

MASCULINITIES AND LANGUAGE



PAUL BAKER AND GAVIN BROOKES

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Today, the topic of gender identity is being discussed more widely than ever before. With the rise of online misogyny and in the wake of #metoo, language around masculinity and toxic masculinity merits closer examination. Accessibly written by two leading linguists, this book provides a comprehensive treatment of the debates around language and masculinity, asking how language is used to perform masculinity and how language is used to represent men.

Including examples of research from a range of international scholars along with original case studies and engaging examples from popular culture, media, literature, advertising and politics, the authors address a wide range of theoretical and methodological standpoints. The book examines concepts of gender performativity, hegemonic masculinity and queer theory, drawing on disciplines and methods including conversation analysis, phonetics, ethnography, interviews, focus groups, visual analysis, discourse analysis, critical discourse studies and corpus linguistics. Situating male language use in terms of power, dominance and subordination, the book concludes with an examination of the more recent concepts of toxic masculinity and healthy masculinity, exploring critical stances towards and around language used by men.

This book demonstrates the role that linguistic research can play in addressing real-world problems associated with masculinity – problems experienced by people of all genders and the natural world more broadly. *Masculinities and Language* is vital reading for scholars, researchers and students of language and gender, sexuality, identity, discourse analysis and sociolinguistics within linguistics, English language and related areas.

Paul Baker is Professor of English Language at Lancaster University, UK, and Commissioning Editor of the journal *Corpora*. He has written 26 books, including *Using Corpus Methods to Triangulate Linguistic Analysis*, *The Language of Patient Feedback* and *Using Corpora to Analyse Gender*.

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“Sifting incisively through thirty years of scholarship, the authors of *Masculinities and Language* distil abundant insights before engaging in their own analyses of state-of-the-art questions and discourses in the 2020s. It’s both sobering and inspiring to ponder and most rewarding to read.”

Brian W. King, *University of Hong Kong*

“*Masculinities and Language* is an indispensable resource for students and scholars interested in exploring the intersection of gender, language, and sexuality. Paul Baker and Gavin Brookes masterfully weave together a range of theories and methodologies, grounding their exploration in rich, illustrative case studies. Their treatment of methodologies – among others, conversation analysis, ethnography, discourse analysis, critical discourse studies and corpus linguistics – offers both depth and breadth, making the book an accessible and engaging entry point into the evolving field of study regarding the discursive investigation of masculinities. The book is therefore a must-read for anyone seeking to understand the complex relationship between masculinity and language in contemporary society.”

Giuseppe Balirano, *University of Naples L’Orientale, Italy*

“This book offers a fresh take on the relationship between masculinities and language, offering students a clear introduction to key theoretical frameworks underpinning research in this area. Baker and Brookes embed queer theory and intersectionality throughout their discussion, demonstrating through useful examples the need for critical analyses of contemporary masculinities.”

Lucy Jones, *University of Nottingham, UK*

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1

INTRODUCTION

Bro am I fat?

During the course of writing this book, we kept encountering a meme on social media (Figure 1.1 shows a version we have recreated), comprised of a brief four-panel comic strip. In the first panel, the meme shows a woman asking a female friend, ‘AM I FAT???’’. The friend replies, ‘OMG! No queen! You are beautiful’. Then, a man asks a male friend the same question. In the last panel, his friend replies, ‘Bro, I know 5 fat people and you are 4 of them’. There are several versions of the meme, and the last panel sometimes has a slightly different punchline, but the meme always humorously comments on supposed differences in interactions within male and female friendship groups. There is ambiguity regarding whether the meme represents men as making jokes at one another’s expense, or as holding one another accountable by being brutally frank. The meme suggests, though, that men expect one another to be tough enough to roll with the (verbal) punches.

Online reaction to the meme indicated that it was divisive – some people found it to be funny and relatable, while others saw it as annoying and sexist. It certainly relies on narrow gender stereotypes, painting women as supportive (perhaps to the point of dishonesty) and men as frank (perhaps to the point of cruelty). Also, we might ask, how relatable is this meme actually? These are not the kinds of interactions that we have usually experienced with male friends – does that make us odd? Should we be having these kinds of interactions? What if we don’t want to?

The meme is a small example of how representations of men, masculinity and language are circulated in societies – a cartoon that takes a few seconds to read and is likely to be forgotten about, unless seen again. But, taken

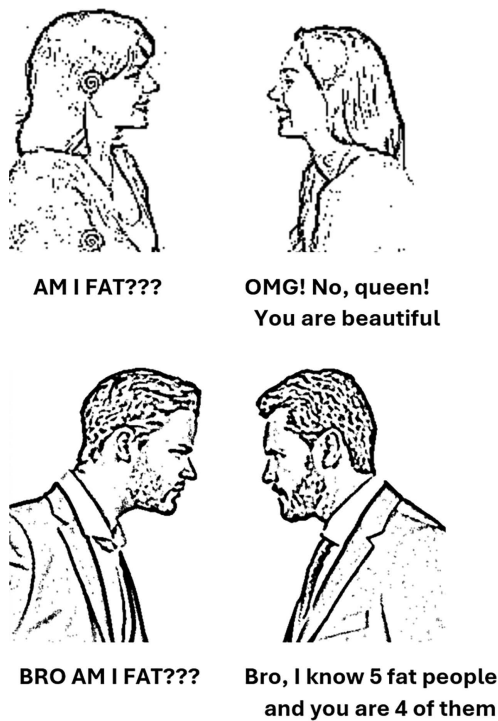


FIGURE 1.1 Bro am I fat?

uncritically, the impression generated by the meme – its view of men, masculinity and language – becomes part of us, contributing in a perhaps small way to our understanding of ‘the way things are’. This, in turn, could lead us to respond in a particular way in our own future interactions, or encourage us to evaluate other interactions that don’t resemble the ones in the meme as being atypical or even wrong. The meme also shows us that a key way that we make sense of masculinity is through language – both by attending to how men talk and how we talk about men.

It is impossible to approach a topic like masculinity without first talking about sex and gender. Unfortunately, this isn’t the easiest of starting points, as these terms are notoriously difficult to define. Part of the reason is that they are used with a variety of meanings. In this book, we use the term *sex* to refer to the biological state of being male or female, typically defined by characteristics such as chromosomes, hormone levels and reproductive/sexual anatomy. Sex categories are usually placed in a binary opposition (female vs. male), though, importantly, increasing recognition of intersex and trans people complicates this picture. We use *gender* to broadly refer to attributes and behaviours that

are socially constructed (and can therefore vary over time and across societies). Gendered traits are categorised as ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’. Rather than being a binary configuration, gender categories tend to be thought of as existing on a single continuum, with the most masculine traits and behaviours at one end, and the most feminine ones at the other. Our gender identity could therefore be placed on this single continuum, which assumes that if you have a lot of masculine traits, you will not hold feminine traits (so masculinity is characterised by the absence of femininity, and vice versa).

These definitions of sex and gender are not intended to be definitive, and an even cursory look at how these terms are defined and used in other academic books and articles, as well as in places like the news and on social media, will reveal other readings and uses. For example, some people also view sex as a social construction, particularly pointing to cases where sex is viewed as only a binary between male and female. Also, some people reject the sex categorisation they are given at birth, based on their genitals, so they do not see sex as purely being about biological traits. Making a distinction between sex and gender is useful, though, in the sense that it provides us with a starting point for our discussion; however, we would encourage readers to engage with other ways of defining and using these terms and to reflect critically on different possible definitions.

As well as having different meanings, the terms *sex* and *gender* are often used interchangeably. For example, some people use gender as a ‘polite’ way of referring to sex.

As indicated earlier, we want to distinguish between these terms in this book; however, we should be careful not to overstate or oversimplify this distinction, as doing so would risk overlooking the ways in which these concepts are ideologically linked. As gender theorist Judith Butler (1990: 17) observes, the social construction of gender often entails ‘the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between “feminine” and “masculine”, where these are understood as expressive attributes of “male” and “female”’. Therefore, the biological notion of maleness is associated with the social notion of masculinity, while femaleness is associated with femininity. Similarly, Baker (2008: 4) observes how

Western society (along with many other societies) traditionally expects men (and boys) to behave and think in ways that are (currently) described as masculine: being assertive, active, aggressive or competitive, taking the lead, being the family ‘breadwinner’, being realistic, logical, pragmatic, not expressing emotions etc. On the other hand, women (and girls) are expected to behave in a set of ways that are labelled as feminine: being more passive or gentle, taking care of people, doing domestic work, being sentimental or emotional.

Although, as noted, gender can be thought of as a continuum rather than as a binary, in reality, the categories of masculine and feminine are often set in opposition to each other, which can result in the creation of dichotomies such as ‘men being rational while women are emotional, and men being competitive while women are cooperative’ (ibid). Perhaps a more accurate model might be to view masculinity and femininity as two separate continuums, meaning that someone could potentially have traits that are both very masculine and very feminine, or they could have traits that are not particularly associated with either form of gender expression.

Masculinity, then, which is the focus of this book, can broadly be viewed as encompassing all forms of gender expression that society attributes to and associates with men. In this book, we examine the kinds of language use that surround masculinity. We look at how language is used to perform and represent certain kinds of masculine identities and consider what the implications of these performances and representations might be for the organisation of social structures. This includes considering not only how such language use can serve to maintain power relations and cause harm but also how it might challenge such harmful social structures, for example, through the possibility of performing masculinity in ‘healthier’ ways. Doing all of this requires us to look at the language used by and about those who benefit the most from such systems of power, those who are most oppressed by them, and those in-between, who might be complicit in such hierarchies and/or who might use the power afforded to them to try to challenge the status quo. An important finding in the field of masculinity studies is that men are often defined in terms of what they are not, so in considering masculinity and men, we must also look at femininity and women.

