be perceived less shameful for endorsing this traditional construction of femininity as being small (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). Vien later talked of preferring Asian women as being the same race he states as he "*could obviously relate to that*". Men often sought connections with women who mirrored their own lifestyle, rather than someone who contrasted them. For Neville compatibility meant, "*you can like do activities together, and enjoy that*" while for Edward, again being fit was of paramount importance:

*“I think for me, like I would put sport is the most important, but I think cardiovascular is actually quite important for me because of how much time I spend running. It's often just nice to be able to go for a run with my partner, you know ... If they're not like wanting to get involved with sport, it's a little bit of a deterrent for me.”(Edward)*

Like Vien, Edward uses first person to show the importance compatibility has on choosing a partner, more so than idealising other traditional feminine gender roles. Athletic abilities and physical strength are not behaviours expected of the traditional woman marked by both evolutionary biology and psychology (Buss, 1994, 1995). However, this trait presented as another avenue to connect, creating a relationship dynamic that aligned with their *own* active lifestyle.

Religious compatibility was another reoccurring example brought forward in the data by four out of seven participants. Some men wanted a religious woman because of the *“morals that come with the religion”* (Zayn) while Neville made reference to it being the *“most important trait”* for a woman who *“actively wants to follow God”*. Again, this was framed as compatibility of beliefs and morality.

### *1.1.3 Attractive women*

Existing literature has shown men’s high valuation of female physical appearance and attractiveness (Bech-Sørensen & Pollet, 2016; Buss, 1989; Buss et al., 2001; Chappetta & Barth, 2022), with similar findings found in this research. While ‘attractive’ was constructed differently in the data, the use of the word *“obviously”* was consistent across three men’s discourse which exemplified shared subjectivities on feminine beauty:

*“Obviously, like attraction is part of it would be like say that it's not like I'm sure that we'd have like slight differences of slight things which like, I think are pubes or things like that...” (Neutron)*

*“Yeah, I think I mean, yeah, obviously that attractive...” (Edward)*

*“Oh, yeah, the ideal partner would be someone that obviously have to be physically attracted to.” (Dwayne)*

The use of “*obviously*” implies that men’s valuation of female attractiveness is not simply an individual preference, rather it is an objective truth. These discursive arrangements exemplify Foucault (1988, p. 18) “regimes of truth”, that the knowledge surrounding female physical attractiveness is legitimised and reinforced by men. Furthermore, in upholding this subject position it limits how both men and women can take action to oppose a stereotype of valuing external beauty in heterosexual dating, in line with this pervasive system of knowledge (Willig, 2021).

While attractive women included surface level desires (“*pretty in the face*”), men’s language followed a ‘heteronormative patrolling’ of women’s bodies (Fahs, 2011) through the use of various maintenance practices, including hair removal. The hairless ideal of women “is part of a broader and larger dictate that women’s bodies are unacceptable in their natural state, and must be altered” (Terry et al., 2018, p. 273). Half of the men endorsed shaving as “*a marker for attractiveness*” (Dwayne), similarly Edward showed a significant emotional outburst:

*“Body hair removed; it’s like wild to me that that’s not a standard. I think for like women, it’s just like general femininity like when you think about what’s a normal trait... it’s just assumed.”*

In line with Terry et al. (2018) comments, Edwards narrative reinforces a dominant discourse that regards women's natural bodies as 'unnatural', while practices aimed at controlling female's body are deemed "normal". Moreover, Dwayne, Edward and Zayn constituted body hair removal within personal "hygiene". The only resistance to this discourse came from Vien with his flippant demeanor, "*I couldn't really care less*".

#### *1.1.4 Emotional Maturity*

Emotional maturity was the last object which constructed a bid for connection within *the perfect woman*. Mimicking previous discursive strategies, this concept was constructed by men who wanted women to display emotion within acceptable limitations. To be emotionally mature, women would still embody 'positive' qualities such as being "*caring, warm*" (Neutron), "*empathetic*" or with "*motherly attributes*" (Dwayne) associated to traditional femininity. At the same time, they were expected to monitor and control their emotions to avoid being positioned as the "*emotionally driven*" women, and therefore cannot "*think objectively*" as Neville stated. This notion was reinforced by Edward below:

*"Like if they do these things on the spectrum. I think overly emotional is probably one of the ones for me, where it's like a point of like, emotional instability, you know. I think that was one of the ones [dealbreaker], with that previous relationship as well."* (Edward)

Edward further spoke of a previous dating experience with a woman who was emotionally unstable and that was a "*large reason*" why he did not pursue a relationship with her. Both Neville and Edward's subjectivities endorse traditional hegemonic masculine ideals that men are rational and, therefore, objective, due to their sense of emotional stability and stoicism.

This ‘knowledge’ (Foucault, 1972) leads them to believe that women who are not like them are limited in their ability to be seen as equal to men. Men often labelled sensitive women as one that “*can't take a joke*” (Vien) which creates a further divide between the gendered relationship. This is because men viewed humour as form of emotional intimacy in dating, and ‘sensitivity’ is constructed as a form of emotional immaturity (Willig, 2014) which hinders the ability to connect. Moreover, frequent use of language in the third person (e.g., “*they can't*”) places blame on women for not being able to connect emotionally, further perpetuating gender stereotypes against women.

For Dwayne, emotional maturity was spoken about in relation to emotional intelligence:

*“Someone with low EQ. That just rubs me the wrong way. Like, I like to think that I have quite a high EQ and it's very hard to be with someone that, at least isn't in the kind of same vicinity, kind of, don't have to match mine. But more or less have to be, at least have an understanding of it...”*

Dwayne’s use of language having to “*kind of I don't have to match mine*” demonstrates how he wants a partnership yet is cautious to say she does not have to be equal to “*match*” his own self-regarded high emotional intelligence. He reinforces his preference by describing a past dealbreaker with an ex he chose to end the relationship with, “*This person wasn't particularly kind or empathetic*”.

## ***1.2 The sexual woman***

The sexual woman was a distinct constitutive part of *the perfect woman*. Men desired a hybrid woman, prioritizing traditional values of female purity and modesty, while simultaneously rejecting traditional norms of sexual passivity. Interestingly, as men discussed

sexual preferences their cadence of speech became slow and irregular, as if they were careful to find the ‘correct’ words to say. As Willig (2021) stated, men intentionally not making explicit references to sexuality informs how men relate to female sexuality and their position to speak on it. Similar to *women speaking up* it was clear than men wanted to avoid sexual misinterpretation while simultaneously enhancing sexual communication. This level of self-surveillance was interesting, but became difficult to discern whether it was my presence as a female researcher or whether males lacked a common space to openly discuss topics of sexual inadequacy.

### *1.2.1 Does the past define the future? (purity vs sexual advances)*

Aspects of female purity was discussed by a majority of the sample, yet the trait of ‘purity’ was often referenced against the alternative: women who were sexually promiscuous. While most men found women with limited sexual history more desirable, how men endorsed their opinions was of more interest. Foucault (1978) was particularly concerned with how the analytics of power “demands obedience through domination, submission, and subjugation” (Foucault, 1978, p. 59). It became clear men’s narrative of the sexual women contributed to this power as a social practice. For example, we see how Edward asserts a discursive power by imposing a truth onto them, “*it just seemed unclassy*” to be sleeping around with multiple men. Neutron on the other hand notes the moral complexity of his subjectivity:

*“Purity. Okay. I do agree with that to an extent but like I don't know is it comes it's to do with Yeah, yeah, it's um, a lot of these a lot of these can be grouped into that toxic masculinity to traditional aspect.” (Neutron)*

Here we see how Neutron subjects his desire for a pure woman as something that is simultaneously governed by the discourse of hegemonic masculinity. Foucault saw the power in subject positions as one that manages an individual's self-formation and governs their moral location within social interaction (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). We begin to see the cross-over by desiring purity as a gendered preference, also places Neutron in a position of power over women which he does not morally align with. Dwayne negotiated his perspective on female purity as one which shows a woman has “*self-respect*” if they are careful who they share their body with, yet also making reference to the “*balancing act*” it is to evaluate the pleasure aspect of having sex. His language exemplifies a dominant sexual “rule” in society, which subjugates women to an ideology of appropriate sexual practice.

Carlisle was the only male who resisted this dominant discourse of immorality surrounding the sexual woman:

*“I feel like, like purity. Especially with like, I guess like the number of previous sexual partners. That by itself isn't like a big thing for me... Like if someone just had like a single phase and was having fun for a while that's totally fine.” (Carlisle)*

Carlisle by using the words “*having fun*” decreases the moral weight of a woman's actions compared to Dwayne's interpretation of a woman needing “*self-respect*” to limit her sexuality. In a dominant femininity discourse which emphasises purity, Carlisle uses action orientated language (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017) to position women as agentic to be sexually promiscuous without losing their “value” as a women. For Carlisle, *the sexual woman* is one who is free to govern her own sexuality against the grain of traditional gendered expectations. Differing subjectivities from Zayn was clearly visible in how he constructed female promiscuity:

*“This is what naturally attracts me more, you know, just having the thought of like, your significant other, not been ran through by several other men you know.” (Zayn)*

The practice of female abstinence is linked with a purity discourse that constructs women as more valuable and better ‘child-bearing partners’ under an evolutionary perspective (Buss, 1989). Zayn (like most men) supported this ‘regime of truth’ surrounding sexuality, which privileges men and condemns women for the same action, where previously, Carlisle (alone) actively sought to challenge it.

Despite idolising the *perfect woman* as sexually pure, she was not allowed to be sexually passive. Men took two polarizing positions. The first, articulated by Vien and Dwayne, indicated initiating sexual advances should be split “50/50” - as if women never made a move, it would be considered a “*red flag*”. The biggest issue underlying men embodying this role is that it made them feel unwanted and their feelings “*just seems not reciprocated*” (Vien). Not wanting to overstep this boundary while simultaneously internalising the lack of sexual pursuit as rejection was again expressed by Dwayne:

*“For me that would, that would just indicate to me, well, I’ll start having doubts, or is she even into me? Does she even want it? And stuff like that. And I’m very conscious of that. For me personally, like, I would not want to do something that they wouldn’t want.”*

These men’s constructions open up an opportunity for action, that women are both allowed and encouraged to engage within their sexuality. For Dwayne this comes as a stark contrast to his previous labelling of promiscuous women. His language exemplifies further

this regulation of female bodies, which allow sexual practice within the confines of what he (and society) deems acceptable: a relationship.

In contrast, Zayn constructed sexual initiation from women as undesirable as he is more traditional but he talks around this as a contested position:

*“Your 30 or an hour minutes into the date.. timing, and it's also like how it's done. If she gives off she does it with every other date she goes on and so like, you might still do it for the one-night stand sort of thing but then pull back. You know, I guess traditional men don't want to be progressive relationship. You know, because you don't I guess traditional men don't want to be in a relationship with girls that just go around and sleep around with anyone that buys them dinner.” (Zayn)*

Zayn’s subjectivity has created a social reality that all “*traditional men*” like himself, share the same knowledge and feelings surrounding female sexual advances. His law of truth (Foucault, 1982) is thus seen in his use of “you” reinforces how he believes people distinguish moral values and expectations when women make sexual advances. He was the only participant to make implicit reference to the categorisation of viewing women differently dependent on whether the end objective was a purely sexual or if they were evaluating their compatibility as a potential partner.

### *1.2.2 Modern Modesty*

The trait of modesty was the second most discussed preference from the list of gender traits. Six out of the seven men referred to modesty, and unlike various other traits, it had the only universally agreed-on opinion: modest women were more desirable. Modesty of clothing presented as the greatest attribute for the evaluation of a woman's character, with discourse

surrounding modesty often reflecting deep-rooted assumptions. The following excerpts show the first assumption; women who cover up have greater levels of self-worth:

*“I see confidence comes more in the form of someone who knows what they like, that type of thing. All the good attributes that attract to a man doesn't have to dress in a provocative way to show it off.” (Zayn)*

*“I think it just speaks to her character. Like, it shows she cares more about the input of herself instead of having to like kind of show it off to others.. like, she cares about the right things” (Neville)*

*“I mean it just shows security, you know, like there's not a need to be overly exposed, you know? I feel like the insecurities that come with it... shows a commitment, you know...” (Edward)*

*“If they dress modestly, it's because they're comfortable in their skin. If they don't feel the need to show off stuff... But dressing modestly also shows that they have, for me anyway, self-respect but I'm not saying that's the only way you can demonstrate self-respect” (Dwayne)*

Their subjectivities prescribe four different positive internal manifestations of modest women (confidence, character, security, and comfortability). Within an “economy of power relations” (Foucault, 1982, p. 780), it is clear these men endorse and legitimize the dominant discourse within a patriarchal system (Connell, 1987), that a *perfect woman* surveils and limits her sexual access, through the construction of clothing. At times I interjected participants' answers, to nail down if a woman's clothing choice could be reflective of simply taste in clothes rather than a personality deficit but most men rejected this as an idea.

The second assumption was that provocatively dressed women meant that they were seeking external validation from other men. For Zayn, his sexual woman is one who is explicit only for him:

*Leyla: "And what is it about the dressing modestly you like?"*

*Zayn: "Yeah, it just shows you that she's not trying to get everyone's attention as she's walking by... it also comes from the light off you got a man, he's only meant to see all of you and not just showing it off to anyone and all that, so there's more meaning towards it."*

While the other men constructed women in similar subject positions, the implications of Zayn's language indicated he was the only one to explicitly put boundaries on female agency. Using *"he's only meant to see all of you"*, thereby implying women's bodies are a privilege of a man within the heterosexual relationship. He conceptualizes the sanctity of sexuality within relationships goes beyond sexual intercourse exclusively but also in how a traditional woman presents herself to the world.

Comparatively, Vien's action orientation contrasts against Zayn's:

*"...if they do it to impress other people. Like, let's say, with my partner, she dressed up, like overly exposed for the purpose of attracting attention from other potential partners, and other people. Then I'd I be like, 'Oh, then what am I here for like, am I not important?' I feel like you don't value me as an individual. If I specifically said that I don't like it and they go out and do that. Then I'm like, that's kind of a red flag because it seems like you're not for me, you're for everyone." (Vien)*

While they can both agree on not wanting women to dress for “other men”, where Zayn outlines ownership that no one should see “his” women, Vien takes a different approach and sees it as a dig at his own self-worth (“...am I not important?”). Both men view modesty as a gateway to respecting the monogamous confines of the relationship, that by dressing immodestly you are breaking these barriers by intentionally drawing the attention of other potential mates.

## **2. The ‘*place*’ for gender roles.**

This discourse outlines men's perspective to gender roles, their relative power relations and negotiations of chivalry vs sexism. Men recognise that women are capable and independent when dating, but still believe that they have certain responsibilities. Men could acknowledge that gender roles are rooted in sexist ideology, but reject this as a present mindset when engaging in chivalrous behaviours. Justification for the ‘*place*’ of gender roles yielded two discursive positions: first within a biological discourse of the various sex differences, second within an egalitarian discourse of ‘genderless’ relationships.

### ***2.1 A Man’s Responsibility - being a provider***

A man’s responsibility was one discursive object where men felt their ‘*place*’ was within heterosexual dating, with women’s financial expectations being a significant topic. Supporting the findings from Wu et al. (2021), men believed it was their innate responsibility to pay for dates, but this did not mean that they think women could not or *should* not offer to pay. There was conversation that men being a financial provider held with it the risk for men to “*get taken for a ride in certain situations*” (Carlisle). To feel their efforts were graciously received, men frequently referred to the practice of women “*offering*” to pay:

*“It's a good thing if she offers because that just shows us like, Oh, she cares about that stuff, too. But at the end of the day, I'm still gonna be paying the date. If I invite you out I'm paying.” (Zayn)*

*“Now it's like, you'd want to pay for the first date, but you'd want her to offer to also pay, it's weird, it's funny because like you are still doing the gesture. But you're seeing her intentions, which are, is she willing to commit to like sharing this relationship with you.” (Neutron)*

*“With a girl I would pay and I don't have any problems about paying but it wouldn't bother me if they expected to pay or were the type that would consider a turn-off if I didn't, even though I do.” (Carlisle)*

The data then was conflicting, as while men stated their roles as a provider, they never made reference to actually wanting to be one from an innate desire. This made it hard to disentangle whether men *being a provider* was a personal choice or a societal expectation (Wu et al., 2021). The practice of women being financially dependent on men was then linked with a ‘gold digger’ discourse, that constructs authentic connections between individuals as incompatible when men are in sole financial control.

Both Edward and Neville shared similar subjectivities by constructing women with high dating expectations as ungrateful if they are expecting “*go to somewhere really fancy*” or not keen to do something “*that's not expensive*” (Edward). Neville was the only man who “*wasn't willing*” to pay for a first date, but he made it clear that it was not a reflection of his feelings towards his partner, rather he points to his own personal attribute (“*I'm stingy*”). Men did not aspire to play the masculine role of providing financial security, if anything, they surveyed first date behaviours for signs of a ‘gold digger’, and if found, they would discontinue the relationship. Traditionally, women were both the property and financially

dependent on men, however the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century flipped this gender inequity, giving rise to gold digger, without having a necessary responsibility to return (Donovan & Donovan, 2020; Slavens, 2006). By positioning women who refuse to contribute financially as gold diggers (Foucault, 1982), men's dating expectations are legitimised and justified.

Beyond financial providing, there were mixed responses when men discussed the gendered trait of women being dependent on them. Some men like Neutron stated they would not want “*to date anyone that's dependent, financially or like emotionally*” as it implied that women were not self-sufficient or that men were in a state of “*control*” over them. For Neutron, a man's responsibility was not to be in charge of the relationship dynamic, as he recognised the “*toxic masculinity*” embedded in traditionalism. His subjectivity exemplifies his awareness of power when one individual is dependent on another. By choosing not to seek a partner who is dependent, he actively resists contributing to this “*toxic*” ideology. However, Zayn shows preference for a partner who *is* dependent on him as he states its “*not such a bad thing*”. Whereas Neutron conceptualised dependence as “*control*”, Zayn sees it as women trusting him to “*make the right choices*” and guide the decision-making for both of them.

## ***2.2 Treat men and women as individuals***

When asked about their belief in gender roles, men provided diverse (often conflicting) responses, making it difficult to consolidate their opinions. For a minority of men, there was a limited *place for gender roles* in dating, emphasizing the importance of removing ‘gender’ confines and treating men and women as individuals. Men communicated this ‘genderless’ relationship first by comparing the nature of the heterosexual vs homosexual relationship:

*“I'm obviously, like, heterosexual so I'm looking for these traits in women, but like, these [preferences] would be regardless of my sexual orientation, it would be what I'd be looking for in my partner.” (Neutron)*

*“[Paying a date] like, I would be okay doing that. But also, it's not because like, if I was gay, and I was dating a dude, then I would pay for the date if it was me that asked him out.” (Carlisle)*

The use of the word “*regardless*” of sexual orientation, as if it is not a core tenet for engaging in heterosexual relationships, shows how Neutron positions himself and women as equals and thus endorsing an egalitarianism in dating. This is reinforced by Carlisle as he reiterated that the responsibility to financially provide is dependent on *who* proposes the date, rather than it being a male-only responsibility. Their subjectivities exemplify an awareness of patriarchal power which places men in a dominant position over women, however they intentionally resisted this mainstream discourse (Foucault, 1982). In doing so, they remove themselves from a collective identity of hegemonic masculinity and see power as an *equal* commodity between men and women.

Vien offered a unique viewpoint that removing gender roles increased relational understanding:

*“I think it's important that you actually do have these moments where it's kind of switches around because then you can have a better understanding of each other and then everything is better”*

Overall, Neutron, Carlisle and Vien’s specific ‘language in use’ (Burr, 2015) was supportive of their positioning of treating men and women as ‘individuals’. Taking inspiration from Foucault (1979)’s penal work within ‘Discipline and punish’, King (2004, p. 30) proposes women also represent ‘the body of the condemned’, as women have “been

discursively constructed (condemned) as inferior yet also threatening to man, thus in perpetual need of containment and control and subjected (condemned) to particular disciplinary techniques”. Vien and Neutron were aware of the persecution women’s experience and made an attempt to not use language which condemned certain traits, even when it went against their own perceptions of *the perfect woman*. Their careful choice of words was another reflection of their subjectivity, but moreover, their discursive power to create a space for women to be seen, felt and experienced as equal to them, irrelevant of gendered hegemony.

Another way men endorsed treating men and women as individuals was in their responses to if they believed in equal or complementary relationships. The most common discourse centered around whether men preferred “50/50” split relationships. Although men were reminded that the focus was on dating, discussions often slipped to bigger concepts about equitable outcomes in more serious and established long-term relationships. While I tried to steer the conversation back to dating-specific topics, it was sometimes difficult to do, so I allowed men to speak freely.

Some men, like Carlisle, “*would greatly prefer gender roles to not have a place in dating*”, and their ideal dating role dynamic “*would just be 50/50*”. His language centered around an underlying fairness and constructed equal relationships as one where people were both expected to provide effort. In addition, he commented on his own personal struggle, “*I just feel like they kind of group... like, girls need to be this way, guys this way.*” His use of ‘they’ is paramount here, as it reiterates Foucault’s (1988) work on an intangible yet omnipresent ‘metapower’ that permeates to every layer of society, and imposes a legitimised universal knowledge of how people should be. I noticed how frustrated Carlisle became towards this section of the interviews, and in line with his other seemingly ‘outlier’ perspectives to a majority of the gender traits. It appeared to me that this topic both resonated

as a lived experience but he also experienced difficulty in holding an opinion which goes against the mainstream.

Similar to Carlisle, both Neutron and Vien supported egalitarian relationships, yet rejected the literal nature of going 50-50 with discourse constructing two implied faults of this ideology:

*“I come back to balance in that pure equity and pure equality are both wrong because if you're basing on pure equity, it's traditional, everyone has their roles, you stick to your roles. If you're purely equal, it's we're literally putting exactly 50/50 into this relationship. I am changing the diapers for exactly three and a half days a week. I am cooking exactly three and a half meals a week... it's like relationships is not 50/50, it's 100/100.” (Neutron)*

*“But like, if we, like everyone, always is 50/50, this and that. Then I'd be like, Okay, that seems kind of platonic... So that's my thought when we like go on hangouts with it's always like, we never split it. It's always one person pays like the whole date and then I'll get you the next time this and that.” (Vien)*

Neutron negotiates acting in an equal power dynamic within male and female relationships and that this is not bound by explicit equal level of actions. In contrast, Vien made reference to endorsing *equal relationships*, yet follows up by constructing a 50/50 dynamic as one that is innately non-sexual. While he rejects the notion of “*splitting*” costs for each date, he immediately sets up his own governance of power by an exchange (“*and then I'll get you the next time*”). Among all the male participants, Vien gave the greatest rejection to his own position as a traditional masculine provider, and instead made a few jokes to the

opposite (“*maybe I’m a bit more feminine*”). For Foucault (1972) discourses make available potential ways of seeing and being in the world, and in this context, men negotiate a new position within a *‘place’ for gender roles is*, egalitarianism that does not mean equal. Rather full effort

### ***2.3 We’re biologically different***

‘We’re biologically different’ was an alternative position to ‘treating men and women as individuals’, within the *place for gender roles*. Men tended to use “we’re” as a way present their opinions as universal ‘truths’ (Foucault, 1972) of men as an objective group. Even when men held some support for gender roles, they often took up a position within a biological discourse. This indicates that while men grappled with their moral location, they could not ignore the role of biology in shaping gender roles. While men negotiated their constructions of masculinity and femininity, men felt biology was something that could not be contested and, therefore, would continuously contribute to power imbalances present within heterosexual differences.

Men were able to take up two subject positions, taking up equality while also positioning themselves firmly within a biological discourse. This was most evident in their unanimous references to cis-gendered woman, where they referred to the difference between the genders as a difference between the sexes. This discourse was very popular as it ignited a fierce discussion with men as seen by each of their excerpts below:

*“ I guess, men doing a lot of that the heavier lifting sort of stuff or mowing the lawns.. I think it's a lot more natural for certain things.” (Edward)*

*“... one of the biggest difference between men and women is women give birth and men don't.” (Vien)*

*“Because we're fundamentally different. Like, biologically anyway... we're more testosterone and all that sort of crap. Like we're more physically stronger. Biologically. Like it's just a fact, like it's not a theory...”*

*(Dwayne)*

*“Men are less emotional than women. So when it comes to dealing in different situations you may be put in, men will think of things. Realistically, not emotionally, logically... I say smarter, more logical in general.”* (Zayn)

*“But as a whole, like biologically, guys are stronger... So if there's like a heavy box that needs lifting, I should be the one that lifts it. But maybe in a relationship with a woman's like a weightlifter and the guy is like just your average disc jockey. It's not wrong to, like get the woman to lift that box, you know?”* (Neville)

Their subjectivities position both themselves and women within a biological discourse (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017) and in doing so legitimises their preferences for traditionally feminine women as ‘natural’. These men use natural physical advantages to explain and govern men doing certain roles, yet Neville goes a step further by stating this same logic applies to woman who supersede the generic stereotype. His use of the word “*should*” imply an obligation, that it is necessarily *because* you certain physical advantages, you must fulfil the corresponding role.

Talk surrounding men and women embodying non-gender typed roles was mixed, with some men taking an equitable approach, where whichever ‘party’ in the relationship held a stronger skillset should therefore be the one to do it. For Edward, despite his strong support for gendered roles, he still admits to this grey area:

*“I can cook fairly well and she's not so good. And I feel like for me, some of those things is a little bit of crossover. Like Gordon Ramsay is probably going to cook most of his meals, you know, I think stuff like that.”*

This area in the data was confusing for both men and my findings. Whenever I questioned men about their support for gender roles, they struggled to back up their opinions especially when it came to whether it was based on biology or equality. They often ended up sitting somewhere in the middle, simultaneously supporting the idea of the fundamental *differences* and *sameness* as individual. They believe it was impossible to exclude the biological differences between the sexes within their negotiations of gender roles. Men also came from a religious standpoint, making reference to how “*god designed us this way*” (Neville) and that men have certain biblical roles of “*males leading the household, right?*” (Edward). For these men, embodying gender roles was not a personal choice, rather an expectation of them when creating and settling for a family. The use of rhetorical questioning here, “*right?*”, and other times in the data showcased how men externalised their practices based on common knowledge (Foucault, 1982).

The emphasis placed on the “natural” differences between the genders allowed men to feel vindicated in their opinions on supporting gender roles, without the fear of social condemnation. Dwayne made the most compelling and explicit reference to this internalized struggle:

*“Um, I feel like the way society is going right now is the heading. Culturally anyway, there's a big movement right now towards the fluidity of gender roles in dating and stuff like that, and there shouldn't be any roles and stuff like that... But maybe the next step would be like, am I just a minority of the thinking where it's kind of like, you know, the silent*

*majority that still thinks like me, but they don't necessarily voice it?*

*Because they're afraid of cancel culture or, or being ostracised or stuff*

*like that.” (Dwayne)*

Dwayne’s narrative exemplifies the marginalisation experienced when people reject a dominant discourse or legitimised ‘knowledge’ (Burr, 2015). Where Gen Z has been a generation pushing for radical social change, particularly in the area of constructing gender, it is interesting that Dwayne was the only man who pointed to the *power* within this relentless and dominant social movement; silencing those who support traditional viewpoints and condemning them to being made subject to (Foucault, 1979).