Additionally, we conceive of masculinity in the plural – as *masculinities*. Thinking of masculinities in this way helps to highlight how there is no single way of being masculine; rather, there are multiple ways. Particularly relevant here is the concept of intersectionality, which was developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw to account for the ways in which different aspects of identity interact with each other, in the process giving rise to specific identifications and linguistic practices (Crenshaw 1989, 1991). Crenshaw originally developed this notion of intersectionality as a means of understanding and critiquing the manner in which different forms of identity-based oppression combine and compound each other to create forms of oppression (her particular focus was on the oppression experienced by Black women). However, since the inception of this concept, the scope of intersectionality has been expanded, being applied to various aspects of identity (including, but not limited to, age, cultural background, ethnicity, gender, nationality, sex, sexual orientation and social class) and to study the identities not only of members of oppressed groups but also of people belonging to traditionally more dominant groups. Levon (2015: 298) points out that ‘intersections are not to be

viewed as “crossroads” of two or more discrete and already existing categories but rather that intersections are themselves formative of the categories in question’. Levon (2015) also highlights how the concept of intersectionality serves to usefully remind us that no single identity category can fully capture an individual’s experience. This involves recognising that there is no one way of being, for example, a man, a woman, gay, bisexual, straight and so on. Therefore, masculinity can be experienced differently, depending on other aspects of identity, such as age, health, nationality, race, religion, sexuality and social class. One objective of this book is to consider how some expressions of masculinity linked to some kinds of men are afforded more prestige than others and how lots of people tend to agree on this, even those who don’t benefit that much from it. This calls to mind a concept known as hegemony, which we will look at in more detail in Chapter 4. We will focus especially on the linguistic or language-related aspects of these different masculinities and look at how language is used to prioritise some expressions of masculinity over others.

When we consider language, we mean both written and spoken language, as well as the increasingly long amounts of time we devote to digital communication – a form of interaction which was barely known about or used before this century (at the time of writing, on average, people spend two and a half hours a day looking at screens – for teenagers it is 8 hours and 39 minutes).¹ Along with rule-based forms of language, which involve specific, shared meanings assigned to writing systems and vocalisations, we can also consider non-linguistic forms of communication, such as gesture, posture, facial expressions, images or even silence. Both linguistic and non-linguistic forms of communication are addressed throughout this book.

We also consider a term related to language, *discourse*, which is a little more difficult to define as it has several related meanings. Stubbs (1983: 1) refers to discourse as ‘language above the sentence or above the clause’, while Brown and Yule (1983: 1) refer to it as ‘language in use’. One meaning of discourse relates to text structure, so we can think about how language is used to organise the discourse in a text or interaction; for example, people might use specific forms of language (called discourse markers) to indicate when they want to start or end a topic. We could also conceive of different types of discourse that involve not only language use but specific social practices. For example, Chilton (2004) refers to ‘political discourse’. This would not only involve cases of language use like political speeches or election pamphlets but also the processes of producing these kinds of language (e.g., who makes the speech, where does it take place, what is the purpose of it, and who decides these things?) and receiving them (e.g., who listened to the speech and how did they respond to it?). A related, but wider, meaning of discourse is given by Foucault (1972: 49), who refers to it as ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak’. This means that discourse not

only represents identities, actions and states of affairs in the real world but also actively constructs these things. We could talk of discourses of masculinity, which involve using language (along with the other forms of expression mentioned previously) to construct the concept of masculinity. From this view, a discourse could be seen as a collection of representations around a subject, along with the social practices that go with those representations, which cohere together to create a kind of common-sense view of some aspect of the world.

In the rest of this chapter, we describe the emergence of the field of Language and Masculinities and outline our motivations for writing this book, considering why the topic is more relevant now than ever before. We also address what we hope our readers will gain from the book. Finally, we provide a short overview of the structure of the remaining chapters.

A small field, with important implications

The field of Language and Masculinities tends to be seen as a minority interest. In university degree schemes, it might be a small-ish component of a module called something like ‘Gender and Language’, which itself might form a section of a wider module called ‘Language and Society’. Studies of language and gender have largely been driven by feminist perspectives that have rightly aimed to raise awareness about the ways language (both in terms of its structures and uses) has been used to perpetuate gender inequalities (almost always with women losing out). It is notable that men have traditionally tended not to be as engaged with this field in large numbers. And in general, we have noticed that in the past, men don’t seem to have been as interested in gender-oriented approaches to language as women. Women have tended to outnumber men at the linguistics conferences relating to gender that we have attended, and with our own students, women have tended to take gender-based linguistics modules or select coursework topics involving gender more than men. For both of us, the field of language and gender was one that felt a little daunting to enter at first, although there are signs that this situation is changing, with more men showing interest in exploring aspects of gender and language use.

A lot of the early focus on language and gender tended to foreground women. Part of the reason for this was that men’s language use was viewed as so standardised and mainstream that it was seen as unremarkable. Thus, women’s language use was viewed as notable and worthy of study because it was supposedly different from the norm (Jespersen 1922). Later, feminist perspectives continued this focus on women by showing how forms of language use oppressed them and how women’s language use tended to be overlooked, degraded or compromised (see, for example, studies by Robin Lakoff (1975) on tag questions like ‘isn’t it’, and Pamela Fishman (1977) on interactional

‘shitwork’). As a result, there has only been a small number of books related to language and men published in recent decades, and we can trace the emergence of a field (or sub-field) to 1997, with the publication of a set of 12 separate studies in *Language and Masculinity*, edited by Sally Johnson and Ulrike Hanna Meinhof. This book was groundbreaking, being the first of its kind. It could be characterised as a collection of linguistic analyses relating to men in a range of contexts (including tabloid news, personal narratives, televised football punditry and gay pornography), some which confirmed stereotypes about male interactions, while others presented a more complex picture. In 2003, Jennifer Coates published a more complete monograph, *Men Talk: Stories in the Making of Masculinities*, which focussed on conversational data collected by the author, particularly involving narratives that men told to each other when they were in small groups. This was a follow-up to an earlier book by the same author, called *Women Talk*, which had come out in 1996. Of the two, *Men Talk* provided a somewhat depressing account of language use; in many of the stories that Coates analysed, men come across as annoying show-offs, barely treating women as equals.

More than a decade passed before another book on the topic would be published, this being Tommaso Milani’s *Language and Masculinities: Performances, Intersections, Dislocations* (2015). Like Johnson and Meinhof’s book, this was a collection of studies by different authors, and the book covered an even broader set of cultural perspectives. The book was also groundbreaking in this area in the sense that some of the studies integrated queer theory into their analyses. A fourth book, *Language and Mediated Masculinities: Cultures, Contexts, Constraints*, by Rob Lawson (2023), focussed on right-wing masculinist discourse, examining different forms of data including newspapers, online forums and television scripts, with a particular focus on the intersection between masculinity and race, as well as on exploring the extent to which there can be such a thing as ‘positive masculinity’. These four books all represent important steps in the development of the field of Language and Masculinities, and we are proud to offer another book, aimed at supporting students who have chosen to work in this area and encouraging others who might not be sure about what the field involves or whether it is interesting. We don’t assume that readers will have a lot of experience of working in the area, so we have tried to explain relevant theoretical concepts and methods as clearly as possible, using examples, and we hope that the analytical case studies of real-life language data we provide will inspire others in their own projects. We also hope that readers will become more aware of the role of language in perpetuating and challenging discourses around masculinity in their own lives.

We have both worked in the area for many years. Paul Baker carried out his PhD research on Polari, a secret language used by gay men up until the 1960s, and since then has looked at the ways that men have been represented

in different contexts, including sitcoms, newspapers, political debates and sexual health leaflets. Gavin Brookes has examined representations of masculinities in contexts such as animal rights campaigns, public health information texts and social media interactions relating to topics like veganism and men's health. We have also worked together on projects that involved comparing men and women's language use in patient feedback forms, as well as looking at the ways men and women are represented in newspaper articles about obesity. Our interest in language and masculinity has been personal, in that it has made us reflect on the extent to which our own uses of language have conformed to or subverted gender norms, as well as on the implications of this in our own lives. However, our personal interest has been augmented in recent years by observation of wider events and trends across the world, which have contributed to a growing sense of masculinity being in crisis. Globally, female students now outnumber male students (Bothwell et al. 2022: 3). Life expectancy for men is, on average, around five years lower than for women (Dattani and Rodés-Guirao 2023). Ninety-three per cent of prisoners are men (UN 2021), and men account for 78.8% of homicide victims (UN 2013). Men also appear to find it increasingly difficult to attract female partners. A study by Neyt et al. (2019) of the dating app Tinder found that men swiped right (to show interest) on female profiles 61.9% of the time, whereas women swiped right on male profiles only 4.5% of the time. The traditional perception of masculinity, which involved a man going out to work and being the 'breadwinner' while women stayed at home and looked after children, has also become much less common, with more women entering the workforce in recent decades. For some men, it might feel like they are becoming superfluous to requirements.

These points notwithstanding, men nevertheless continue to occupy positions of power across the world. Men hold 64% of senior academic positions at universities (Bothwell et al. 2022: 15) and 94.6% of CEO positions globally (Huerta 2024), while 76.7% of cabinet members heading ministries leading a policy area are men (UN Women 2024). Women might be entering the workforce, but they are still outnumbered by men (47% of women are in work, compared to 72% of men – International Labour Organisation 2022) and women also earn 20% less than men on average (International Labour Organisation 2024). Additionally, around 82% of the victims of domestic homicide are women (UN Women 2020). In the past decade, there has been an increased sense of scrutiny and criticism both in terms of individual male behaviours and patriarchal structures, particularly as these are played out in online contexts. For example, in 2014, an online harassment campaign against feminism and diversity in video game culture, known as #gamergate, drew attention to misogyny in the gaming industry. Then, in 2017, the hashtag #metoo was used as a way of highlighting sexual assault and harassment (perpetrated mostly by men), particularly in workplace contexts.