#### ***2.4 Sexism in Chivalry?***

The final section relative to *the place for gender roles* regarded men’s perspectives on sexism and negotiating chivalry in dating. Men were quick to state that chivalry was not rooted in sexism and were perplexed that it could be misconstrued as it. For Dwayne, doing acts of service for “*his*” woman was not a “*sexist thing*” but instead he believes “*it’s the respectful thing to do*”. Like most men in my sample, Dwayne made sense of chivalry as an action of care from a basis of love within the relationship. Men also often guided the conversation back to their own self-identity, referring to their role as a man, wanting to “*look after*” women. For Dwayne, his discourse was action orientated (Willig, 2021), as constructing chivalry in this way consequently places him in a positive role of being a ‘care giver’, rather than simply following traditional gender roles. Vien’s discourse offered a similar construction of men as the ‘caretaker’, through describing chivalry as an altruistic behaviour:

*“You telling me that is sexism is like the first ever I’ve ever heard that?”*

*Okay, I’ve always thought it was like, Oh, that guy’s like being chivalrous.*

*Like he's smooth and he's like risen her up, like, you know? He's doing all these smooth things. Like if I saw a bro like hand his jacket over to a girl and then, complementing her, I'm like Damn... you know what I mean? Like, it's smooth or they do the yawn, and then the arm goes over."*

I noted a shift in Vien's tone when discussing benevolent sexism, suggesting his personal offence at the accusation that men doing chivalrous acts is sinister. His use of hypothetical scenarios exemplifies traditional romance and uses specific words with positive connotations ("complimenting her") while simultaneously outlining the confidence men must have to initiate such an encounter. Furthermore, it's clear he idolizes this role model behaviour as he brings the context back to first person ("*I'm like Damn*"), acknowledging his admiration for the 'man' who acts in this way. Other men utilised neoliberal feminist discourses (Dabrowski, 2020), positioning women as the 'strong independent woman' position, attempting to reject hegemonic ideals of male superiority (Connell, 1987), and thus did not see women in *need* of help through traditional behaviours. Similar subjectivities were seen with Zayn as he too became visibly annoyed at the idea that a man's chivalry can be considered anything besides "acts of kindness":

*"I mean, I don't see it that way. Some of those girls see it that way. That's their own problem. Okay, but just because I put my jacket down on a puddle of water so you can walk?" (Zayn)*

However, not all men spoke of chivalrous behaviours in a positive light:

*"Doesn't it feel like those behaviours are pretty, like tokenistic? Like, you know, oh, walk on the fucking side of the road or whatever. And that's what I mean like it's kind of hypocritical because in my head I'm like, you should do that but like then it's like logically like does it matter?" (Carlisle)*

The use of “tokenistic” implies that for Carlisle, men engaging in behaviours is not for true personal desire, but rather an example of gendered performance (Eagly, 1987; Hunter et al., 2017) to fit socio-cultural expectations of men. During this part of the interview, Carlisle accompanied his blunt verbal responses with consistent laughter, which further exemplifies the idiocy he feels on the topic. However soon after Carlisle contradicted his position by stating, “... *unfortunately, this is a bit shit, but I feel like to be successful as a guy in a dating environment, you need to embrace some of those traditional values sometimes.*” Carlisle’s narrative exemplifies how regardless of the rise of egalitarian relationships, chivalrous behaviours and traditional dating norms hold greater power and subjective value with woman.

Where discourse diverged was surrounding the issue of benevolent sexism and its link to power imbalances within traditional dating. Men’s positioning here was the most consistent amongst the entire text, fundamentally asserting women were “*capable*” and that “*they can do it*” (Zayn). While men ranged on where they felt the *place for gender roles* was in dating, all seven men drew consensus that women were agentic, independent and equal with men. However, by positioning themselves within a discourse of egalitarianism of the sexes, it serves two purposes (Foucault, 1982, 2011). First, for men like Neutron and Edward, it legitimises their traditional gender role expectations as a preference and thus removes liability to be considered sexist or oppressive. Second, for men who did not support gender roles like Vien and Carlisle, it opens up discussion for the negative impact traditional expectations has had on men’s feelings of worth and external perceptions from other women. Furthermore, men frequently subjected ‘other’ men who were sexist by describing ‘the line’ which must be crossed for chivalry to be considered hegemonic:

*“I think it's when a guy starts treating a woman as though she's incapable is when it would become like, for example, if I get the door for her because I'm not like, Oh, she can't open the door.” (Neville)*

*“When a guy thinks that she's incapable of doing that, that's where I think it probably gets to a point of sexism but I think yeah, I think the idea of chivalry I think is obviously a thing is good because I think it shows the intentionality for the for the man to look after the woman.” (Edward)*

*“I understand why people are standing up against traditional gender roles... and when it becomes when it becomes misogynistic or misandristic, like that's when you have to draw the line.” (Neutron)*

Similar to Dosser (2022) critiques of toxic masculinity, which singles out ‘good’ vs ‘bad’ forms of masculinity, men’s use of third person to describe other “guys” who hold distinct subjectivities of women which are different to themselves. Consequently, doing this removes men from the responsibility to challenge hegemonic dating norms as they feel they do not contribute into the wider social practice of gender hegemony, despite having preferences which enforce longstanding norms.

## Findings women

There were two main discourses for females: The toxic male is out and Are we equals? These were constructed and negotiated in different ways as outlined in the table below.

Table 4: Female main discourses and constitutive parts

<b>The toxic male is out</b>
Inside matters <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Brains over brawn</li><li>• Bid for connection</li></ul> You may lead me, but you can't dominate me <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• (Leader)ship</li><li>• Being capable vs being mothered</li><li>• Dominant men</li></ul> Stoicism
<b>Are we equals?</b>
Dating is transactional There is a limit Yes but no to gender roles

### 3. The toxic male is out

This discourse captured women's dating preferences and how they negatively constructed the *toxic male* as both outdated and undesirable. This discourse was navigated through three main constitutive parts. First, women critiqued men's physical capabilities as insignificant to internal characteristics but also as an indicator for dating compatibility. Next, they shared subjectivities whereby they surveilled men's behaviours by allowing them to embrace certain traits of masculinity while condemning others that threatened their female autonomy. Lastly, stoicism was the only universally condemned gender trait, with women outlining various consequences when men take up this 'silent' and undesirable position.

### **3.1 Inside matters**

Multiple discursive objects made up this section around what is inside the person that matters. The two main ones are brains over brawn and bid for connection.

#### *3.1.1 Brains over Brawn*

Brains over brawn spoke to women preferring traits of intelligence, courage, and personality over external characteristics of the traditional male of being physically strong, athletic, and being large in stature. The gendered trait of being analytic and intelligent was brought up by five out of seven of the women. Two of the women made sense of it from a point of intellectual compatibility, “*I’m sort of like an academic myself*” (Peggy), while another highlighted how diverse intelligence offers the ability to learn and grow:

*“Because you don’t have to be smarter than me but be smarter in different areas” (Tatiana)*

For Tatiana, inside matters came from a belief that a man’s intelligence is crucial for a successful relationship. She desired a partner who can challenge her and in exchange who she can learn from in order to facilitate an ‘equal’ relationship of respect. Tatiana’s views were solidified from a unique experience with a man to whom she was “*constantly needing to explain*” things. This trait for her was a dealbreaker so she did not want to date them again.

While women’s subjectivities converged by constructing male intelligence as an object of capability and desire, most women resisted a dominant discourse that masculinity could not be artistic in order to be attractive:

*Leyla: “Ok so intelligence focused, not artistic?”*

*Sharapova: Like my kind of preference, I'd probably go for more artistic and creative. Like if there was a scale... That's to say if I were picking between an engineer versus a singer-songwriter. Then I would be more attracted to the singer-songwriter... Like I find that more impressive than like someone who's gone and studied to be a doctor. Something about like, surf happy life, then creating some music guitar like beach, with a fire going."*

The prioritization of male intelligence and disregard for artistic creativity, is rooted in socio-evolutionary and antifeminist discourses. These discourses depict men as more valuable partners, due to their ability to secure high earning jobs and distance themselves from traditionally feminine practices (Arrowsmith, 2015; Connell, 1987). However, Sharapova's talk rejects these *toxic male* discourses and opens up a new opportunity for men to take up an artistic position and not just be viewed as an 'attractive' man but the *most* attractive heterosexual man. Even when creativity was not prioritized over intelligence, it was still seen as vital for men to carry both traits ("*ideal person being like all those things*") (Eve).

Brains over brawn was not a discursive object where women compared internal versus external traits, but rather it was the difference with how women spoke of these attributes that exhibited Foucault's 'truth-telling'. When women constructed 'intelligence' they often used surface-level reasoning (e.g., feeling "*more attracted*"), whereas when they described (and rejected) muscularity, their discourse displayed greater depth. Women positioned muscular men within a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, that constructed these men as inherently toxic in two main ways. Firstly, bodybuilding was not seen as attractive, not because the

women did not want a fit man, but because bodybuilding requires work and “more ego” that may detract from a relationship:

*“I’ve just heard some negative experiences with men that were in the bodybuilding scene, in the really active gym scene, that they weren’t very attentive” (Tatiana)*

*“Honestly, I just feel like someone who like looks after themselves, but not to the point where they’re like a bodybuilder or super massive, like I feel that they got, like, maybe a bit more ego as well” (Peggy)*

Secondly, most women utilised stereotypical assumptions linked to discourses on ‘gym bros’ (“*I just feel like*”), rather than drawing on personal experiences. Their subjectivities subject men to various truths associated with muscularity and *engaging* in practices which facilitate it.

*“I’m not too sure why I don’t go for muscular. Maybe, like, I don’t want my potential partner in the future to be like, ‘man’s man’, like, I want us to be like kind of under similar labels. I don’t want to be like two different - physical wise” (Yuki)*

*“Just kind of like a bit off-putting in when they’re like super muscly super into the gym. they’re like, those typical gym guys who are you know, taking photos of themselves all the time, like, love themselves a bit. Too much. Think they kind of God’s gift to the earth?” (Barbie)*

By doing so, these women exercise their own discursive power (Foucault, 1991), and contribute to shaping the discourse around physical fitness and masculinity, with the ability to even punish men who embodied this trait (e.g., “*self-centred*”, “*God’s gift*”) (Foucault, 1979;

Marcoccio, 1995). This language frequently restricted men to be viewed positively within their masculinity, despite prioritising muscularity, thus restricting an opportunity for action (Willig, 2014).

These assumptions of muscular men were further exemplified with the opposite type of man, the “dad bod”:

*“The perfect medium would be he has tone, has muscle, but I don't care if you've had a good winter. We absolutely don't care if you've got a belly. It's all good” (Bella)*

*“I wouldn't mind someone who's got a bit of a dad bod. But still takes care of themselves.” (Barbie)*

Both Bella and Barbie use language that governs the appropriate level of how men's physical appearance impacts their lifestyle. Bella juxtaposes her “*perfect*” man would have some muscle yet states liking more “*belly*” resulting from a more sedentary or indulgent “*good winter*”. Moreover, she uses “*we absolutely...*” to generalise her opinion (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017) that all women share her views on men's bodies. Similarly, Barbie expresses her desires but conditions her attraction a “*dad bod*”, using “*but*” to insinuate that beyond visual aesthetics, her preference is also influenced by a behavioural lifestyle that is still subject to *her* subjective assessment of how well a man takes care of himself.

The only competing discourse that placed male muscularity and athleticism in a positive light came from Eve and Sharapova:

*“It's kind of like, you know, a turn on that there's like a bit stronger. You can like, lift some things that I can or you know, like in the bedroom, like*

*that's also really fun as well. So like, having that like sort of masculine as a core aspect, because I feel like maybe it's a balance with like, the feminine.” (Eve)*

*“I've always been quite sporty. And so being with someone who's quite sporty themselves and quite, like competent in that regard and quite coordinated. I find it attractive. And if they weren't, I think I would kind of find that unattractive” (Sharapova)*

As previously mentioned, Eve was one participant who highly valued both intelligence and artistic abilities, yet she was the only woman to make explicit mention of her sexual desire (“*turn on*”) when dating a muscular man. She makes sense of inside matters, as one that prioritises both traditional and non-traditional masculine traits, as she relates it back to her own self-identity and the desire to feel “feminine”. Whereas for Sharapova, a man with *brawn* who was valued as being compatible with her sporting ability.

Interestingly, another discursive object which lay within the *toxic male is out*, is through the trait ‘avoidance of femininity’ in the men. Here preferences were diverse, with the conversation revolving how men choose to dress either masculine or feminine. For example, Peggy loves a man in a traditional suit because it is the “*opposite*” of her feminine self, whereas Bella loves a man who paints his nails because it shows he’s “*comfortable within himself*”. An *avoidance of femininity* was a social practice which exemplified men’s association to hegemonic ‘dominant’ masculinity, as if they were comfortable engaging in feminine practices, they were seen as in touch with their own femininity. Consequently, this construction is also positioned men as ‘safe’, by not being complicit in the longstanding ‘bro-culture’ in Aotearoa (Trotter-Simons, 2018). Eve’s language details this below:

*“Anything avoidance of femininity. It’s obviously like this poor male has been taught that they can’t... You can’t cry you can’t like paint your nails or like wear pink because it’s too girly. Like I think it’s just so archaic way of thinking and it’s not their fault necessarily because that’s what they’ve been taught.”*

Eve acknowledges the struggle and marginalisation men face when their way of thinking and acting goes against a dominant discourse of antifemininity with traditionally ‘masculine’ men. Her language is compassionate to men (*it’s not their fault, poor men*), supporting Foucault’s (1972, 2011) ideas that individuals are bound by the limited discourses which are available to speak from. Sharapova held similar subjectivities, acknowledging that men have “*been conditioned by society*” to avoid femininity, however unlike Eve (and Foucault), she rejects the idea that men are *passive* entities under the power of social discourses. Instead men are willingly “*putting pressures on themselves*” to act in a way she deems not “*natural*”, and by doing this appoints men with the power to (re)produce a knowledge of hard masculinity which welcomes in the soft feminine (Foucault, 1991).

Overall, women’s discourses revealed tensions and contradictions when comparing brains over brawn. They scrutinised the ideal masculinity, as a man who must be intelligent yet not *too* intelligent, to reject creativity, taking care of their body yet not *too* muscular, and emotionally in touch but not parading around as *too* feminine. This negotiation left little room for men to act authentically without facing the threat of being positioned as the stereotyped *toxic male*.