At the same time, a number of online communities (collectively called the manosphere – discussed further in Chapter 6) have formed under the banner of men's rights, popularising concepts such as incels (involuntarily celibate men) and Alphas (dominant men), which both articulate and foster a sense of male grievance and entitlement. Online influencers like Andrew Tate have propagated misogynist content which has been found to influence young people, especially young men and boys (Willingham 2022). In many countries, the political landscape is becoming increasingly polarised, and masculinity is one of the key 'culture war' battlegrounds, with language playing a central role in representing different views of masculinity, as well as in terms of being the vehicle for arguments that legitimate or challenge those views. In the time that we have studied language and masculinity, the subject has never felt as socially relevant as it does today.

Overview of the book

We have structured this book in pairs of chapters, which to an extent represent opposites of one another. The first and last chapters (the introduction and conclusion) comprise one pair, acting as bookends. Chapters 2 and 3 are also a pair, as they respectively focus on the ways that men use language in real life and the ways that we use language to represent men. So, Chapter 2 is about reality, and Chapter 3 is about representation. Chapters 4 and 5 are our next pair – focussing on the ways in which language relates to more and less powerful men, respectively. Then we have Chapters 6 and 7, which consider opposite poles of evaluation. In Chapter 6 we consider toxic masculinity, whereas Chapter 7 looks at healthy masculinity.

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 explores how masculinities are performed through language (and other behaviours). It uses a large database of naturally occurring conversation as a springboard to explore the forms of language that are typically used by men more than women and asks what these especially distinctive forms tell us about masculine performances. The chapter shows how such performances are context-dependent, in the process highlighting how people (particularly men, in our case) adapt their (linguistic) behaviours according to the different social situations in which they find themselves. We also highlight the fact that more typically masculine forms of language aren't always used by all men, all the time, and that studies of differences between men's and women's language use can overlook similarities, while also ignoring the fact that there can be differences within groups (i.e., differences between men).

In Chapter 3, we shift our focus from performance to representation, as we consider how men and masculinities are depicted in various forms of discourse, including everyday interactions, mass media, advertisements and children's literature. We will see that representations of masculinity are not

neutral but are imbued with societal values and ideologies. Such representations accordingly shape and are shaped by societal norms and, thus, typically serve to reinforce stereotypes and power structures (though, as we will see later in the book, representations of this kind can also serve to challenge these stereotypes and power structures). By the end of this chapter, we will have therefore sharpened the ‘critical lens’ we need to scrutinise the ways in which language use and other forms of discourse can contribute to hegemonic and toxic masculinities.

Building on Chapter 3, Chapters 4 to 6 are quite explicitly concerned with power. Chapter 4 picks up on the concept of hegemonic masculinity. We examine how language and societal structures uphold this form of masculinity, marginalising other masculinities and reinforcing gender hierarchies. We look closely at examples from popular culture and political discourse to get a sense of how language use can maintain hegemonic masculinity but also challenge it. Chapter 5 then focusses on those masculinities that are marginalised or subordinated within hegemonic power systems, such as those associated with sexualities and racial or socio-economic backgrounds do not align with the hegemonic ideal. We consider how such processes of marginalisation and subordination are, in no small part, discursive.

Keeping with the theme of power and oppression, in Chapter 6 we explore the relatively recent concept of ‘toxic masculinity’ (defined as cultural norms that equate masculinity with dominance, aggression and emotional suppression). This chapter offers a critical discussion of this concept before elaborating on Chapters 4 and 5 by critiquing, in toxically masculine performances, articulations of hegemonic masculinity which have been found to have particularly damaging effects for all of society and the natural world.

Chapter 7 explores the concept of ‘healthy masculinity’ by analysing the different ways in which it has been defined across global media. We see how campaigns have tried to encourage men to express traits that are not ordinarily associated with masculinity, such as empathy, emotional expressiveness and cooperative behaviour. In this vein, we consider various initiatives and movements that have sought to promote ‘healthier’ expressions of masculinity, countering the toxic norms discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter builds on the critique of toxic masculinity offered in Chapter 6 by considering what constructive alternatives (which seek to transform harmful cultural norms) might look like. However, we also consider criticisms of the concept of healthy masculinity itself, which query how helpful it is.

Chapter 8, which is the final chapter, revisits some of the key themes and findings that have emerged from the book and the research on masculinities discussed within it. This concluding chapter reinforces the book’s overarching argument – that language plays a crucial role in shaping gender norms and that changes in language can both reflect and lead to broader societal transformations. More specifically, we consider the importance (but also

the challenges) of changing societal discourses in order to promote healthier forms of masculinity. Building on this imperative, we also highlight areas for future research, in the process pointing to possible ways in which those studying masculinities and language might contribute to such efforts.

In our view, no single book can be fully representative of the varied body of research that exists on the topic of masculinities and language, especially as this body of work continues to grow ever larger and more diverse in terms of the contexts, data and methods it takes in. With this limitation in mind, rather than attempting to cover every aspect of research on masculinities and language, we have tried to focus on the topics that are, in our view, of particular contemporary relevance to the field and to society, in the belief that understanding these topics will be especially beneficial to those approaching the subject afresh. That said, there is also plenty in this book for those more seasoned in this area to sink their teeth into, including areas that have received relatively little attention to-date (e.g., AI representations, trans men and healthy masculinities), as well as fresh takes on more well-studied topics (e.g., performances of masculinities, hegemonic masculinity, etc.).

Each chapter discusses a mixture of classic and contemporary studies, carried out by both established and emerging scholars working, in various languages, within and on a wide range of cultural contexts. Collectively, the work we discuss addresses language data from Belgium, Canada, China, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, India, Italy, Japan, Madagascar, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Russia, South Africa, Spain, the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US) and Zimbabwe. As a way of bringing the various theories and concepts introduced to life, in each chapter we provide a series of case studies, based on our analyses of real-life texts and linguistic data, which are intended to demonstrate what such performances and representations of masculinities look like in a range of languages and national contexts. In particular, we examine data representing Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), Dutch, English, French, Greek, Neapolitan, Polish, Russian and Spanish. Where possible, we have tried to reproduce text in its original language, providing translations in English. By adopting this wide linguistic and cultural lens, we hope to better illuminate points of both similarity and difference in how masculinities are performed and represented across languages and cultures. This perspective is important, lest we (falsely) assume that all cultures are either identical or differ entirely in terms of the ideologies and social practices that constitute masculinities. This is an issue that we will return to at the end of the book. However, let us now turn to Chapter 2 to ask the question: What, if anything, is distinctive about men's language use?

Note

1 <https://twicsy.com/blog/time-spent-on-social-media>

2

PERFORMANCES OF MASCULINITY

Introduction

What does it mean to talk like a man? Is all men's language use masculine, and can masculine language be used by people who aren't male? In this chapter, we consider how we, and other researchers, have attempted to identify features of language that have tended to be associated with masculinity because they are used more by men than women. We are interested in real-life, authentic cases of men's language use in this chapter (in the following chapter, we consider ways that people use language to represent men in a wider range of contexts, including, for example, fiction and advertising).

Absolutely fucking ecstatic to be here

We begin our exploration of masculine performances by considering the following transcript of a comedy routine by the performer Adam All, which took place in a nightclub in London in 2019.¹

I'm so delighted to be here this evening. I am so happy. Thanks so much for having me. I'm really happy to be here. It's fucking brilliant. Fucking brilliant (unclear). Absolutely fucking ecstatic to be here. Particularly as, actually I've not, I've not been very well. (unclear) you lot. I'll do that again: I've not been very well. (Audience shout sympathy) Poor me. I was actually quite terrified for a short time. It was the worst, worst cold anyone has ever had in the history of man flu. But hey, thankfully for me, I'm very lucky because in my life

there's a lovely lady who looks after me when I'm not very well. That lady is: mam. Bless my mam though. She's great. When I've got the lurgy I'm like this. Aaaaah! And she lets me in. She pops me on the sofa and she makes me a nice cup of tea. You can't beat tea can you? Tea is literally the cure to everything, including mechanical failure and death. Any Whovians in? 'No, we didn't see that episode.' Fair enough.

During this comedy sketch, Adam employs a confident and repeated use of swearing (*fucking brilliant*, *fucking ecstatic*) in order to emphasise how happy he is. Use of superlatives and repetition also occur when he says he has had the *worst, worst cold anyone has ever had in the history of man flu*. The term *man flu* has become so ubiquitous in recent years that it has appeared in the Oxford and Cambridge dictionaries of English. It refers to cases where a man exaggerates the symptoms of a cold or other minor ailment (Sue 2017).

As well as his hyperbolic style, Adam also refers to a woman in a somewhat condescending way, as a *lovely lady*. The term *lady* has been described as a pseudo-polite term, while *lovely* is a word that is often associated with evaluations of women (Baker et al. 2019) as well as being perceived by Lakoff (1975) as an 'empty adjective'; that is, a word that is used to express an emotional reaction but is overused to the extent that it loses meaning. We might view Adam's speech as positioning him as a stereotypically masculine man. However, Adam's next words provoke audience laughter at his expense, as it turns out that the 'lovely lady' who looks after him when he is unwell is not a wife or girlfriend but his mother ('mam'). Adam's reliance on his mother paints him as not very independent (a trait we might not associate with masculinity), although we should bear in mind that this is a comedy routine, so Adam makes humour out of the gap between how he wishes to be perceived and how he is in reality. With that said, Adam goes on to paint a picture of himself as being waited on by a female relative who carries out domestic chores for him, which suggests a rather traditional, '1950s' form of masculinity.

Adam then describes tea as being the cure to *mechanical failure*. This is a term associated with vehicles or other machines – topics that are perhaps more traditionally associated with male conversation. There is a cultural reference in the last two lines – *Whovians* are fans of the long-running British science fiction television series *Doctor Who*, and this is a genre perhaps more likely to be stereotypically associated with men. Here, we might identify Adam as performing a form of masculine identity sometimes described as 'nerd' or 'geek', associated with someone who has an obsessive interest in a niche subject (Salter and Blodgett 2017). Adam shows his nerd credentials

by quoting from an episode of *Doctor Who* from 2005, where the main character, the Doctor, tells his companion, ‘Tea! That’s all I needed, Good cuppa tea. Superheated infusion of free radicals and tannin. Just the thing for healing the synapses’. Adam indicates that his love of tea is a reference to this episode, and when nobody in the audience seems to understand this, he responds, matter-of-factly, ‘Fair enough’.

The reason we included this excerpt at the beginning of this chapter is that Adam is a drag king – a character performed by Jen Powell. Powell was often mistaken for a boy when growing up and is nonbinary. Adam’s comedy routine is successful because he has picked up on numerous linguistic features that are typically associated with men, and he exaggerates these for comic effect. The extract shows us that such language is not necessarily the sole domain of people who are assigned as male at birth. In this chapter, we consider the features of language that are most strongly associated with masculinity by examining those that men tend to use more than women. A pertinent question is whether such features are an essential aspect of masculinity, found across different cultures and time periods, or whether they are culturally specific. Linked to this question is the extent to which use of these features is natural or learnt, or some combination of the two.

Of course, identifying ‘real’ features of men’s language presents us with a number of challenges. First, it is difficult to generalise a set of features across billions of individuals and hundreds of languages. So, we need a lot of data, and even then, we will probably have to place limits on the extent of our findings. Second, we need to ensure that we have considered as wide a range of features as possible. We may, for example, come up with a list of possible features and analyse some naturally occurring data to see whether men actually use them. However, even if the items on our list do turn out to be used a lot by men, there may be other features that we have missed, so we need an approach that can identify features we haven’t thought of in advance. Third, we need to be able to ensure that the features we identify are used relatively more often by men, compared to women. It is extremely unlikely that we will be able to find aspects of language that are always used by men and never by women, so instead we will have to consider cases where men use certain features comparatively more often. So, in identifying features of men’s language, we also need to consider women’s language.

In order to address some of these issues, we have used a collection of millions of words of transcribed conversations (known as a spoken corpus), called the British National Corpus, as a springboard for the organisation of this chapter. We have identified sets of words that are more typical of men’s speech compared to women’s, and we have drawn on a wider range of academic literature and examples of conversation in order to interrogate the ways that men use language. Obviously, this limits our findings to British

speakers, although we have tried to consider how what we find might relate to other contexts around the world.

Gender performativity and indexicality

As we noted in Chapter 1, prior to the 1990s, research in language and gender tended not to focus on men's language use in and of itself, regarding it as the default or norm. Instead, women's language was subjected to more scrutiny, initially being viewed as a 'deficient' form of male language (Jespersen 1922) and then being analysed in order to both ascertain the ways that men used language to dominate women (e.g., Lakoff 1975) and raise consciousness about the ways in which women were oppressed through language systems (e.g., Spender 1980). By 1990, two different paradigms had emerged, both of which viewed cultural influences as a key explanatory factor in the kinds of language that men and women used. Tannen (1990) focussed on gender difference, arguing that men and women spoke different *genderlects*, having been socialised to grow up in different cultures. From this perspective, men were interpreted as tending to view conversation as a contest, whereas for women, talk was cooperative – a way of exchanging confirmation and support. This perspective on 'gender difference' did not problematise anyone's language use but instead advocated awareness of other people's communication styles. A range of popular self-help books, mostly aimed at a female audience, took a similar perspective. These include: *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (Gray 1992); *Why Men Don't Listen And Women Can't Read Maps* (Pease and Pease 2001); *He's Just Not That Into You* (Behrendt and Tuccillo 2004); *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man* (Harvey 2009); and *Never Chase Men Again* (Bryans 2015). The difference framework didn't directly engage with issues such as dominance and sexism, and as a result, critics such as Troemel-Ploetz (1991: 490) argued that it was a 'non-engaged and apolitical stance' which aimed at 'the cementation of patriarchy'. Other researchers, who have carried out a large-scale meta-analyses on sex variation research, have concluded that men and women were more alike than different (see, for example, Hyde 2005). Therefore, frameworks which focussed only on gender differences presented only a partial account of language use in society and exaggerated and essentialised the differences. Such frameworks have, nevertheless, been incredibly popular outside academia.

An alternative perspective was put forward by Butler (1990), who also viewed gendered language use as related to culture but reframed gender as something that was *done*, as opposed to something a person *was*. In other words, gender was a performance. Butler was inspired by research on speech acts by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969, 1979, 1983, 1989). Austin and Searle had argued that language can perform acts by bringing states of affairs into being. Performative sentences are in the first person, present tense, indicative

mood and active voice, and they cause changes in the world. Examples would include phrases such as, ‘I promise to buy you a car’, ‘I sentence you to ten years in prison’, and ‘I now declare you husband and wife’. Performative sentences can be infelicitous (or ‘unhappy’) if they do not meet what Austin (1962) calls ‘felicity conditions’, which might involve conventionality of procedure, appropriate participants and circumstances, and the genuine intentions of the speaker. So, for example, a speaker can only use a speech act to sentence a person to ten years in prison if they happen to be a judge and are presiding over a court of law where someone else is being tried for a crime.

Butler (1990) took the view of linguistic performativity further, arguing that gender was a series of performances – a socially constructed and never-ending process, a work-in-progress and in-practice (Rodino 1997) in which we are continuously engaged. Gender, from this view, is therefore something that we *do* rather than something we *are*. Butler wrote: ‘Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance of a natural sort of being’ (Butler 1990: 33). Before this point, sociolinguists had tended to work from the view that people speak in certain ways because of who they are. However, Butler reversed the reasoning, arguing instead that people construct their identities based on the ways that they speak. So, rather than claiming that Peter swears because he is a man, we would say that swearing is one of the ways in which Peter performs being a man.

So as we grow up in a society, we get a sense of the behaviours, including language use, that are seen as acceptable for different kinds of social identities. For the most part, people use this knowledge to approximate an ‘appropriate’ gender performance, helping to strengthen the associations between behaviour and identity and going on to act as models for others. This system tends to be so unremarked upon that it is seen as natural and normal; most of the time we are barely conscious of it. And although what counts as an appropriate set of gender performances can appear to be fixed, this can, in fact, differ between cultures and can also change over time. For example, at various points, wearing trousers (or ‘pants’ in US English) has been strongly associated with men and masculinity, even to the point where in some US cities in the 19th and 20th centuries, laws were passed banning women from wearing them (Sears 2014). During World War II, women worked in factories and wore trousers for work, sometimes using their husband’s clothes to save material, and by the 1960s, fashions had begun to change so that trousers were seen as fashionable for women (Rabinovitch-Fox 2021). However, even today, wearing trousers is still, to an extent, associated with masculinity.

At this point, we might ask: How do certain features or behaviours become associated with a particular kind of gender performance? Broadly in response to this question, Ochs (1993: 337–338) writes that sociolinguistic studies

tend to be based on the assumption that language systematically varies across social contexts and that such variation is part of the meaning indexed by linguistic structures. For example, we might have different ways of pronouncing a word. The word's meaning will be the same, but the way we pronounce it may convey (or index) different social meanings in terms of our social class, ethnicity, age or some other aspect of our identity. We have been socialised both to convey and interpret these meanings.

So, for example, in some contexts we might want to indicate that we are being polite. For this reason, we would adopt certain forms of language which would gradually become associated with politeness, such as using honorifics, like *Mr Smith*, and avoiding other terms of reference, like *Smithy*, which would become associated with familiarity or even impoliteness (Culpeper 2011). We may mirror the use of certain words and phrases around people who are similar to us in some way, as a way of showing that we are close to them, so that, over time, those words and phrases become linked to that aspect of our identity. Ochs (1993: 342) notes that, over time, language features become associated with certain functions or contexts and develop 'norms, preferences, and expectations regarding the distribution of this work vis-à-vis particular social identities of speakers, referents and addressees'.

In terms of gender, Ochs (1993: 340) writes that 'there are very few features of language which directly and exclusively index gender' but instead, the relation of language to gender is non-exclusive. This means that some features may be employed more by one sex than the other (as opposed to being exclusively male or female), and a feature that indexes gender may also be used to mark other social information (so tag questions, like the use of 'isn't it?' at the end of a statement, might be associated with female speakers, but they are also associated with a hesitant stance or the act of checking for confirmation). Features like tag questions can be so indexed that they become associated with women, and this helps to motivate their increased use by women, resulting in a constitutive relationship between gender and language.