### *3.1.2 Bid for connection*

For women, the *toxic male* is one who was out of touch with their internal sense of self and is unwilling to create a bid for connection. Like men, women all made sense of a bid

for connection, constructing their ideal man as compatible to their own uniqueness and desires. This idea of compatibility can be seen below when two women gave opposing answers towards their preference for ‘athleticism’:

*“I’m not really a big sports person. So I probably wouldn’t be like, keen to be dating someone who’s like a big rugby star or really into that sort of thing. I’d probably go for someone more introverted. Probably because I’m also quite reserved, it’s probably just one I’m drawn to. Not to say that I want someone to pull me out of my shell a little bit, but it’s probably more comfort factor.” (Peggy)*

*“...just what I’m used to like, we’ve been all kind of, as a family like, sports was quite pushed onto us. And so I guess that’s something that I know I would want to have in common with someone else. But again, is it a deal breaker? No. But like just thinking of who I am attracted to.” (Sharapova)*

Women often did not evaluate men’s capacity to embody traditional masculinity markers as a sign of ‘worth’, instead they valued compatibility of traits to ensure long-term relationship satisfaction. For Sharapova, we see the depth of *inside matters* here in relation to connection, as despite her passion for a sporty man, she still does not consider this a dealbreaker. Sharapova described not pursuing a relationship because the man was “*just avoiding all forms of vulnerability and openness*”. Men were positioned as the ‘toxic male’ if they did not engage in practices which facilitated emotional intimacy and vulnerability in the bid for connection.

Other ways women spoke on bid for connection was by the mention of coming from a similar heritage, like for Yuki:

*“I feel like maybe it's my like, Japanese culture as well. Like in Japan, not many people, like swear and I'm not really used to it and I feel like it's a bit childish in a way. Like I've dated about four people in the past and all of them were like, Asian heritage. They were like more of a like studying hard type rather than like sporty.”*

Yuki's bid for connection preferences stem from her personal and cultural experiences to form a relational practice. Foucault (1972) would suggest this is based on shared forms of knowledge surrounding social norms. Women spoke passionately, branding the toxic male as one with various faults for their inability to connect, similar to Bella who believed men were seen as “*autistic, if they're rejecting emotion*” or Sharapova's ability to sense “*fuck boy vibes*” when men are standoffish and reserved.

Overall, *Inside matters* captures how women did not conceptualise or restrict men solely for traditional expectations of ‘masculinity’, rather by their level of compatibility, bid for connection and willingness to be open.

### ***3.2 You may lead me; but you can't dominate me***

This section constructed discursive objects of male leadership, pursuit and dominance in dating. Women also outlined two positions men could take up; being capable or being mothered. Overall, negotiations surrounding the *toxic male is out* left finite room for men to behave that would not be considered authoritative instead of acting in servitude for women.

#### ***3.2.1 Leadership***

Four women spoke about leadership and all of them expressed strong support where leadership was constructed as an honorary role that represents masculine integrity and a sense of noble characteristics. Leadership was an object of selflessness and men acting in servitude

for women, unlike other markers of *the toxic male*, which idolizes power and dominance over women. Constructing leadership this way had a direct impact on dating practices (Foucault, 1982), as women felt comfortable to embody a followership role without it being seen as a form of patriarchal control but instead showed eagerness and commitment to the relationship.

The women frequently used the word “*initiative*” to describe male leaders who were proactive and considerate of themselves and their dates. Eve gave an example of a man taking initiative of domestic duties, “*you know, you see like the laundry needs to be done*”, while Peggy spoke of how “*endearing*” it was when a man initiates and plans a date. Yuki spoke of previous dates with men who “*were not independent*” and then proceeded to outline how this meant she had to, “*organise the dates and like where to go out to eat, I have to kind of initiate everything*”. During this conversation she appeared uncomfortable, as she resisted being positioned in a dominant ‘feminist’ discourse (Downing Hansen, 2002; Henley et al., 1998), that forces her to *want* to take up this ‘masculine role’. Instead, she preferred adopting the position of a follower within a traditional femininity discourse (Foucault, 1982), which contributed to her own self-formation and feelings of femininity.

Contradictory to Yuki’s construction of ‘you may lead me’, Peggy constructs leadership as a shared responsibility:

*“Leadership but not in like they are the leader, like we have shared leadership. And I feel like that like leadership and followership role. I don't know how so like, it should be equal. It shouldn't be the male that's the leader. It takes a leadership role over a female like, I reckon it's 50/50 like, sometimes the guy will do it and then sometimes the female would do it and you just kind of follow each other or meet each other, depending on*

*like, what the situation is or what she wants. Like if it's a date idea, or if it's like, a plan to like move house or something"*

Notably, she makes the distinction (“like they are the leader”/ “the male that's the leader”) that her support of leadership as a quality is distinct for it as a gendered role. She furthers her point by personifying “*following each other*” to establish a push and pull of responsibility. For Peggy, *you may lead me*, comes with the condition that being lead also gives privilege and opportunity to lead a man also. She uses action orientated language (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017), situated within an egalitarian discourse which removes any accusation for endorsing a traditional belief that men are in a position of authoritative control in the relationship.

Sharapova utilised the same discursive technique by endorsing leadership, yet limiting her gendered language as not to imply it is a role exclusive to men. Instead, she states that the “*person*” who is more equipped should take on the role of leader. In her case, Sharapova describes herself as an “*unorganised person*” and thus justifies her preference for men to take “*leadership to plan*”, so like Peggy it removes any accusation of supporting gender roles. As Sharapova was the most against gendered roles, it was interesting that leadership was one of the few she did endorse, as it was done so in a complementary nature similar to bid for connection.

An alternative approach women constructed to *you may lead me*, was the positioning of the ideal man as courageous protector. Previously, there was contention surrounding the assignment of a man as the leader due to their gender. However, when women desired a man to demonstrate a duty of care over them, contention was non-existent. The explicit use of “*stands up*” was referenced by three of the women below:

*“Courage, standing up in any situation. If you've had the courage to stand by his own convictions as call his friends on shit, to call people out on shit to like, protect someone who they like, I think that's attractive” (Bella)*

*“I really have a bit of an issue about my partner not being able to stand up for me. I don't want to be with someone who isn't able to stand up for me and I have to fight for myself” (Tatiana)*

*“So if they like weren't courageous for me that's like, they're not brave or adventurous. They're a little bit timid. They're okay with just say letting things be and pass by. Not like really standing up for themselves, which for me, it's not really that hot” (Eve)*

The phrase “*standing up*” is action orientated and can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, men are positioned as agentic to resist other toxic and sexist discourses from their peers. Bella further shared a personal experience where a man would not “*call out*” his friends sexual intimidation with another girl. Second, it has direct consequences for women’s feelings of safety with a partner, both emotionally and physically. Within a discourse of the *toxic male is out*, women instead positioned the courage within leadership as fundamental towards a ‘positive’ masculinity.

Women allowed men to lead them when it was done so embodying some traits of traditional masculinity, including courage, leadership and self-reliance, however if they embodied other traits of leadership like assertiveness or dominance they were considered hegemonic, while simultaneously if they did not embody these attributes, they risked being considered “*weak men*”(Eve), “*little bit timid*” (Peggy) and “*not really that hot*” (Bella).

### 3.2.2 Being capable versus mothering

'Self-reliant' was the second most discussed trait by six out of seven women, within the object of 'male capability'. For example Peggy desires, "*hygiene, cleanliness, like clothing... Well put together, organised, their life under control*". In comparison, Tatiana's talk speak to capability in a work/life context:

*"Because I live at home since I'm studying full time. But I think, I mean, most of the guys I'm going on dates with work full time. So that's where it would be an issue for me because if you're working full time and you're still living at home. But if you're bringing in full-time money and you're still living at home, not paying rent or whatever, that's embarrassing."*

*(Tatiana)*

Tatiana opened up about a few previous dates with men who she described as "*not really self-reliant*" because they lived at home. Her talk negotiates the practice (Foucault, 1982) of financial stability is linked with masculinity discourse that constructs it as contingent on independent living. While she understands the circumstances ("*Because I can understand, definitely now with the price of everything*") her language limits an opportunity for action, believing that men who do not conform to dominant western ideas of individualism are then viewed as "*embarrassing*". Tatiana, like most other women, unconsciously exercised a discursive power within their narratives (Foucault, 1982, 1991) by surveying what a man "*should*" be or face the threat of being positioned as incompetent. Women's subjectivities converged on this idea and felt justified to critique a man's worth based on his capacity, with his "*autonomy already existing*" (Bella) prior to meeting them. The *toxic male is out* was not just one of overt sexist control, rather, he was any man who fell short of what women expected them to be.

Resistant to mothering a partner was a repetitive object brought up by participants. Women frequently positioned men who were not capable, reliant or taking leadership within a 'boyhood' subject position, which simultaneously placed them within a 'mother' position. This double positioning had direct effects on their subjectivity (Willig, 2014), as it inhibited women's ability to respect men, thus they were not able to take the 'lead' in dating. This burden of being positioned a "mother" is evident across multiple narratives:

*"I don't want to date someone and feel like I'm their mom. Kind of like, I wouldn't feel attracted to them if I had to, like do their things. Yeah, if they're independent, I think I will feel more as a woman" (Yuki)*

*"And so if they are self-reliant, and they're not dependent on me or their mom or their friends to like them, that it's their personality, that I know what I'm getting. I don't want to be your fucking mum" (Bella)*

We see how women talk on multiple negative consequences of needing to be looked after by symbolising them as a "baby" and a "big child". For Yuki she conceptualises the undertone of male self-reliance stemming from traditional notions of masculinity as she states she "feels more as a woman", similarly for Bella a self-reliant man shows authenticity of character (*I know what I'm getting*) before entering into a relationship, as for her men that are capable and self-reliant in their own lives, will therefore be seen as autonomous unlike a child. All women strongly disdained the traditional expectation of women to "look after" a man as exemplified by Peggy's excerpt.

*"I don't want to baby them like having to pick up after them or like cook for them like they can look after themselves. I don't have to like take on like a big child and look after like that's just not attractive at all having to*

*look like I've got so much going on in my own life like to keep myself together let alone keeping someone else together” (Peggy)*

Toxic male was exemplified as needing ‘mothering’ and this was one of the strongest and most cohesive positioning of the women towards the traditional representation of women as caregivers in heterosexual relationships. Conversely being capable and self-reliant were valued.

### *3.2.3 You can't dominate me*

Male dominance is a core tenant in the debate of gendered issues and hegemonic masculinity in heterosexual relationships (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The trait of dominance was brought up by all seven women, yet their preferences ranged, each making sense of *you can't dominate me* differently. This section was explored through traits of general dominance and men being the sexual pursuer. *You can't dominate me* discourse uncovered how women feel conflicted with male dominance in different settings. Sexual dominance and men being the ‘sexual pursuer’ raised many tensions and emotions. Bella talks specifically of the double standard with the regards to sex. Bella resists the idea that only men have the privilege to be sexually promiscuous:

*“I think it was the second date. And he was like ‘How many people have you slept with?’ and I was like, ‘Why do you care?’ And he's like, ‘Well, that obviously means you have sex with a lot’ ... I just received that as you're putting way too much importance on my history. And you think that women who have slept with a lot of people are less valuable than women who haven't. And I don't care. I see it as like, if you slept with a lot of people, you're gonna be better at sex, same with a man as well.”*

Bella's anger and distress was evident as she spoke, her volume the highest within in her interview. She conveys an exhaustion from taking up a feminist position within a dominant sexual drive discourse, that unequally privileges men (Gilbert & Walker, 1999; Hollway, 1989). Foucault (1978) points to society's pursuit to seek the 'truth' surrounding sex, and the obsession surrounding its rules and surveillance of women's bodies, which is evident in Bella's narrative.

While some women did make reference to positive associations with dominance, "*in the bedroom, don't mind a little bit*" (Sharapova) or "*dominance is something that I enjoy at times*" (Eve), it was more common for talk to centre around the potential harms. The trait of men being the sexual pursuer particularly did not sit well for the women, feeling it was just "*one-sided approach*" (Peggy) to sex. Peggy was audibly giggling at the idea, with her questioning reply "*doesn't it feel like predatorial?*". This same questioning was used by Sharapova, "*Right? Does that make any sense?*", as she states that men who are dominant are self-serving and on a "*power-trip*" against women. Their engagement with me as a female researcher was evident in this discourse, with their rhetorical questions inviting a level of reassurance that women collectively share the same subjectivity and 'knowledge' (Foucault, 1972).

The biggest issue underlying *you can't dominate me*, was women feeling sexual dominance was a way men fulfilled internalised feelings of inadequacy as Bella states "*dominance is strictly about self-assurance*". Similarly, repetitive use of "*over*" exemplified a power inadequacy women felt between the genders, "*that they then have dominance over you*" (Sharapova), or "*I don't want to be dominated over*" (Eve). Even when women enjoyed aspects of male dominance their language negotiated a space where they too were allowed to

also have the opportunity to be dominant alongside men. In addition, a toxic male was one who was 'too dominant'.

### **3.3 Stoicism**

*Stoicism* was the most discussed trait by all seven women and the only trait that had universal agreement. Women boldly and ferociously spoke about their disapproval of men not being forthcoming with their emotions. Women felt stoicism upheld anti-femininity discourses surrounding male vulnerability (Smith et al., 2015) and created various barricades within the dating process:

*"I don't like stoicism. Yeah. He can fuck off, like have some emotional intelligence, if you practice stoicism to just not feel things" (Bella)*

*"And it doesn't give like any depth to the relationship like if we can connect emotionally like there's no, there's nothing better." (Eve)*

*"Like, communication is really important for me. So if they don't show emotion, like you don't really talk a lot." (Yuki)*

*"Without the actual emotion, you don't really know how they feel. Yeah, they can kind of tell you how they feel. But until you see the actual real emotion, you're not really going to know" (Barbie)*

*Leyla: "So what would you think of a man that doesn't show emotion?"*

*Peggy: "They're just not interested in me. Like I can't I trust you fully"*

Each narrative constructs different consequences of stoicism; "emotional intelligence", "depth to the relationship", broken "communication", lacking "actual real" emotion and

“trust”. We see above how women construct stoicism as an object of harm by making men subject to their own “self-knowledge” (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). Stoicism was the strongest constitutive part to *the toxic male is out*, as when men “*put a wall up*” (Peggy), it fed into a gender imbalance, that women were not privileged to be on an equal footing in communication with men.

Sharapova’s narrative held the strongest subjectification:

*“Not being able to show any emotion.... what are you a sociopath? Like, you know, like, that's just not normal. And it's, I do feel like that has been kind of a bit more normalised. So I find that scary... Like, it's all like, Yeah, 'I'm masculine', or 'I'm real tough'” (Sharapova)*

Her use of “*are you a sociopath?*”, exemplifies how her ‘truth games’ (Foucault, 1972, 1982) positions men as objectively mentally unwell, if they restrict their emotional expression. She supports her assertion of truth by using the phrase “*that's just not normal*”. This phrase implies that society has established a general consensus that men should not openly express their emotions without being viewed as flawed, as if they are a “*sociopath*”.

Beyond the consequences stoicism has on men, women also made sense of stoicism from the implications it had on a woman’s *bid for connection*. Yuki spoke of her own acts of service like cooking a meal or giving presents as crucial to her own self-esteem that men are able to express their emotions and in doing so validate her efforts (“*knowing that they're happy with me*”). Yuki’s example shows the dual interaction emotions have in dating that she constructs as paramount to its success. Interestingly, discourse began to shift when women’s talk governed the acceptable parameters of men’s emotion. Their attitudes oscillated between constructing emotion as ‘normal’ yet showing *too* much emotion positioned men as the ‘cry-baby’. For Barbie she states,

*“So many people are like, oh, you know, boys shouldn't cry or guys shouldn't cry. If that's how they feel like why? I mean, you don't want someone who's like gonna cry about everything. But to be able to show emotion. When it's, I'd say, valid.”*

She attempts to reject a dominant social practice within hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987), yet she doubles back in the following sentence when her construction closes opportunity for men to act authentically as she controls what is “*valid*”. This demonstrates how the practice of men crying is linked with a femininity discourse, that constructs vulnerability as incompatible with masculinity. Multiple women made references to not wanting a man to “*cry every day*” (Yuki) or on “*first few dates, you wouldn't want him crying*” (Tatiana). Their subjectivities construct a limiting reality in which men who are too emotional risk being undesirable as a male partner, yet if they are stoic they risk being labelled toxically masculine.

Overall, this discourse carried with it many discursive objects which constructed the ideal against the ‘toxic’ male. While preferences and constructions were varied greatly, for the most part, women resisted concepts of the traditional masculinity feeling it contributed to a gender hegemony and hindered their own freedom. Women constructed a *new* form of masculinity, that emphasised inner qualities over physicality and dominance, with the goal of eliminating the *toxic male (is out)*.

#### **4. Are we equals?**

This discourse sparked a lot of questioning, bargaining and contradicting. Subjectivities were individual and difficult to converge into one way of understanding the link between power and gender roles, both discursively and in the social world. First, dating was constructed as a fundamentally *transactional* practice, where men either expected

something in return or women felt compelled to reciprocate certain behaviours. Next, women outlined how chivalry and sexism was contingent to men's underlying intentions which allowed them to feel empowered. Lastly, *yes but no to gender roles* referred to the negotiations within discourse, that allowed certain forms of masculinity while rejecting others.

#### ***4.1 Dating is transactional***

In discussions of equality and chivalry, the transactional nature of dating was frequently constructed as a discursive object. The discourse *Are we equals?* was first spoken from the position that men act in a “*tit for tat*” (Eve) manner to get what they want, or that women felt indebted to men. Paying the date was a distinct behaviour that highlighted power tensions between the men and women. There was no single answer to men always being the financial provider, as discourse varied on the context of the dating scenario and the personal ethics that guided subjectivity (Willig, 2014) on payment and power. Peggy and Sharapova were adamant on paying for themselves and not relying on men but for two different reasons:

*“I'd rather just pay for my own so I feel like I don't owe them anything”*

*(Peggy)*

*“No, let's go 50/50 Because I would never ask a guy to pay like on the first date. So I've always felt very uncomfortable if the guy pays” (Sharapova)*

The practice of men being the financial provider is linked with a discourse of female domesticity which constructs women as dependent on men (Vogler, 1998). Both Peggy and Sharapova construct money as an object of power, carrying transactional value more than its literal use, rather as an expectation for sexual gratification. These constructions position men who assume the role of financial provider role as self-serving and thus limits the opportunity

(Willig, 2014) for them being seen as altruistic. When I pressed further about why Sharapova felt “*very uncomfortable*”, she stated, “*I don't feel more cared for*” and that she feels “*ungrateful*”, as she does not partake in the traditional gendered performance women are expected to fulfil (Hunter et al., 2017).

In contrast, Bella takes up the position of the pseudo-feminist within an egalitarian discourse, by seemingly constructing an ‘equal approach’ to date paying to assert her independence, yet contradicts herself by controlling men’s behaviour to what *she* believes is ‘right’:

*“My perfect ideal situation for finances is not 50/50 but give what you can give, you go as much as you can go to a situation. If I’m going on a date with a good business guy who's earning fucking six figures a year, I'm expecting him to pay for more than me, but I want to be able to do my contribution which might be buying my ice cream.”*

For her dating is constructed as a transactional activity that necessitates fairness and consideration of how to be involved . While her language implies that men have the freedom to “*give what you can*”, *she* is also setting a standard for an acceptable level of contribution.

Similarly, for Yuki men being the financial provider was not a necessity, yet she still preferred it as “*it shows they want to invest a bit in you*”. However, she further goes on to outline that men unwilling to put something in or to be “*generous*” in the initial stages of dating out of “*fear that he might not get anything back*” was her greatest turn-off.

In contrast to the rest of the women, Barbie and Tatiana shared similar subjectivities by constructing money as their gendered expectation from men:

*“Um, so first few dates like obviously him paying for the date. I think, especially the first date, the guy should always pay usually because they're the one who asked you out” (Barbie)*

Barbie makes two assumptions with her talk; first the use of “*obviously*” to imply universal knowledge that it is always the man's role to pay, and the second was that men are always the pursuers of women. Where other women saw money as an object for manipulation, Barbie saw it showed enthusiasm and compensation for her time. Tatiana mirrors this narrative of men paying for women's time:

*“So, if you would ask the person on the date, so you've asked me on a date, you're wanting to have my time you want to hang out with me, then you pay for it. I didn't ask you out on a date, so I'm not going to pay for it.”*

Her use of first-person language (“I didn't” / “I'm not”) governs her self-formation (Foucault, 1988) and removes responsibility of the ‘self’ and instead places it on the objective ‘pursuer’ role. While she resisted explicitly making financial provision a gendered expectation for men, when I offered her the same counterargument she eventually conceded, “*like I do kind of believe that like men should pay for the date*”. This was paramount in her interview, as Tatiana simultaneously spoke on rejecting the gendered roles placed on women, yet had expectations of what “*men should be*”.

While subjectivities differed among women, they all distained feeling men were using them for *their* transactional value. Yet, they did not take any action to regulate their own language and resist a dominant discourse that men use their financial power to control women. Instead, they positioned themselves as vulnerable and exploited, which allowed them to dictate how men should behave without being labelled as ‘toxically feminine’ (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). Women contradicted themselves by positioning men

as the only character engaging in transactional behaviour. These persistent tensions echo McCann (2022) idea of ‘toxic femininities’, where women masquerade as fighting for equality, yet discipline and punish men who break these boundaries. It was clear that women exerted a discursive power (Foucault, 1972, 1982) over men where their ‘shared knowledge’ over money was an objective truth for power.

#### **4.2 *There is a limit***

Negotiations surrounding chivalry and benevolent sexism were plentiful, however for most women *there is a limit* to what they considered appropriate dating behaviours. From the onset of their discourses women constructed benevolent sexism as ‘irrelevant’ ideology modern men had.

Peggy stated men offering her his jacket is “*kind of sweet*” because it shows “*that they care*”, yet follows up her sentence, “*but then it depends probably on what it is that they're doing*”. For Peggy, men's underlying intention when acting with chivalrous behaviours is ultimately what determines her comfort in engaging in them, without feeling a threat to her personal autonomy. This idea of uncovering a man’s true “*intention*” was mentioned explicitly by a few women:

*“I think it comes back down to like, intention because like he's thought about, like he's thinking about me. He's like, wanting to do something nice for me because he cares about me. Not because he's trying to like up me or show dominance or like think I'm weaker, so I can't do it. It's really about the intention behind it.” (Eve)*

*“I think chivalry is absolutely fine to a point and it's really nice to a point.” (Bella)*

Leyla: "So what's the point?"

"The point is where it's being done because they don't think the other person is capable of it's like that internal dialogue of like, "I'm going to do this for my woman because she can't do it herself" ... It's nice because someone did it because they want to make you happy. So it's intention." (Bella)

Supporting previous literature (Gul & Kupfer, 2018), women were generally attracted to benevolent sexist attitudes for men to take "care" and make them "happy". However, few women were also aware that these behaviours present as a gender-based prejudice (Glick & Fiske, 2011) and can provide an opportunity for men to "show dominance" (Eve) over, rather than treating them as equals. These narratives exemplify how women made sense of *Are we equals?* as they would not take a singular stance, rather their talk and truth-telling of experience, outlined men embodying gendered roles as a spectrum contingent on their evaluation of their attitudes.

Other women constructed chivalry with a more definitive and polarizing perspective. For Barbie men being chivalrous was non-negotiable as she made sense of it in dating as a sign of good faith for "showing his character":

"Well, you know, further along in the relationship, is he not going to be like, the kind of typical man that I want, you know, having, you know, way into the future like when it comes to like kids and stuff and then be like, are you going to work and all that kind of thing." (Barbie)

According to Foucault (1982), Barbie's discourse imposes a 'law of truth' that men who exhibit chivalrous behaviour also fulfil the traditionally masculine gender role of a man,

exemplified further with her reiterations of “*you know*”. For Barbie, *there is a limit* to how men are allowed to act and if they do not meet her expectations of a “*typical man*”, they are not worthy of her. Contrasting other women, Barbie does not position herself as the ‘victim’ within a gendered discourse of *Are we equals?*, rather she constructs gender equality contingent on individuals fulfilling traditional gendered roles. The only woman who explicitly spoke against a dominant discourse of chivalry was Sharapova, stating it was “*gimmicky*” and not being “*impressed by that kind of thing*”.

*There is a limit* was also constructed when women spoke directly to benevolent sexism as a relevant discourse in Gen Z dating. For Yuki, “*I didn't really think about it like, that it means [we're] seen as weak*”, with Tatiana providing a similar narrative:

*“There are plenty of women that hold places of power, academia, like women have proved that they can have jobs, ... that they are capable of making money. When a man does that for me, I don't take it as they think I can't take care of myself. ... I don't take it that way. And from my experience, I haven't met a man who thinks that women can't do X, Y & Z things. So I think yeah, the sexism was relevant, maybe four decades ago... but as we're becoming more I feel like liberal as a society, generally, it's not a sexism thing.” (Tatiana)*

Tatiana, like most women, attempted to reclaim relational and gendered power against men by positioning themselves as the ‘strong, independent women’ within neo liberal feminism discourses. They often referred to macro-level “*society*” successes of women as an argument that benevolent sexism was an ‘irrelevant’ issue with young men. Their acceptance of chivalry ‘on their terms’, is contradictory as the practice of male-only chivalry is

intrinsically linked to a benevolent sexism discourse, that constructs women as the weaker sex compared to men.

#### ***4.3 Yes but no to gender roles***

Women's attitudes towards gender roles were often ambivalent, contradictory and conditional. When women opposed gender roles often it was because they felt gender roles contributed to dominant discourses of patriarchal dominance and subordination of women (Connell, 1987; Schippers, 2007). When they agreed with gender roles it was conditional on power, dominance, and bid for connection.

Peggy demonstrated this in her use of gender-neutral labels, "*I feel anyone can pay*", "*we are both working*" and "*I feel anyone should be able to do advances*". By using these collective nouns she removes both the 'feminine' and 'masculine' position and instead asserts herself (and others) within an egalitarian discourse, that no one gender has more power or authority in the relationship.

Other women recognised traditional gender roles as a form of societal 'power' which controls men, as well as women. For instance, Yuki attests, "*it shouldn't be like, females should be like this males should be like this*". In line with Foucault (1982) teachings on power, she contextualises the socialised norms that men and women are expected to fulfil, as a form of social obedience that power demands. Similarly, Eve constructs women as the greater 'victim' in comparison to men:

*"If you're thinking about like putting a cube into a square, like you know, it's a much narrower like shape that you have to fit into, whereas males have a lot more flexibility"*

Gender roles are then a tool for conformation and control over women, as men are positioned with greater power to overcome social pressure. Bella supported this idea of the restriction that gender roles create:

*“I don't want to play the role of fucking 50s housewife. I don't want to have my feelings really diminished down to what men have described them to be. So there's manners and chivalry, which are attractive qualities but just as I don't want to prescribe roles to someone else, I don't want to be prescribed a role that is then deemed dateable or feminine enough, because equality would be you are two people who work together coexist like work well together. It's you know, not 50/50 All the time. Sometimes you got to give ninety percent because they only have to listen...”*

Her repetitive use of first person statement “*I don't want*”, externalises gender roles to a larger entity, similar to the ‘metapower’ within discourse itself (Foucault, 1991), which “*prescribes*” a role that takes no consideration of her own agency. Moreover, she negotiates an ideal egalitarian relationship as one that does not ride on the fulfilment of an arbitrary level of “*enough*” femininity that “*men have described*”.

Four women navigated the complexities of gender roles, balancing the idea of upholding gender roles from a biological perspective while also acknowledging the potential threat to gender equality. This was evident in their uptake of biological discourses, constructing the various ‘differences’, “*we have different hormones... our brains work a little bit differently*” (Yuki) or “*our neuro chemistry is wired differently*” (Tatiana) and “*males and females are inherently different... like cellular and biological level*” (Eve). These women all utilised biological discourses at the beginning of their responses, often accompanied by a flippant and blunt tone of voice. This language attempted to construct them as ‘objective’ and

logical thinkers towards this gendered debate, while resisting being positioned as an 'emotionally' driven women (Schippers, 2007). This idea was solidified as women quickly transitioned their talk from the 'yes' to the 'but no' towards gender roles in discourse.

Tatiana was hesitant to give her honest opinion for fear her subjectivity would be misinterpreted as supporting a gender hegemony. After reassurance that her honesty was paramount, she continued, "*men should be to a certain extent, like muscular and domineering*" yet quickly followed her sentence with "*but I also don't believe that woman can't be the intelligent, woman can't be high-income earners.*" Her narrative seeks to open up an opportunity for action (Willig, 2021), to reject the idea of mutually exclusive gender roles. However, by supporting the dominant societal discourse of what a man "*should*" be, she contradicted herself. She attempted to take up a pseudo-feminist position, to justify her preferences but also make her feel vindicated that she is fighting for gender equality.