A question arises regarding the extent to which features linked to certain forms of gender performance are merely arbitrary or whether there is some kind of biological basis behind their use. For example, when we look at a large corpus of naturally occurring spoken language, we find that men living in the UK during the period when this book was written are, statistically speaking, more likely (about six times more likely) than women to say the word *mate*. The word is typically used, by men at least, as an informal term of reference for close friends (usually other men). However, there is nothing essentially 'male' about the phonemes that are used in saying the word *mate*, or indeed in stringing together the four letters that are used to spell it. On the other hand, consider voice pitch. On average, men tend to speak in a lower pitch compared to women (Cruttenden 1997). To an extent, this is due to the surge of testosterone that is released during puberty which makes male

vocal folds elongate and thicken, although the difference in pitch is also likely to be reinforced because both men and women associate lower pitches with male voices, and they might adjust their own voice to match what they see as the ideal. Traunmüller and Eriksson (1995) reviewed a number of studies on average F_0 values (the frequency at which the vocal folds vibrate when voiced speech sounds are made) for men and women from different linguistic backgrounds, noting marked differences across cultures. For example, Rose (1991) reports that in Wu dialects of Chinese, the average male and female F_0 is 170 and 187 Hz, respectively, whereas for French, Boë et al. (1975) report these figures to be 118 and 207 Hz. As a result of these studies, Simpson (2009) suggests that, to an extent, fundamental voice frequency is learned.

All gender performances are interpreted within a social context which helps to reinforce them as well as endow them with additional levels of meaning. In this way, a deep voice is not just associated with being male, but it also tends to be linked to notions of power, success, intimidation of other men and sexual allure (Pisanski et al. 2018). Within any society, some aspects of language use are associated not just with being a man but with being the *right* sort of man, while other features would be deemed inappropriate, weird or funny if they were used by men. Gender performance is therefore just as much about what is not done as what is done. And an important aspect of performativity theory is that gender performances are usually not conscious. While Adam All's performance is a more studied one, aimed at entertaining an audience, most of us do not consciously craft our gender performances. That is not to say that everyone is able to, or even wants to, replicate the 'correct' gender performance. If that was the case, no boy would ever have been bullied for being a 'sissy' (a point which also indicates that there can be higher sanctions when boys and men do not conform to expectations). Instead, we should think of gender performance as a form of socialisation which restrains, to different degrees, our range of potentialities. In this chapter, then, we focus on aspects of language that might be seen as typically associated with a 'normal' masculine gendered performance. These are not necessarily the most powerful ones (we will look at those in Chapter 4), although some of them are linked to attempts to establish dominance. And they are not used by all men all the time, but we have identified them using statistical measures, based on comparing large datasets of male and female language use.

Male keywords

The earlier point we made about the fact that women use the word *mate* even though it is more strongly associated with men, raises an important interpretative issue. When identifying forms of language use that are associated with men or masculinity, we must do so cautiously, being particularly careful to avoid over-generalising. While men and women are different from

one another, there is also a great deal of intra-sex difference (e.g., not all men are the same), and there are also many points of similarity between men and women. However, it is easy to attend to difference and use it as a way of making sense of the social world. As Galasiński (2004: 155) argues, 'gender is one of the most crucial axes along which our social life is structured, together with its inequalities, oppressions, discriminations'. Ways of conceiving men and women through difference can be referred to as the 'gender differences' discourse, and this is one of the most powerful discourses in human society. Gender differences can also be seen as a conservative discourse in that it places men and women into fixed categories, which reduces capacity for individual variation and places expectations on how people should behave and, consequently, on the roles they can perform. Outside academic research, there is a great deal of writing which takes the gender differences discourse as its basis. For example, an article in *Forbes* by Goman (2016) lists numerous differences in gendered communication, along with explanations for them which are also grounded within a perspective of gender difference. The article claims that women have less ability to control displays of emotion. It also claims that men's discomfort in dealing with emotion leads them to look for solutions, while women, on the other hand, understand that sometimes people just want to be heard. It is important to note that discourses are not facts or truths. There might be elements of truth in them, but at best they are usually (over-)generalisations.

As well as selective referencing of research which supports the gender differences discourse, at times research on gender and language can, itself, misinterpret or over-interpret the work of others, which inadvertently contributes towards the maintenance of this powerful discourse. For example, Walton et al. (2004: 402) claim that Fischer and Manstead (2000) showed that women experience emotions more intensely and for longer and that they express emotions more overtly than men. However, Fischer and Manstead (2000: 90) actually concluded that women experience *certain* emotions more intensely than men but that there was no difference for anger and disgust.

Additionally, some studies can be based on small amounts of data, collected from only a few people, so it is difficult to make claims about representativeness. For example, there are numerous studies that have found that male speakers tend to interrupt more than female speakers, such as Zimmerman and West (1975), who examined 31 two-party conversations. For same-sex dyads, there did not seem to be much difference in terms of who interrupted who, but for the cross-sex dyads, almost all interruptions and overlaps were made by the male speakers. However, James and Clarke's (1993) critical overview of a wide range of studies on interruptions published between 1965 and 1991 found that 'most research has found no significant difference between the genders [*sic*] in number of interruptions initiated in either cross-sex or same-sex interaction' (1993: 231). Another meta-analysis

of 43 studies on interruptions (Anderson and Leaper 1998) did find that male speakers were more likely to interrupt than female speakers, although there was a negligible effect size (meaning that although there was a difference, it was not especially large). Anderson and Leaper (1998) also found that studies were more likely to report larger differences in intrusive interruptions in natural settings (as opposed to laboratory settings), when group size involved three or more people and when the first author of the paper was female.

In writing this chapter, we have tried to base our claims around men's uses of language on findings from large corpora. In particular, we have used three corpora of English language usage to do so: (1) the Spoken British National Corpus 2014, which consists of 11 million words of transcribed conversational speech sampled in the UK between 2012 and 2016 (see: Love et al. 2017); (2) a 21-million-word corpus of online interactions (mostly from people living in the UK and the US) in a forum concerned with the topic of anxiety (see: Collins and Baker 2023); and (3) a 29-million-word corpus of online comments made by patients evaluating UK healthcare services (see: Baker et al. 2019). For the first two corpora, contributors were asked to provide information about their sex. For the patient feedback corpus, patients were not asked about their sex, but as some patients did reveal this information in their comments, the data can be revealing, particularly about cases where people decide to make their sex relevant to their feedback (see also: Baker and Brookes 2022).

Our analysis in this chapter begins with a consideration of male keywords; that is, words that are used proportionally more frequently by male speakers in the Spoken BNC compared to female speakers. While these male keywords provide a focus for the chapter, we also consider the equivalent set of female keywords in order to provide additional evidence. Without the female keywords, we can't be certain that the male keywords actually show a generalisable pattern. So, for example, we identified a set of male keywords which refer to numbers, such as *three*, *four*, *twenty* and *thousand*. On this basis, we might want to conclude that men use more quantification in their speech than women. However, it could be the case that women also use quantification but that they use different words in order to do it. For this reason, we would need to check whether any of the female keywords also reference numbers. In this case, none of the female keywords are numbers. So, this additional level of checking allows us to be more confident that, in terms of recent British English at least, quantification is a form of language used more typically by male speakers compared to female speakers.

Of the 11 million words making up the 2014 update of the Spoken BNC, approximately 4.34 million of those words are from 305 people who said they were male, while 7 million words are speech from 365 people who said they were female.² Conversations were recorded by volunteers in domestic settings, so the corpus can tell us about language use in informal contexts but

would not reveal anything about language used in other types of contexts, such as workplaces. To calculate the keywords in the corpus, we use statistical techniques to compare relative frequencies of male and female uses of words. A keyword isn't necessarily a frequent word, but it is one which occurs proportionally more frequently in one dataset compared to a second one. This can be achieved by comparing two corpora against each other or, as we have done to obtain the male and female keywords mentioned previously, by comparing two distinct parts of a single corpus (i.e., two 'sub-corpora' – male speech and female speech) against one another. To generate the keywords, we used a statistical technique called log-ratio (Hardie 2014: online).³

Setting the non-standards

We identified 38 words in the Spoken BNC 2014 as male keywords: *mate*, *cards*, *eh*, *game*, *em*, *quid*, *reckon*, *card*, *hit*, *gotta*, *America*, *er*, *against*, *cost*, *percent*, *playing*, *pound*, *n*, *road*, *forty*, *certain*, *play*, *thousand*, *its*, *across*, *world*, *country*, *sell*, *building*, *twenty*, *cut*, *four*, *bloody*, *th-*, *pretty*, *hell*, *terrible* and *three*. The list is given in order of log-ratio score, so *mate* has the highest log-ratio (2.65), and *three* has the lowest (0.5). Thirty-eight words does not look like an enormous amount of language. However, collectively these words were used 67,873 times by male speakers in this corpus, giving us a lot of examples to analyse. We can supplement these keywords by also considering key tags. All of the words in the corpus were 'tagged' automatically by specialist computer software, according to a semantic and grammatical categorisation system. This allows us to consider grammatical categories such as singular common nouns, or semantic categories like colours. Twelve semantic categories and seven grammatical categories were key for male speakers compared to female speakers, and we will refer to some of these categories in the following sections as they provide further evidence of what might be regarded as typical of how male speakers use language.

We begin, though, by grouping the keywords into categories of meaning and usage to start to gain a sense of some of the more typical forms of language that tend to be employed by men more than women. The first category of note includes terms associated with non-standard English: *mate*, *quid*, *gotta*, *bloody*, *hell*, *em* (a shortened version of *them*) and *n* (which refers to the negator part in *dunno* and *innit*). This pronounced use of non-standard forms in the data for the male speakers compared to the female speakers supports Trudgill's (1972) work on gendered speech in Norwich. Trudgill (1972) noted that male speakers were more likely to adopt non-standard speech varieties more typically associated with working-class people, as such uses of language helped the speakers to achieve group solidarity as opposed to signifying that they were from a higher-status social class. This finding is perhaps surprising, considering that we might view men as being more

likely to be interested in demonstrating dominance over one another, and perhaps one way to do that would be to signal social status by using standard language forms that are associated with people of a higher social class, such as people who have professional occupations. However, the use of non-standard varieties can be explained if we consider Labov's (1966) concept of covert prestige; that is, the idea that speakers can assign a high value to non-standard forms. One view of these forms is that by not adhering to linguistic standards, the speakers show themselves to be 'beyond the rules', which demonstrates another form of power (see the discussion of Vladimir Putin's language use in Chapter 4). Kiesling (1998) provides a similar example of how non-standard language is used as covert prestige in US fraternities, wherein male students sometimes adopted a non-standard *-in* pronunciation for words like *telling* (i.e., *tellin'*) and *fucking* (i.e., *fuckin'*), instead of the standard *-ing* form. The non-standard form was most likely to be used in causal socialising contexts, and Kiesling (1998) suggests that it helps to index 'working class behavioural traits of being hard working and casual', as well as 'casual camaraderie' (1998: 84).