Similarly, Sharapova struggled the most with *yes but no to gender roles*, as despite being the firmest to oppose them, her discourse describes witnessing friends struggle in dating as a result:

*"I guess it's at that point where no one's really taking any roles on it looks really difficult... No one's making any plans. I feel it's just a bit kind of all over the show. Like neither side's putting in an effort because the girls are like, 'oh, well he should be the one to make the first move'. And, you know, oh, 'he should be doing this' and blah, blah, blah. So I think there's this expectation of gender roles. But then some guys are maybe not upstanding those gender roles, so then nothing's really going on."*

Sharapova further stated, "*I don't think I believe in them*", again taking up the pseudo-feminist position fighting to gendered equality, yet simultaneously blaming men by not being

“*upstanding*” their role. Negotiating the unknown by removing ‘gender’ as a cultural construct from dating roles in the heterosexual dynamic and looking collectively as *equal* people in the relationship was an implicit idea multiple women offered. To do this, it required reconstructing traditional gendered expectations in order for them to feel equal in power with men:

*“There's always room for these roles in any sort of thing, but it's not just male roles or female roles. It's a role that you play in a relationship”*

*(Bella)*

*“I feel like that balance nowadays. Like I see it more often. Like the female having the power like in the relationship or dating. I think it just depends on the person.” (Yuki)*

*“I feel like gender roles needs, I don't know, need to get like a redefinition.” (Tatiana)*

*“I think it's just about your relationship itself, then like it should be very dependent on the two people” (Sharapova)*

Their shared subjectivities (Foucault, 1972, 1982) led them to see a future social and psychological reality where individuals are not constrained by societal pressures or expected norms. In constructing this “*redefinition*” of gender roles, women often spoke of dating where roles are no longer intrinsically linked to ‘gender’, rather attempting to take up a position in an egalitarian discourse between “*two people*”.

Overall, most women preferred a hybrid dating dynamic, that combines the best bits of traditional gender roles while modifying those that negatively impacted their self-perception as *equals* to men. In their attempts to position men as using them for their

‘transactional’ value, women’s discourse revealed how they too unconsciously contributed to this practice in dating. There was a rigidity in their use of language , as women felt there was a limit to men’s acceptable behaviours in line with their true intentions, leaving little room for men to act outside of those limits. This was a persistent discursive power visible in the text which will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

This chapter commences with a brief summary of the research, including my key findings. Next, I delve into how the main ideas align to existing literature and theories on gender roles. Finally, I discuss the implications of this study, the limitations that were present and provide recommendations for future research. The structure of the chapter provides a separate discussion of the findings of men and then women and then considers the implications for heterosexual dating in general.

### **Summary of Findings**

This research explored Gen Z's attitudes towards gender roles in modern-day heterosexual dating. Three research aims were central into this inquiry: Firstly, to understand Gen Z's heterosexual dating preferences and their attitudes to traditional gender role traits in the opposite sex. Secondly, to explore how Gen Z discusses and experiences gender roles in their own heterosexual dating lives. Lastly, to understand how Gen Z made sense of power in dating including equality, sexism, and chivalry. The findings unveiled four core discourses. There were two main discourses for men - The perfect woman, The 'place' for gender roles, and two for women - The toxic male is out and Are we equals? (summarised in table 5). Overall, both men and women negotiated traditional masculinities and femininities, to emphasize certain traits as desirable, while condemning others for the various subjective faults they bring to heterosexual dating.

Table 5: Men main discourses and women main discourses

Men	Women
<b>The perfect woman</b>	<b>The toxic male is out</b>
<i>Bid for connection</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women speaking up</li> <li>• Compatibility</li> <li>• Attractive women</li> <li>• Emotional maturity</li> </ul>	<i>Inside matters</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brains over brawn</li> <li>• Bid for connection</li> </ul>
<i>The sexual woman</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the past define the future? (purity vs sexual advances)</li> <li>• Modern modesty</li> </ul>	<i>You may lead me, but you can't dominate me</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Leader)ship</li> <li>• Being capable vs being mothered</li> <li>• Dominant men</li> </ul>
	<i>Stoicism</i>
<b>The 'place' for gender roles</b>	<b>Are we equals?</b>
<i>A man's responsibility – being a provider.</i> <i>Treat men and women as individuals</i> <i>We're biologically different.</i> <i>Sexism in chivalry?</i>	<i>Dating is transactional</i> <i>There's a limit</i> <i>Yes but no to gender roles</i>

Men articulated the *perfect woman* as one who fulfilled their bid for connection, by speaking up having compatible interests, being 'attractive' and regulating their emotions. They curated and controlled women's sexuality, in line with a romantic desire for romantic reciprocity, yet maintaining sexual morality in public perceptions of 'their' woman. The *'place' for gender roles* negotiated men's self-perceptions of responsibility, alongside their responses to power issues in chivalrous behaviours. Other negotiations navigated the essentialist biological discourses against those who wished to abolish the psychological rituals embedded in gender roles.

Women passionately spoke out against all tropes of the 'toxic male', asserting their preferences for a man who instead prioritized traits of intelligence, courage, leadership, and capability. There was an element of solidarity among women, through their shared

subjectivity constructing the harms of toxic masculinity, linked to dominance and stoicism. Throughout *Are we equals?* women outlined the fundamental transactional nature within dating, expanding to their control of chivalrous behaviour which is in line with their predetermined limits. Their opinions surrounding gender roles were conflicting, as they attempted to construct a future of 'genderless' roles in dating, yet they frequently referred to the faults, both experienced and imagined, of how essential they are to successful dating.

### **Constructing the ideal other**

Men's subjectivities negotiated between traditional and neoliberal discourses to construct their ideal women, with most sharing similar positionings of women. Firstly, men's talk still supported various dominant discourses on femininity. This was seen in their condemnation of body hair, sexual promiscuity and the need for women to regulate their emotions so as to not be positioned as the 'hysterical' or 'illogical' woman. They universalised their 'knowledge' as various 'truths games' (Foucault, 1982), visible in their frequent assumptions surrounding certain feminine traits. Drawing on these truths limits women being vocal in their sexual autonomy and pleasure, without being made subject to the 'truths' men have regulated in society. Overall, re-occurring valuation of sex based preferences, such as 'attractiveness' and 'purity' was seen in this study (Buss et al., 2001; Eastwick & Finkel, 2008; Luo & Zhang, 2009), which may indicate some evolutionary based traits are more inflexible to change compared to others (Buss, 1989, 1995).

Despite their use of more traditional discourses men's talk was frequently action orientated (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017; Foucault, 1982), constructing women as agentic, capable, and equal to men. These constructions allowed men to be perceived as progressive and remove accusation that their traditional preferences could be interpreted as hegemonic (Connell, 1987). There was an emergence of newer constructions of idealized

femininity, positioning women as agentic within discourses of the perfect women, resisting traditional 'silent' positionings seen in femininity discourses (Jack, 1993). At times these men rejected evolutionary perspectives of what women *should* be (Buss, 1989; Trivers, 1972), as seen in their disapproval of female passivity, submission, and sexual receptivity. In contrast, these men constructed these traits as a hinderance to relational 'connection'.

To construct their subjectivity, they created discourses of 'connection' to resist the traditional practice of men being the pursuer (Kachel et al., 2016), as they too wanted to feel desired and pursued by women. This is noteworthy, as the 'male bravado' has dominated masculinity discourses (Forrest, 2010; Tolman et al., 2016), yet these men were comfortable showing their emotional vulnerability against these norms. By way of social processes (Burr, 2015; Gergen, 1985), the continuance of these resistant and open conversations with young men, may re-conceptualize the dominant stereotypical discourse, that heterosexual men do not prioritize intimacy and connection when dating. This conclusion is further supported in my study, as no male participants utilised the 'male sexual drive discourse' to construct their innate biological sexual urges, despite its paramount place in gender role literature (Allen, 2003; Gilbert & Walker, 1999; Hollway, 1989; Tolman et al., 2016).

Constructing the ideal masculinity showed various tensions and negotiations within women's talk, exhibiting an awareness that their support for various masculine traits had direct impact on their subjective femininity. These tensions reflect the issues Kimmel (1987) raised nearly 40 years ago, as changes seen in masculinity discourses are the direct effect rapid evolution in femininity discourses. For my female participants, rather than talking of the perfect man, women frequently utilized a discourse of the 'toxic male' as someone to avoid. This was evident in their discursive tactics using language in resistance 'to', rather than in support 'of' certain masculine traits. Contradictory to growing evidence that suggests

women value physical attractiveness (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008; Luo & Zhang, 2009), the females in this study sought to de-emphasize men's external appearance, prioritizing instead connection. These discourses suggest that women are transcending the bounds of gender roles as their subjectivities actively resisted historical norms, which sought to oppress them within the confines gender hegemony (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017; Connell, 1987; Downing Hansen, 2002; Henley et al., 1998).

Of note though, woman's subjectivities were often contradictory. In line with Kimmel (1987), women struggled to construct their ideal masculinity and often expressed rigid boundaries, oscillating between 'just enough' and 'too much'. For instance, the construction of the 'toxic male' within a stoicism discourse has been present in New Zealand literature, previously constructed as the hardened 'kiwi bloke' (Trotter-Simons, 2018). There, women's subjectivities constructed 'normative performances', where societal norms have reinforced men repress their emotionality as a practice in their heterosexual relationships (Trotter-Simons, 2018). However, within this study, I found my female participants frequently contributed to this practice through their discursive constructions, whereby reserving emotions was 'unnatural' yet showing *too* much positioned men as the 'crybaby'. Consequently, these constructions and positions actively limit the practice of male vulnerability within dating spaces (Willig, 2021), by suggesting men can *do* emotionality wrong.

At times the women constructed their desire for a 'softboy' by prioritizing inner qualities (Muldoon, 2023), but at the same time they lacked awareness of the implications of their language as a social practice, thereby inadvertently reinforcing the desire for a stoic, 'toxic male' (Burr, 2015; May & Mumby, 2004). Overall, these findings contradict evidence from Koenig and Eagly (2014), under Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987), that discourses on

gender change in response to evolving social roles. Rather, the rigid social construction of masculinity (Burr, 2015) may be progressing further away from the gender dichotomy of the past (Hare-Mustin, 1994).

## **Negotiating Power**

Aotearoa has seen significant progression in gender equality over the past century (Allen, 2018; Armstrong & Abel, 2020; Else, 2018; Tombs, 2021), yet tense negotiations of power are still deeply embedded in discourse among Gen Z. In part, this can be attributed to Gen Z's unconventional and individualistic nature, attempting to *do* things their way (Harari et al., 2023; Schultz, 2021). These individualistic negotiations were visible across the participants discourses, with often distinct 'sense-making' of gendered issues of equality, sexism, and power.

## **Men's power**

It is clear that men recognize the historical patriarchal power held by them in gender dynamics (Eisen & Yamashita, 2019; Lamont, 2015). This has resulted in intentional discursive tactics to dissociate themselves from certain forms of 'bad' masculinities (Dossier, 2022), and position themselves as progressive, egalitarian, and inherently 'good' men (Eisen & Yamashita, 2019; Lamont, 2015). While there were a few instances where men would make explicit references to holding *power* within heterosexual dating, it became clear men used their power implicitly, rather than explicitly (Foucault, 1982). As previously mentioned, the most obvious use of men's discursive power was their regulation of women's body, through their construction of the sexual women (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). Within an "economy of power relations" (Foucault, 1982, p. 780), men pulled on mainstream and hegemonic constructions that purity and modesty show levels of innate 'goodness', and that

perversion from this norm labels the women as lacking self-respect. Their use of biological and religious discourses, served as legitimised ‘knowledge’ systems (Foucault, 1972), allowing their preferences to be seen as ‘natural’, ‘normal’ and ‘moral’.

Crucially though, not all men utilised this discursive power, with some explicitly refusing to use ‘essentialist’ language (Burr, 2015) pertaining to what women must be. Rather, by constructing the ‘individuals’ position within egalitarian discourses, the male participants communicated their subjectivity that women and men should be devoid of the ‘rules’ linked to their gender, in order to experience mutually satisfying heterosexual dating. Often these men shared their frustrations over traditionalism in dating norms, at times pointing to the societal pressure they face to align with women’s expectations. This internalised struggle for Gen Z men has been growing (Esslinger & Chang, 2022), but is often overlooked in discussions about power in gender.

Previous literature has largely focused on women’s association to benevolent sexism (Cross & Overall, 2018; Gul & Kupfer, 2018), so within this research it was advantageous to see how men constructed it. Men actively adopted more nuanced neo-liberal feminist discourses to construct men’s subjectivity as fundamentally *not* sexist through men taking up the ‘caretaker’ position, constructing chivalry as a practice of care for women not power over women. Men also talked of frustration when their actions were misconstrued as negative reflection of their attitudes towards women. In contrast, not all individuals felt this way, with some constructing chivalry as trivial, ‘tokenistic’ and gendered performance (Eagly, 1987; Hunter et al., 2017). These constructions served as an opportunity for action (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017), allowing for practice in dating, to not be restricted to traditionalist behaviours of chivalry as the only indicator that men indeed care for you. These men sought to de-emphasize the importance of maintaining traditional dating norms, thus supporting their

anti-traditionalist subjectivity (Willig, 2021). These findings suggests that the link between chivalry and sexist attitudes among Gen Z men is complex, as they attempt to eradicate more traditional benevolent sexism discourses (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

### **Women's power**

As the social movement for gender equality has progressed, it is has become enmeshed with different waves of feminism and feminism discourse. Of particular interest, the emergence of 'newer' femininities, such as toxic (McCann, 2022), hegemonic (Schipper, 2007) and neoliberal (Dabrowski, 2020), have offered Gen Z women alternative ways to reclaim their relational power in society. Specifically, the uptake of the 'pseudo-feminist' position constructs women as the gendered minority, and masquerades as a form of egalitarian approach to gendered issues (McCann, 2022). As seen in this study, feminine subjectivities often utilised these discourses, with women often expressing their frustration with being told *how* to act. These emotions, however, served as a form of discursive power, being constructed as the 'victim' to a gendered hegemony (Connell, 1987), thereby women felt justified to reconstruct the 'knowledge' surrounding gender roles, using a one-sided approach to change (Foucault, 1972).