Kiesling's study indicates that non-standard language use is not only associated with masculinity but can intersect with other identity characteristics, such as social class. Another intersectional study sheds further light on the motivations for non-standard language use like this. Eckert (2000) describes an ethnographic study of two mixed-sex groups of teenagers in a Detroit High School. She used the concept of the Community of Practice to investigate the language use of 'Jocks', who tended to be socially aspirational middle-class students who took part in school activities like sports and choir, and 'Burnouts', who were working-class students who were rebellious and disliked school. Eckert found that each Community of Practice had its own distinct way of using language. Perhaps, as expected, the Jocks tended to use more standard forms of English, whereas the Burnouts used more non-standard forms. However, there were also sex differences within the groups, with the female Jocks using more of the standard forms compared to the male Jocks, while the female Burnouts used more non-standard forms compared to the male Burnouts. Eckert suggests that this is because both sets of girls had to work harder than the boys to index their membership of their specific Communities of Practice, constructing their identities through symbolic means.

Other studies have indicated that non-standard language forms are not necessarily associated with masculinity. Zhao and Liu (2021) considered use of language in mainland China. Here, the standard language is known as Putonghua, although there are several regional varieties of Putonghua, such as a form spoken in Shanghai (a relatively wealthy and cosmopolitan coastal city). Examination of social media posts from the microblogging site Sina Weibo considered attitudes associated with the non-standard varieties, which

were found to be associated with traits of femininity, as the following social media post indicates:

Are you from Shanghai? Shanghainese girls are so beautiful. I love the Shanghai accent – all the girls use lots of words from Shanghainese and the tone is so adorable.

This post indicates a positive attitude towards the accent. However, such attitudes alter drastically if the accent is used by men. In such cases, it becomes negatively associated with effeminacy and homosexuality, as the following post from a female blogger demonstrates:

I was waiting for my bus and there was a handsome young man next to me – he was very, very, very handsome – then he spoke, with a Shanghai Putonghua accent. This isn't the point, the point is, he sounded like a gay man and he had really long nails on his index and little fingers. Oh my god, I lost interest right away.

Zhao and Liu (2021) say that further work is required to tease apart the gender-related associations with non-standard varieties. What does appear to be the case is that non-standard forms are not a universal index of masculinity but develop within specific cultural contexts and have a complex relationship with the concepts of intersectionality, prestige and group membership.

Mine's fifty-five percent bigger than yours

Returning to the male keywords in the Spoken BNC, another set of words related to numbers and values: *quid*, *pound*, *cost*, *percent*, *forty*, *thousand*, *twenty*, *four* and *three*. In addition, collectively, words grammatically tagged as units of measurement (like *metre*, *kilo*, *pint*, *dollar*, *acre*, *tonne*, etc.) also count as key for men, as do a set of words tagged as numeral nouns, such as *hundred*, *thousand* and *million*. For the male speakers in the Spoken BNC, terms of quantification can mark their speech as distinctive. Take a measurement word like *percent*, which can be used with very specific numbers in male speech, sometimes in cases where it looks unlikely that the claim about quantification could actually be verified, as the following two excerpts of speech indicate.

Male: I said yeah and the bloke was talking a load of rubbish he was ninety-five percent of it is accusations worth completely wrong

Male: it would be wrong of me in that state of mind to come back here with my judgement clouded about things and really knowing that I'm eighty to ninety percent feeling that it shouldn't continue.

We also found a much higher proportion of use of quantification by men in the patient feedback corpus we examined – as indicated in the following example where the man giving the feedback refers to numbers ten times.

They always take between 20 to 40 minutes to speak with someone. Compare [Anonymised] to my previous surgeries this is at least 5 times faster. You should always remember a surgery has thousands of people registered and only a couple of administrators looking after it. If 10 people call at the same time you will have to wait for the 2 people working to get through them, which will take about 5 minutes a call, so 25 minutes if you were number 10!

Potter et al. (1991) refer to such cases as examples of quantification rhetoric. In the previous extract, the numbers could be seen as part of a rhetorical strategy which helps to lend credibility to the person's point of view – in this case, a complaint about the time it takes to speak to a staff member at a surgery. This use of quantification makes the feedback appear more specific and accurate and helps to emphasise the extent of the inconvenience experienced. Other researchers have also identified greater use of quantification by male language users in health contexts, such as Charteris-Black and Seale (2010: 71), who wrote, '[m]en following traditional masculine styles have a discursive orientation to measuring and counting entities and processes rather than talking directly about what is happening to their own bodies'.

It is perhaps a cliché that men like to make comparisons through quantification. This phenomenon can be shown by the rather vulgar idiom of the 'dick-measuring contest', which refers to any situation in which men are said to compete over superficial characteristics to demonstrate power or worthiness. In 2023, the owners of two of the largest social media platforms, Elon Musk (owner of X, formerly *Twitter*) and Mark Zuckerberg (owner of *Meta*, which includes *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *Threads* and *WhatsApp*), engaged in a somewhat public and likely tongue-in-cheek spat, in which they discussed meeting for a cage fight. Musk tweeted, 'I'm up for a cage fight if he [Zuckerberg] is lol'. Musk's 75-year-old mother replied, 'A verbal fight only. Three questions each. The funniest answers win. Who agrees?'. Musk replied, 'MOM. You're embarrassing me in front of my Twitter friends. I'm going to break Zuck's face'. Later, Musk tweeted, 'I propose a literal dick measuring contest'. As with many exchanges on social media, the intentions of the interlocutors can be difficult to ascertain, resulting in multiple interpretations from audience members. Musk might have used such language to be ironic, making fun of stereotypes about male conflict. On the other hand, he could have been embodying the stereotype.

None of the feels

It can be useful to consider not only the words that men used more than women in the Spoken BNC, but also the words that men used less. Applying the same keyness criteria to the female speech, we found that they used key-words which referenced emotions (*feeling, feel, felt*) or involved evaluations which were often linked to emotional states (*shame, annoying, love, hate, lovely, nice, fine, ridiculous, horrible, awful*). So, we could say that, relatively speaking, male speech in the corpus is characterised by a comparatively limited reference to emotion.

This seemingly muted emotional expressivity is certainly something that is seen as a male stereotype. For example, typing *men feelings* into a search engine (Google) produced hundreds of links to web pages which related to the view that men are unable to express emotions. A handful of the titles of those pages are shown in the following box.

Why So Many Men Struggle With Their Emotions
 Why Are Men Less Likely to Talk About Their Feelings
 How Men Can Save Relationships by Learning to Be Vulnerable
 Why Guys Still Struggle with Expressing Emotions
 7 Reasons Why Men Can Struggle to Talk About Their Feelings
 Men Have Feelings Too
 Why Men Need to Show Emotion
 20 Meaningful Ways Men Express Their Feelings Without Words

These examples generally imply that men have emotions but do not express them, especially not through language. The last example is the only one that indicates that men do express emotions, but it also states that they do not do so using words. Some of the article titles also indicate that men *should* express emotions, and this is an aspect we will return to in Chapter 7, which explores the notion of healthy masculinity.

It is important to take into consideration the gendered expectations around expressions of emotion. To an extent, such expectations can become self-fulfilling, putting pressure on men to conform, resulting in men appearing emotionless, which strengthens expectations surrounding norms, creating a cycle which sustains itself. Indeed, some research does appear to confirm this state of affairs. For example, Hall (1984) notes how men tend to smile less than women in social situations due to socialised rules to remain emotionally neutral, meaning that male emotions can sometimes be difficult to read. While it is generally accepted that men speak in a deeper pitch than women,

Simpson (2009) notes that there is less agreement over sex differences and range of pitch. The popular view is that women demonstrate a greater pitch range, which is linked to expression of emotion, and some studies confirm this view. For example, Haan and van Heuven's (1999) study of Dutch speakers asking questions found that female speakers used a wider range of pitch. However, Henton's (1989) research showed no significant sex differences in pitch range, and Herbst's (1969) study of German speakers found that male speakers had a wider pitch range.

When we consider the male keywords of the Spoken BNC, we note that the nouns tend to relate to concepts or concrete objects: *game, cards, cards, quid, America, road, world, country, sell, building*. To an extent, this points to the contexts in which the male speakers represented in this corpus have been recorded, with several of the conversations being based around card games. However, other keywords referenced topics of conversation related to politics, finance and transport, and similarly, semantic tags that were key for men were Government, Politics and Elections; Games; Electricity and Electrical Equipment; Industry; Science and Technology; and Geographic Terms.

The following three illustrative excerpts of conversations from the Spoken BNC involve men giving directions to a garage in order to get a wheel arch on a car replaced, discussing political systems around the world and describing building renovations. The symbol (.) indicates a short pause, while ANON-place is an anonymisation code.