This was most visible within the 'transactional nature' of dating discourses, and the construction of money as an object of power (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). Women harshly critiqued various dating practices, including chivalrous behaviours and finances, as methods for their control by men, however they still frequently supported and desired these norms to be maintained. Lamont (2013) research supports this as they found women endorsed male gender roles, using essentialist language of what men *need* to be, yet simultaneously resisted women being confined to traditionally feminine roles (Lamont, 2013). This illustrates how certain dating practices, men being expected to pay, have been normalized through

social processes (Burr, 2015), signifying that these have become taken-for-granted practices. Additionally, Foucault (1988, 1991) states that despite the individual having innate ‘freedom’ to choose, they are confined by the power that dominant forms of knowledge produce, by way of socialised dating rules. These tensions, highlight how Gen Z women are struggling between maintaining cultural traditionalism within heterosexual dating, while also negotiating their own liberal individualism (Adams et al., 2019).

A second distinct way women negotiated power, was evident in their frequent refusal to show universal support for masculine traits. It became clear through various discursive objects, such as, ‘you may lead me, but you can’t dominate me’, women’s talk held various tensions, by wanting to relinquish *some* power to men in order to be led, yet careful not to give too much, to avoid an inequitable dynamic. Where previous findings have seen women feel ‘victim’ to men’s power (Allen, 2003), my female participants positioned themselves as the ‘strong, independent women’. These constructions of the feminine ‘self’ echo previous literature (Jackson & Cram, 2003), in particular the “bad bitch” position seen in Samardzic et al. (2023, p. 138). These positions allowed women to feel like they were not giving up their relational power, with the ability to enjoy the practice of dating on their terms (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017), even when they endorsed traditional gender roles, like men leading the relationship (Shrikant, 2023).

The practice of chivalry has seen contentious debate in recent neoliberal and feminist discourses, particularly with women debating its practicality in heterosexual dating (Gouws et al., 2018; Wright, 2018). Here, most women dismissed benevolent sexism as a mainstream ideology that men prescribe to, to feel *power* over women. Rather, they conveyed their subjectivity through neoliberal feminist discourses (Dabrowski, 2020), constructing the capability of women. These findings deviate from previous work, where only ‘feminist’

women found men who engage in traditional dating behaviours to be linked to sexism (Backus & Mahalik, 2011). This may indicate that drawing on neoliberal feminism discourses may provide an alternative opportunity for women to resist being positioned as subordinate to men, which previous literature has not observed.

In contrast, the construction of chivalry as an object of care, mirrored that of men's discourses, yet women were quick to follow up by constructing the 'limit'. This language was action orientated language (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017), as it allowed women to engage in behaviours which aim to positively serve them, contingent on their choice. In doing so, they retain their relational power, by feeling they were not passively following chivalry as a social practice. This finding coincides previous literature (Glick & Fiske, 2011; Gul & Kupfer, 2018), that while women may endorse less explicit benevolent sexist attitudes compared to men, they still desire them.

### **Implications for gender roles in dating**

Mounting evidence shows younger generations are converging towards non-gender role conforming (Chappetta & Barth, 2016; Chappetta & Barth, 2022; Eastwick & Finkel, 2008; Luo & Zhang, 2009) and egalitarian-based heterosexual relationships (Brooks & Bolzendahl, 2004; Buss et al., 2001). While existing literature has heavily focused on these findings through quantitative measures, this research sought to understand *why* attitudes in Gen Z are gravitating these directions.

To make sense of egalitarian relationships, both men and women adopted contemporary '50-50' discourses, yet their constructions competed against one another, some conceptualising it as putting in half the *effort*, while others constructing as offer of equal *power*. Crucially though, most participants implicitly still constructed the *need* for gender roles, despite the emergence of new discourses surrounding 'genderless' relationships. These

discursive negotiations exemplify the real-life tensions in the neo-liberal dating landscape (Adams et al., 2019; Esslinger & Chang, 2022; McMaster, 2013), as Gen Z are finding traditional gender roles to be outdated concepts (Clifton, 2021; Lamont, 2020), yet their desire for traditionalism is still embedded within their subjective dating preferences (Cameron & Curry, 2020; Eaton & Rose, 2011; Paynter & Leaper, 2016; Robnett & Leaper, 2012). One explanation for this internalized conflict, stems from Gender Schema Theory (Martin & Halverson, 1981), which suggests that individuals are deeply and unconsciously programmed by gender schemas in early development and thus are extremely difficult to alter in later life. So, despite the rapid progressions in all social, political, and cultural contexts in Aotearoa, these findings exhibit how slow the ‘knowledge’ surrounding gender roles is to change.

In the pursuit for collective change, egalitarian relationships cannot only be constructed as ‘genderless’ relationships, as people may still hold traditional values yet support fulfilling, equitable heterosexual relationships. Similarly, the societal obsession to define new gender roles follows “regimes of truth” (Foucault, 1988, p. 18), thus creating further stereotypes and opportunities for punishment (Foucault, 1978, 1979). Rather, the focus needs to be on the *subject*, recognizing how people unconsciously subjugate the ‘other’ to their own assumptions surrounding masculinity and femininity norms (Foucault, 1982; Foucault, 1991). I frequently challenged the contradictions of their discourse for both men and women, yet this seldomly changed their perspective. Thus, I found their unwillingness to take responsibility for their subjectivity, the greatest threat to gender equality and reformation of socialised rules.

In spite of this, it was encouraging to see some voices emerging, with clear, declarative resistance to following dominant masculinity and femininity discourses. With

language being the “pre-condition for thought” (Burr, 2015, p. 10), their sense-making of their idealized other was congruent with their ideological positioning, thus enabling them to rely less on stereotyped gendered knowledge. This movement away from a strict binary, that positions individuals as ‘traditionalist’ or ‘progressive’ may be what is actually needed to facilitate change and de-emphasize the ‘meta-power’ within society which seeks to control (Foucault, 1988).

### **Limitations and future research**

There were practical restraints so I could achieve my research aims within the parameters of a master’s thesis. These constraints (finances, time, and resources) impacted how many people I could interview. Seven males and females were not a large sample, but I did have a diverse sample in terms of age and cultural background (more cultural differences in the men than women). There are advantages and disadvantages to having a diversity of sample the purpose of this research was not to generalize the findings and I could still identify dominant discourses. The method of recruitment meant a majority of my participants were university students, which may reflect a middle-class and privileged account of Gen Z (Hanel & Vione, 2016; Johnston, 2018). Future research could venture to smaller, lower socio-economic and rural communities, beyond Auckland, to ensure a wider representation of dominant and minority discourses. More purposeful sample of different ethnicities would also be worthwhile. Similarly, this sample was restricted to heterosexual and heteronormative relationships in order to explore dynamics of power between men and women. With 29% of all 170,000 self-identifying LGBT belonging to Gen Z (NZ, 2022), it is crucial that future research explores how gender roles impact these relationships. This will allow a wider representation of the voices within Gen Z.

As mentioned in chapter two, previous studies have suggested that people's attitudes towards their ideal partner preferences differ from the qualities of their actual partners (Backus & Mahalik, 2011). To help combat this, I included questions about participants ideal partner preferences, followed by questions about their real-life dating experiences in relation to these preferences. However, as interviews progressed, I discovered that some participants had limited or no dating history, having married their first and only partner. As a result, I had to adjust my interview questions to focus more on their ideological positioning and attitudes, thus limiting my findings to report on actual dating experiences. This was more of an issue for the men in this study. Future research could require participants to have a minimum number of dating partners or experience to address this limitation.

In terms of methodological limitations, the table of traits was a unique tool utilised to initiate conversation. However, since this list was a curated summary of pre-existing measures on masculinity and femininity, the results are constrained to these preferences and there is a possibility that other elements could have been missed. I was aware of the potential implications the phrasing of traits could have on participants, and I was careful to use neutral language to avoid bias. In terms interviewing both men and women, identifying as a woman, was interesting and did lead to some dilemmas which required high levels of reflexivity at all stages of my analysis. I found the women's findings more difficult to analysis and at times thought it would have just been better to focus on one gender. Future research could explore one gender in more depth from different positionalities or research that is with couples where they negotiate their discourses together.

It should also be noted that there are certain limitations regarding the use of FDA in this research. Although the overarching focus of this research was analysing discourses towards the opposite gender, it meant core concepts relative to FDA including 'technologies

of the self' and governmentality (Foucault, 1991) were not easily applied and therefore not used in analysis. To remedy this, future research could focus on how people govern their own behaviours in line with dating practices, in order to be perceived as more appealing to the opposite gender. This would better inform how people transform and recognize the 'self' as a subject within a larger system of legitimised 'technologies', as seen in Foucault's (1988, 1991) works on 'self-government' which permit self-constitution (Mitcheson, 2012).

Alternatively, utilising a different methodology, such as narrative-discursive approach (Taylor & Littleton, 2006), would shift the lens from the 'meta-power' of discourse, to people's use of narratives specific to their contextual settings, while being aware of wider socio-cultural scripts. This also allows exploration of more solidified relationships and marriage contexts.

Lastly, Foucault (1972) and other social psychologists, such as Bandura (1977), have argued that the knowledge surrounding gender and gender roles is largely influenced by the culture in which they exist. However, there is currently a significant lack of research that examines gender roles from a cultural perspective within dating. Graham et al. (2023) research with aboriginal men highlighted the importance of exploring the relationship between culture and gender role adherence and maintenance between groups in Australia. As my research did not recruit any Māori participants, it would be beneficial to examine gender roles from a Te Ao Māori perspective using kaupapa strategies (Wilson et al., 2022). Specifically, this could aim at analysing Māori discourses that compete against dominant Pākehā concepts of masculine and feminine norms, considering Māori is a traditionally matrilineal culture (Pihama, 2020; Whānau, 2018).

### **Concluding thoughts**

It can be argued that modern society is more progressive, accepting, and open to change than ever before. Paradoxically, we are also experiencing a society where discussions

on social issues are being heavily scrutinized, with the fear of offending others and not being *politically* correct. One area that is currently under debate is traditional gender roles in heterosexual dating, with many people feeling uncomfortable to openly express their opinions, with the exception of some online platforms. This was evident among the young men and women in this study, rigidly negotiating between the norms of the *past*, and the ideals of the *future*. Society is only getting more complex, as we are navigating through unprecedented times of a global pandemic, geo-political conflicts, and climate instability. Overall, participants expressed a desire to redefine dating norms, but their language consistently controlled, stereotyped, and blamed the ‘other’ rather than taking accountability for their own subjectivity to gendered inequality. In response, Gen Z now more than ever need to be adaptable, challenging the knowledge they have of themselves and the ‘other’, in order to navigate a rapidly changing social world.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Project information

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### **Tradition in modern times: Exploring Generation Z attitudes towards Gender Roles in Heterosexual dating.**

#### **INFORMATION SHEET**

Thank you for your interest in my research project. My name is Leyla Olguc and I am a student in the Master of Science in Psychology programme at Massey University. I am inviting men and women between the ages of 18-26 years, who live in Auckland, New Zealand to participate in research about attitudes & experiences towards gender roles when dating.

#### **Project Description**

My aim is to investigate both the lived experiences and personal attitudes young adults have towards engaging in gender roles while heterosexual dating.

#### **If you choose to participate in this study:**

If you choose to participate in this project, you will be asked to think about your attitudes and experiences when dating during a 45 mins - one-hour interview (approximately) with me. In advance, I will send you a copy of the questions before the interview and be available to discuss any questions you have. For example, I may ask you about certain physical, emotional and personality attributes of the opposite sex and you can discuss what you consider to be of importance when both choosing who to date and while you are in active dating. This research does not explore committed relationships, instead it focuses on the dating experiences of individuals looking for a partner and before they have agreed to enter a relationship with someone.

The interviews will be recorded using an audio recorder. The interviews will be semi-structured, which means I will ask you to tell me some stories to reflect your experience, but these can be brief. We will meet in a private, quiet location within the Massey University Albany campus including booked study rooms or a public library booked room. If you do not

wish to meet in person or for more convenience, we could meet via Zoom. I expect each interview will take between 60-90 minutes at maximum.

To thank you for your time in my research I will be gifting a **\$40 Westfield gift card** to every participant who completes the interview. This will be given at the end of the interview and is not redeemable for cash but is able to be used at any Westfield mall.

### **The benefits and risks of this research:**

This research will contribute to an enhanced understanding of the experiences of both men and women when dating in New Zealand. There is a significant lack of males experiences within psychological research, in particular males in dating within Aotearoa New Zealand. With the evolution of dating within modern times to be highly digitalized through dating apps and the growing popularity of public figures speaking about traditional gender roles, this research has the potential to be very useful in understanding actual opinions to global discussions.

As this research is discussing personal and sometimes private stories of dating, this research may bring up unpleasant feelings of thoughts. However, this is a small risk and I will ensure that the interview balances both positive and negative experiences. Within the interview you have the right to decline any question that you do not wish to answer. Additionally, all personal identifying information e.g., name, names of others, places of residence and work, will be removed and you will be given a pseudonym to eliminate the risk of being identifiable.

Please know that if at any point you want to stop the interview you can and you will not need to explain why you want to stop. I am voice recording our conversation so that I can later transcribe it into a written document. After transcription this will be emailed to you so that you may read over it and make any desired changes if you want. I may provide with a summary of research findings if you want this also. At the bottom of this sheet will be support organizations if needed.

### **Data Management**

The confidentiality and privacy of all participants are of utmost importance and all names and identifying information will be removed from the transcripts, data and write up of this research. All transcripts will be stored on a password protected file on a password protected computer. After approving of the transcript all the audio files will be deleted. I will store all consent forms, with your real names printed in a locked filing cabinet. Then I will digitalize the consent forms, password-protect the files and store them on a password-protected computer. Upon completion of the research, identifiable data will be destroyed at the end of the research. Deidentified data will be destroyed after 5 years.

## Participant's Rights

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 (for up to two weeks following the interview);*
- *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.*

## Contact details:

My primary supervisor Dr Kathryn McGuigan, Lecturer at Massey University, Auckland.

If you have any questions about the study please contact me or my supervisor.