Male: and er (.) so I said right I said (.) just go up past Morrison's (.) first (.) just and up to the roundabout first left off the roundabout is – ANON-place street go down there as though you're going to – ANONplace first left there is a road and it'll take you to a plumbers and it'll take you to er a body shop who who'll do that but I said before you ask him to do it ask him what he thinks and how much will it be (.) before you get saying

Male: and you could say the same about democratic even America because you are o- you are not elected by taking the wider view you are just elected for taking a very narrow view it's like

Male: the idea would be to basically make it all new energy-efficient et cetera et cetera and it would be they'd add a floor on the top (.) and they'd fill in the ground floor (.) which is currently cos the building's on stilts basically (.) it's currently car park down there

While the man in the first excerpt mentions someone who works in a body shop, none of these excerpts refer to close social relationships between people, and we found quite long stretches of conversations between male

speakers in the corpus in which objects or ideas were discussed as opposed to people, particularly any people who were known to the speakers. Female noun keywords, on the other hand, tended to refer to different kinds of people: *baby, sister, boys, girls, friend, dad* (a semantic category called Kin was key for women in the Spoken BNC), as well as to personal events such as *wedding, birthday* and *holiday*. These terms indicate that male speakers' talk is more likely to be impersonal, consisting of references to objects and concepts, whereas female speakers' talk is more likely to be about social relationships and social events.

Related to this, in our corpus of patient feedback we found that men were less likely to refer to their feelings about their medical conditions. They used words such as *scared, vulnerable, emotional, upset, anxious, frightening, upsetting, alone, distressing* and *worried* much less than women. Their feedback tended to be more matter-of-fact, focussing on narratives relating to the progress of their treatment. These men were more likely to use technical terminology that involved nominalised forms – *investigation, removal, management, checks, consultations, action, progress* – resulting in a discourse style which appeared somewhat dispassionate, with fewer references to verb processes or the social actors who carried them out, as the following two pieces of male feedback indicate:

The speed from initial discovery of a lump to removal – 6 weeks

Once cancer was suspected, investigation and treatment could not have been quicker.

As part of these narratives, evaluation tended to be linked to the success of the outcome of treatment, with men being more likely to use evaluative words, such as *competent, effective* and *professionalism*, which related to the way the treatment was carried out. Other evaluative words used by male patients tended to strike a formal tone: *satisfactory, world class, first rate, superb, exemplary, poor*.

I submitted a formal complaint but did not receive a satisfactory answer

They were very efficient and maintained a high standard of professionalism throughout

Female patients tended to use evaluative words that suggested a more involved stance and employed such words much more often to evaluate the personalities and social skills of the staff, for example, describing them as *fabulous, amazing, lovely, kind, empathic, approachable, supportive, wonderful, respectful, compassionate, nice, welcoming, sensitive* or *rude*, or

noting whether they felt *reassured*, *listened* to or *supported* or if their *fears* and *worries* were addressed.

It is difficult to provide a single explanation for these differences. On the one hand, some of the men who contributed comments to this dataset may believe that they should not show fear, particularly during stressful situations. For this reason, they may not want to attend to or acknowledge negative emotions, or indeed *any* emotions, in their feedback. On the other hand, some men may believe that their feelings are less relevant to giving feedback than relating the more technical aspects of their treatment. However, it is certainly the case that the male patients were less likely than the female patients to focus on the emotional and relational aspects of their experience in this context.

Our analysis of patient feedback also indicated that men implied that they were not expected to acknowledge or experience pain (see also: Jaworska and Ryan 2018). Looking at the following excerpts, the first is from a male patient who attributes his stoical attitude towards pain as being directly related to his sex, whereas in the second excerpt, the man refers to his sex as part of a legitimisation strategy in order to emphasise how bad his pain was.

I was seen x-rayed, treated really well, and then told off for not explaining my pain and told to stop biting my lip, and help them understand my pain, I explained I was a man, to which I was told I had damaged my ligaments and shown my x rays

Now I am a big 6ft man who has under gone a lot of dental work and have never felt pain like it.

Collins and Baker (2023) found similar kinds of sentiments expressed in the corpus of forum posts relating to anxiety, with men noting how their sex makes them bad at expressing emotions, or how discussing anxiety will make them be perceived as less manly.

I hope this helps in some way, i am a man and not good at touchy feely, good luck

Me being well me i've injured myself a lot, bruised 1 rib and fractured another, had a rugby pole pierce my kneecap and so on and I don't care how less of a 'man' this makes me to the world, anxiety is the toughest thing I have ever faced.

Do men actually experience emotions less often or less intensely than women? The aforementioned study of the emotions of men and women in 37 countries by Fischer and Manstead (2000) found that women reported more

intense feelings of emotions associated with powerlessness (i.e., sadness, fear, shame and guilt), and men from countries that had a poor record for gender equality tended to experience these four emotions more strongly than men from countries with a high record for gender equality. Clearly, context (particularly social status and one's own sense of power) has a role to play in the experience of 'powerless' emotions. Additionally, the study focussed on two expressions of emotions: antagonism and crying. The former was experienced more by men, and the latter more by women. The analysts therefore suggested that a biosocial framework (Wood and Eagly 2002), which emphasises both social roles and gender-typed physical attributes which may place constraints on behaviour, would help to account for the findings.

If context is important, then examining contexts in which men do display emotions can help to shed light on the social roles and expectations that constrain them. Walton et al. (2004) carried out focus groups involving 16 men in England, asking them about emotions. The men constructed themselves as controlling or concealing expressions of distress in social contexts, thereby drawing on a socially shared construction of a masculine way of doing emotions. English men in particular were seen as 'very stiff upper lip', with the men in the focus group comparing them to 'your French and your Spanish, they're always hugging and kissing each other aren't they'. However, the men discussed how experiencing and expressing emotions was acceptable in certain rule-governed contexts. For example, death was seen as a permissible or understandable context for a man to experience grief. Likewise, a nightclub scenario involving another man trying to pick up their girlfriend was cited as a situation where the men could acceptably feel anger. However, during the latter discussion, one of the focus group participants constructed an alternative, 'cool' position, saying he was 'too laid-back to get angry'. He was therefore able to challenge some of the accepted notions of masculinity without threatening the occupancy of a masculine subject position.

What a goal!

Another permissible context for male displays of emotion emerging from Walton et al.'s (2004) study was a football match. The following excerpt is a transcript of a live commentary of an FA (Football Association) Cup match taking place in 1972. The commentary was provided by 26-year-old John Motson for the BBC television series *Match of the Day*. The match in question was between Newcastle United, a top-flight team, and Hereford United, a non-league club placed far lower in the rankings. Against the odds, Hereford United won the game 2–1, with the result being described as one of the greatest shocks in the history of the competition. Newcastle United had scored early in the game and looked as though they were going to win. However, with just 5 minutes of the match remaining, Hereford United midfielder



FIGURE 2.1 Hereford United players are mobbed by the jubilant home crowd after their 2–1 win against Newcastle United in 1972.

Source: PA Images/Alamy. www.alamy.com/stock-photo-soccer-fa-cup-third-round-replay-hereford-united-v-newcastle-united-110438984.html

Ronnie Radford scored an equaliser (the following commentary relates to this point in the match), resulting in the match going into extra time (and fans excitedly invading the pitch). During extra time, Hereford United went on to score a second goal to record a sensational victory.

1. Tremendous spirit in this Hereford side they're not giving this up by any means (.)
2. Radford (.)
3. Now Tudor's gone down for Newcastle (.)
4. Radford ↑ again
5. OH WHAT A ↑ GOAL ↓
6. WHAT A GOAL
7. RADFORD THE SCORER
8. Ronnie Radford (.) and the (.) crowd (.)
9. The crowd are invading the pitch (.)
10. And now it will take some time to clear the field (.)
11. What a tremendous shot by Radford (.)

12. He got that ball back (.) and hit it from well outside the penalty area (.)
13. And no goalkeeper in the world would have stopped that

CAPITALS loud pitch (.) pause ↑ rising intonation ↓ falling intonation
(from the Jefferson Transcription System; Jefferson 1988)

Motson's voice reflects the emotion felt by the Hereford United fans who invaded the pitch following Radford's equalising goal. In line 4, Motson's rising intonation indicates a sense of expectancy, and when the goal is scored, Motson uses a loud pitch (line 5), and the rise-fall intonation of the word *goal* indicates that his voice is breaking with emotion. He repeats the statement more decisively in line 6, accentuating each word. In line 8, Motson pauses three times between words as he reacts to what he is seeing (the crowd invading the pitch). His evaluative language (*tremendous*), surprise marker (*oh*) and hyperbole (*no goalkeeper in the world*) also indicate a highly emotional stance. Football matches are often venues where communal displays of strong emotion are experienced, with players hugging and kissing one another after scoring goals. In other contexts, this kind of male-to-male physical contact would be taboo (particularly so in 1970s Britain). It is perhaps not football per se that condones displays of emotion but the fact that football is strongly associated with masculinity. MacArthur (2019) found that in contexts that were rated as highly masculine (e.g., firefighting, weight-lifting), men who cried were viewed as emotionally stronger and of higher status than men in more feminine contexts (e.g., nursing, figure-skating). Thus, men who are perceived as embodying cultural ideals of masculinity are given more room to cry (or, at least, to be non-conforming with regard to gender norms) than men who are perceived as less masculine.