<p><b>Leyla Olg</b> Student, School of Psychology Albany Campus Massey University Phone: +64 [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]</p>	<p><b>Dr Kathryn McGuigan</b> E-mail k.mcguigan@massey.ac.nz</p>
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## Support information

If you find the interview distressing, please use your existing support services. It can also be useful to talk with your GP or other medical professional that you have a good relationship with. You can also contact or use these resources:

- **1737, need to talk?** If you're feeling anxious, down, overwhelmed or that you need to talk with someone, you can call or text the helpline for free, anytime (24 hours, 7 days a week) 0800 1737 1737 – free call
- **The Depression Helpline** (0800 111 757) or text 4202
- **Healthline** (0800 611 116)
- **Lifeline** (0800 543 354)
- **Samaritans** (0800 726 666)
- **The Lowdown** www.thelowdown.co.nz or free text 5626
- **Health and Disability Commissioner** <https://www.hdc.org.nz/mental-health-addictions/where-to-find-help-and-support/>
- **Mental Health Foundation website** <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/in-crisis/support-groups/>

## **Ethics approval**

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 23/27. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Associate Professor Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email [humanethics2@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics2@massey.ac.nz)."

## Appendix B: Advertisement poster



# DO WE NEED GENDER ROLES IN DATING?

- Who should pay for the first date? Does your ideal partner follow traditional norms? Who's your ideal preference?
- Inclusion Criteria: I am looking to interview 15 men and women, aged between 18-26 who would like to discuss gender roles in heterosexual dating. Participants must reside in Auckland and Identify as heterosexual.
- We will discuss gender roles across multiple contexts: including physical characteristics, emotional traits and dating 'norms'. This will include discussion surrounding your individual preferences and how these compare to traditional norms.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 23/27. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Associate Professor Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, email [humanethics2@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics2@massey.ac.nz)

If you are interested or would like more information, please contact Leyla: [redacted] or [redacted]@massey.ac.nz



## Appendix C: Consent Form

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### *Tradition in modern times: Exploring Generation Z attitudes towards Gender Roles in Heterosexual dating.*

#### **PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL**

I have read and I understand the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from this study up to two weeks after my transcripts have been returned to me.

1. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.
2. I wish/do not wish to have my transcripts of my recordings returned to me.
3. I wish/do not wish to have data placed in an official archive.
4. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

#### **Declaration by Participant:**

I \_\_\_\_\_ [print full name] \_\_\_\_\_ hereby consent to take part in this study.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix D: Interview Guide**

The following is a general outline for the semi-structured interviews conducted in this project. Broad topics are reflected in the headings, subtopics are included in the bullet points, and some examples of how I might word questions are included in quotation marks.

These will be semi-structured interviews. Therefore, participants will be informed and structured around the context of the participant, their lived experiences, and how they respond during the interview. The questions may vary between interviews.

### **Introductions & admin**

- Introductions, formalities, getting comfortable
- Information sheet and consent form signed
- Brief project summary

### **Getting to know the participant & whanaungatanga**

- Tell me a bit about yourself:  
E.g., “what you do for a living?”, “Are you currently studying”, “who do you live with?”, “are you currently in a relationship”.  
(Builds interview rapport and this information can give wider context to some of the perspectives and experiences we discuss later in the interview)
- Reciprocity: sharing a bit about myself, my background, my interests in this project, etc.

Prior to questions participant will be briefed on this research and given the current definition of what *dating* defines in this study.

### **Personal Preferences in line with traditional norms (attitudes & experiences)**

\*Participants will be given the table of traits for the opposite sex in categories of physical, emotional, and behavioural attributes to familiarize themselves before answering questions

- “How would you describe your ideal partner to date?”
- “Based on this list of traditional traits, does your partner preference follow traditional masculine / feminine norms?”
- “why / why not” Or “which norms and why”
- “Thinking about your own dating history, can you tell me about whether you have actually gone on dates with people who align with your gendered preferences?”
- “Thinking about your own experience, can you think back to a time you chose to not pursue a potential partner after a date/s because of any [physical, emotional, and behavioural] attributes?” i.e “any dealbreakers which has stopped you from pursuing a relationship.”

#### *Follow up*

- “tell me more about this – what/why did you find that attribute unappealing in a partner?”

### **General gender role ideology & Egalitarian relationships**

- “Do you believe in the importance of gender roles for men and women.”
  - men and women are equals in their dating expectations/ should do the same thing?
- Give participants background knowledge on egalitarian relationships to inform correct understanding: for example,

- In an egalitarian relationship everything is split equally, essentially a 50:50 stance is taken. In comparison traditional gender roles is more aligned with complementarianism or equity – that men and women have different expectations/ norms based on their sex.
- “Based on this comparison, is your ideal relationship more for equality or equity?”
- “Do you feel men and women have different dating expectations?”
- “Talk to me a bit about why?”

### **Power & Benevolent Sexism:**

Give participants background knowledge on benevolent sexism and its link to modern chivalry to inform correct understanding: for example,

- Following on from the last statement, when we discuss chivalry and other ‘traditional’ norms of behaviours in dating, e.g. men walking on the side of the road or picking a girl up in his car for a date, they date back to an ideology from men viewing women as the weaker sex and is the reason these traditional behaviours started. Despite seeming ‘positive’ on the outside it can be interpreted as one form of sexism, known as benevolent sexism.
- “Based on this information, when you or if you see other men act in line with these traditional behaviours or with chivalry, do you feel like benevolent sexism applies?”
- “Why or why not?”
- “Is there any parameters when people act in a chivalrous way that it becomes sexism?”

### **Debrief**

Bringing conversation to a natural end

- “We are nearing our finishing time, is there anything else you wanted to mention?”
- “I think we can stop right here.”

Thanking the participant for their time

- Thanking them for their courage to speak and acknowledge their effort giving up their time.

### **Providing resources, avenues to seek support, etc.**

“We have been talking about a lot of personal topics and some potentially emotional experiences you have had. If you feel you need to talk this over with someone, I have attached a list of resources you may contact for your needs.”

“Additionally, if you have any questions related to the study do not hesitate to reach out and ask me.”

### **Bringing conversation back to the present,**

“Do you have any plans for the day?”

## Appendix E: Tables of gender traits

LIST OF TRADITIONAL GENDER TRAITS FOR: MEN

PHYSICAL / APPEARANCE	COGNITIVE / EMOTIONAL	BEHAVIOURAL / PERSONALITY
Physical strength / Muscular	Stoicism (doesn't show emotion)	Financial provider (pay for dates)
Physically domineering in size	Courage	Self-reliant (not dependent)
Traditional clothing (pants, shirts, shorts)	Intelligent focused – not artistic/creative focused	Leadership (organising everything surrounding dates, picking you up)
Athletic	Assertive	Initiates all sexual advances
Avoidance of femininity (no skirts, painted nails, makeup etc.)	Analytical	Dominance

LIST OF TRADITIONAL GENDER TRAITS FOR: WOMEN

PHYSICAL / APPEARANCE	COGNITIVE / EMOTIONAL	BEHAVIOURAL / PERSONALITY
Physically attractive	Kind / Caring	Submissive / Passive
Gentle	Emotional / Sensitive	Dependent (relying on you e.g. for money)
Dresses modestly (not overly exposed, not too sexy)	Artistic / Creative focused - not intellectual	Affectionate
Appearance focused (effort to do hair, makeup)	Warm	Doesn't initiate sexual advances (never makes the move)
Clean shaven / body hair removed		Purity (Has never had a partner or very few)

## Appendix F: Example of discourse coding and sorting for female participants

Discourses	Research objective relative	# of female transcripts discourse appeared in	Colour Code - Aqua: Peggy, Pink: Barbie, Grey: Yuki, Orange: Sharapova, Dark blue: Tatiana, Green: Eve			
Benevolent sexism	3	7	It's like, a little bit irritating. Okay. That feels a little bit demeaning? I guess, like, I feel I can, like, do so much more than what you're like thinking like, you can just be like, perfect. You just follow me. I'll do all this. I actually no. I can do that for myself. I don't need you to do that for me. Like, like, yeah.	I definitely feel that it's like, I guess, probably in higher education in a way. Like I've had to work my way up. But I'm so used to like, sort of fighting for what I want.	I feel like maybe it's my like, Japanese culture as well. Like in Japan, not many people, like swear and I'm not really used to it and I feel like it's a bit childish in a way.	Combination by feel like culture like if a ethnicity is quite big as well? Like they did about four people in the past and all of them were like, Asian heritage. They were like more of a like studying heart type rather than like sporty.
Physical domineering/ Dominance	2	7	physically domineering and size... Because I'm quite tall. I need someone who's, like, taller than me. So I mean, if they were like, same height as me, they'd have to be more muscley just so I don't feel like I'm the bigger one.	I think it's just more like I don't know. I feel like during like sex and stuff, I don't want to be the bigger one because I feel like it's more me being self conscious of myself and like my weight.	not to like be a taller height. Like not like to physically domineering like honestly someone probably who's more of a bit like a giant teddy bear sort of thing more like not they're, like looming presence more like gentle,	gentle giant be more like you know that there but they're not gonna like harm you like you can rely on them. We're like domineering, like they might be trying to, I feel more like push you into doing things you don't want to do. Or things that make
Physical strength/Muscular (deal breaker)	2	7	.Okay, these are all male focus for me. I guess one that stands out is probably like physical strength. [why is that stand out to you?] Because that's something I don't have.	I've heard of kinda like, it's kind of like, you know, a turn on that there's like a bit stronger. You can like, lift some things that I can or you know, like in the bedroom, like that's also really fun as well. So like, having that like sort of masculine as a core aspect, because I feel like maybe it's a balance with like, the feminine. And	{What's your ideal if you could actually pick one} on some definition... the muscle definition is that you can still feel the muscle definition.	The perfect medium would be has tone has muscle, but I don't care if you've had us winter. We've absolutely don't care if you've got a belly. It's all good. Cool legs.
Stoicism	2	7	I don't I'm not really the biggest fan of the first one and cognitive and emotional stops out stoicism just because I I don't think it's a strength women can't show emotion to me. I guess on the first few dates, you wouldn't want to highlight crying about something. But the fact that a guy can show that he's emotionally in tuned or aware of his emotions that's something that I would disagree with for that one,	I used to really like, isn't used to is what is used to mean meaning what does it mean to nineteen? I want to tall fashionable man. Yeah, all those was dominating, was stoic. And he is probably a large reason why I don't like those things now because I didn't feel like I could emotionally connect. Height didn't matter. Because he was a shit person.	Yeah, I have dated someone that was very stoic, doesn't really show emotion and coming away from that to my partner now who's very not that and made me like cement further that I don't/don't like that. I don't like it when guys don't show emotion. I don't like having to pull out how they feel about things. Or even just like, you know, not really laughing that much. We're not really reacting that much to things that are said I don't like that.	I just felt like they didn't want to like it was just zero energy. Okay, I didn't want to almost like I wouldn't say they wouldn't. They didn't want to be there. It just felt like a little bit more. I felt like a scavengers scavenger hunt. I was trying to find out like what they were thinking what they were feeling if I said something that was like, nude or out of pocket or you know, I it was a bit stressful. Yeah, I'm just coming away from it. I was like. Okay, did that even
Against gender roles	3	6	I definitely feel there's certain like, traditional aspects and then more. Like, golden. Like, that was like the paying thing, I feel anyone can pay. Like, everyone's just like, we're working. We're both working. Like, it shouldn't be just one person again, paying. I feel anyone should be able to like do advances. I	like, these are things that I like, but they're not specifically just because there male traits it said okay,	Think just do what feels natural. That's probably just the main thing. I don't think we need to necessarily uphold these gender roles.	Yeah, I guess so, yeah, but I can see how it's yeah, how dating is kind of in that in that phase where it's a little bit harder now because you don't really have Yeah, I guess like this kind of rule book almost like this guy should do this the guy should offer to do this, you know, so I think I can see why it's yeah,
Chivalry	3	6	Like, first off, it's kinda like, in some ways, kind of sweet. Like, they're showing that they care. Yeah, but there's a depends probably on what it is that they're doing. They'll start with like, the jacket thing my jacket, like, I feel like did you just bring your own jacket? That was fine. Like, that's just like,	Like, I never want to go and open someone's car door for for them. You know, like I think like a lot of it would be rooted in like people pleasing.	I think like, I don't know, honestly, like, I'm not impressed by that kind of thing. I'm not impressed by if you're a provider and you're paying for me. I'm like, I don't know. I'm just not impressed by that kind of stuff. I just, I just need you to Come hug me and snuggle into me and touch me and away we go. Okay, Um, yeah, so I guess like, I don't really I don't really care for like the gimmicky stuff. I don't. Because then if someone does like something, say I am dating and someone like runs around to open my car door. I probably be like, what, like, are you just trying to get in my pants like who? What are you trying to	them? Yeah, so it's like if the guy that, you know, plans the date, you know, picks you up, pays the date or comes out of the road. Yeah, gives him his jacket. Yeah, that's kind of like showing his character and that I guess the traditional kind of things are important to him. Whereas if I went on a date with someone and they were like, look to for fall, pick where you want to go and then was like, oh, let's split the bill. I kind of be like, well, you know, further
Equity vs equality	3	6	Feels like, like, a mixture of things. But the main one that I feel like honestly, it's just a series it's we just pay for your own. So if you're going out for dinner, you pay for what you had. And then they paid what they had, especially on like that first maybe second date. If they are like insist that they'd want to pay, then like, there'll be like a stream of like going, Are you sure like at least making you know the classic attempts but in some ways, I'd rather just pay for my own so I feel like I don't owe them anything.	I probably like if he wants to do it, I wouldn't stop them. But I feel like it should be equal. Possible. Like, I feel like I would have to do something in return probably these days.	I think it depends. If I were the one to say, I want to take you out on a date. Let's go here. Like let's go to the movies. We'll go watch this. And then I would think whoever's kind of planned that should be the one to date. Do I think that the pressure of that is put on two guys More than girls 100% And I would like to I'm definitely like first state. In the past I've been like, that's split up, we'll go equal. But yeah, I think it depends on the date and if kind of one party has been the one to organise it and they're almost the ones wanting to take that person out. To then be like, ah, and can you actually pay? I think what would so have you ever made?	No, let's go 50/50 Because I would never ask a guy to pay like on the first date. So I've always felt very uncomfortable if the guy pays