Obviously, there was regret

Galasiński (2004) provides a critique of existing models that conceptualise the relationship between men, language and emotions. He argues that talking about emotions is not a way of 'doing gender', and that 'men talking about emotions do not always take up masculine subject positions'. Galasiński is critical of the view that all men are incapable of feeling, expressing or talking about emotions (2004: 144). His analysis of interviews relating to topics such as fatherhood and unemployment indicates that men's talk about emotions is sometimes not concerned with the fact that they are men at all (2004). Galasiński (2004: 96) argues that men are emotionally literate – they are able to narrate the world in terms of the emotional impact that it might have, and they can reflect on their own emotional experiences. Consider, for example,

the following excerpt, reproduced from Galasiński's (2004: 90, 97) interview with a Polish man who talked about losing his job. Not only is this a difficult subject to discuss, but it also represents a situation that can threaten a man's ability to perform a traditional 'provider' role. The original Polish transcript is provided first, with the English translation underneath.

no żal jakiś takin a nie wiem to żal to (.) jakiś gniew nie wiadomo (.) taki no: ale nie wściekłość tylko po prostu gdzieś (. .) no i żal że to akurat to (tak myślę) (.) takie delikatne to jest nie? ustosunkowanie tego co czuję (.) co czułem. no że to mogło być (.) zupełnie inaczej. jakby to wszystko było no bo to wiadomo to był żal bo żeby to szło tak jak miało być no to żal tego utracić co się już (.) zaangażowało w to nie? (.) hm. (. .) no i rozmowa była inna i: fakty wyszły inne z tego nie? ja myślę że to: żal tego że (.) to stracony to ten czas stracony że wiadomo że jeżeli jest praca no to człowiek sobie jakieś sobie plany czy coś do tego tak jak ja sobie coś planowałem, że wszystko jakoś się poukłada, że to będzie dobrze nie? a trudno żeby jeden miesiąc drugi trzeci miesiąc żeby zamiast iść do góry to szło w dół nie? no to żal bo gniew to nie ma co, bo to (. .) może akurat ja: inaczej odnoszę się inaczej sobie tłumaczę te (.) niektóre te nie? ale to (. .) sam sobie: muszę sobie wytłumaczyć, jeżeli ja sam sobie wytłumaczyć jeżeli ja sobie sam siebie zrozumieć no to jakoś o będzie (.) inaczej jeżeli ja sobie nie dam rady no to trudno żeby tak było dalej nie?

Translation

well, it's regret, I don't know, anger [gniew] I don't know but not fury, just somewhere, and the regret that I think that way. It's very subtle isn't it? relating to what I feel, what I felt. That it could have been completely different. If it all happened, obviously, there was regret, because if it had gone the way it should have, one would regret losing what one engaged in, right? Mhm. And the conversation would be different and different facts came out, right? I think that there is regret that it is a lost time, that obviously if there is work, then one can make plans for oneself or something, I planned that things would sort themselves out, right? it's regret, because there is no cause for anger [gniew]. Perhaps I relate differently, explain to myself differently those, right? but I have to explain [it] to myself, if I explain [it] to myself, if I understand myself it will be different, if I don't manage, it's hard to continue like that.

(from Galasiński 2004: 90, 97)

In this extract, the man talks about the different kinds of regret that he experiences. This includes regret for lost time, lost plans, losing what he had engaged in, and also regret at his own emotions (i.e., 'regret that I think that way'). He distinguishes between present and past emotions ('what

I feel, what I felt') and distinguishes his feelings of regret from anger, saying that the difference is very subtle. Galasiński (2004: 91) argues that the man's self-understanding leads to better emotion management, leaving him better able to cope with reality. Therefore, the man shows a deep awareness of his emotional experiences, and his attempts to manage these should be seen not as efforts to suppress such experiences but to understand himself better. Galasiński's work involved a small number of male interviewees (26 in total), with the interviews taking place in a private context in which the men were guaranteed anonymity. In this sense, the interviews might tell us what is (emotionally, discursively) possible in that particular context. However, they also indicate that although men have to negotiate the social expectation that they should not express emotions, they are certainly not emotionless or emotionally illiterate.

Ask and ye shall receive

Moving on from emotions, our analysis of the language of male speakers indicated how they conveyed a sense of confidence in their opinions, in a number of ways. For example, two of the male keywords from the Spoken BNC indexed confidence: *certain* and *reckon*, both of which were used to index strong epistemic modality, as the following extracts from two different conversations indicate:

Male 1: you sure about that? (.) you certain about that are you?

Male 2: I'm certainly certain

Male speaker: so I reckon about an extra inch and a half of cable in between each bulb it'll er will be nice

Reckon is often used to mean *think* or *believe* (it tends to occur less as a synonym for *feel*), and it can also be used in quantification, which, as seen earlier, is another feature more common to male speech.

Male 1: yeah we did two and a half I'm sure we did like maybe six or seven hours today

Male 2: I reckon seven

Certain was also used by male speakers as a form of pseudo-quantification, used in similar ways to words like *percent*. This indicates that even when male speakers were not sure about something, they were at least able to demonstrate confidence in their degree of certainty.

Male: so like we'll be running things at certain times in certain classrooms

Male: polygamy isn't illegal in certain countries

Confidence, particularly in workplace contexts, tends to be something more typically exhibited by men. For example, a survey by Fidelity International in 2021 found that men were more likely than women to ask for multiple pay rises (25% vs 12%) or promotions (17% vs 9%). Babcock and Laschever (2003) found that female master's degree students were more likely to take the first pay offer when entering a new job, while male students were eight times more likely than female students to try to negotiate a higher salary. Interestingly, a more recent study (Kray et al. 2024) found that the situation had reversed, with more women negotiating salary increases. They suggest that 'the reversal might point to the value of promoting women's agency' (Kray et al. 2024: 20).

Erm you know

A perhaps less obvious way in which male speakers in the Spoken BNC expressed confidence in what they were saying was through their more regular use of filled pauses like *er* and *eh*, as well as the false start, *th-*. Such hesitations seem, on face value, to suggest uncertainty, perhaps as the speaker tries to grasp for the right word. However, a closer look at these features in use indicates that they often act as a form of floor-holding, used by the speaker to signal to listeners that they want to keep talking. In contrast, there are fewer of these types of hesitation markers in the language used by female speakers in this corpus. There are several non-lexical discourse markers which are keywords for female speakers, although rather than marking hesitation, they instead function as back-channelers, used by women to acknowledge the speech of others: *ah*, *uhu*, *mm*, *hmm*, *mhm*, *tut*, *huh*. Other female keywords were *gosh*, *goodness*, *bless*, *ha*, *yep*, *really*, *fine* and *exactly*, which also indicate responsiveness to others. Compared to female speakers, male speakers seem to provide fewer signals that they are paying attention to another person or that they agree with them. Consider, for example, the use of fillers and back-channels in the following conversation, taken from the Spoken BNC, between a male speaker and a female speaker, both aged 41.

Male: so it's getting good sounds I'm going to turn it up okay so let's just see how this goes so erm I I think that he had a very rounded message that er had some interesting things in it that one could explore

Female: mm

Male: and you know when you see some of his pictures and think erm you know with Jenny's interest in in laser and that kind of thing

Female: mm

Male: and outfit that she works with him for but erm I would have thought in some kind of fashion erm they have an interest in all that kind of stuff that kind of exposure and presumably they come across these people

Female: mm

A further marker of male language users' confidence was found when we examined patient feedback. Men were more likely than women to use the second person pronoun *you*, which tended to be a feature of a generalisable style of feedback, where the male patient in question described his own experience in a way that made it appear as though he was speaking on behalf of every patient (when he clearly was not).

If you call when the switchboard opens more often than not the line is engaged. When you finally get through you are kept on hold for ages. Finally the receptionist (who is pleasant and approachable) answers and informs you that all of the appointments for the day are booked and that you will have to call tomorrow, and the cycle repeats.

This greater use of *you* by male language users in health-related communicative contexts was also noticed by Charteris-Black and Seale (2010: 64–65), who hypothesised that it helped to 'make their accounts seem less personal and more objective and generalizable'.

An often-cited stereotype of male interactional style is a refusal to take no for an answer. Numerous campaigns that have aimed to raise awareness about rape and sexual assault have used the slogan 'no means no' in order to emphasise the importance of consent. This is something we consider in more detail in Chapter 6 as part of our exploration of toxic masculinity.

No prize for second place

Another set of male keywords in the Spoken British National Corpus relates to games: *card*, *cards*, *play*, *playing* and *game*. To an extent, the reason that these words are key is due to the conversational setting. When people volunteered to record their talk for the compilation of the corpus, they could choose their own setting, and compared to female speakers, a larger number of male speakers recorded conversations that took place while they were playing board or card games with friends. The following excerpt of conversation involved three male speakers playing a board game called Pandemic.

Male 1: oh event card <Anon> over there

Male 2: er remote treatment remove two disease cubes from the board

Male 3: oh that's good

Male 1: how many have you got now?

Male 2: one two three

Male 3: is that all of them?

Additionally, even when men were not playing games, they were more likely than women to talk about computer games, football and other sports.

Male 1: it's a good job we haven't been to the football since

Male 2: they've lost haven't they?

Male 1: they've lost every game since

Male 3: oh

Male 1: I saw I saw the Scunthorpe score and I was like where are Scunthorpe they were like bottom of the league

For men, games were a more salient topic of their conversation when they were being recorded, compared to women in the corpus, and the prevalence of language connected to games in speech between male speakers suggests a more competitive and hierarchical form of interaction, wherein winners and losers will be established. We might also consider the possibility that, to create the Spoken BNC, people were asked to volunteer to record their conversations, and for some men, doing this in a structured situation like a game might have been an easier and less daunting option than simply trying to produce a conversation on any topic.

The competitive aspect of men's talk has also been found in analysis of men's narratives. Coates (2003) carried out a qualitative analysis of recordings of 32 male-only conversations, focussing on the ways that men told each other stories about past events. One feature of these narratives was that they had to be 'tellable' (Labov 1972), describing some sort of unusual event. Where male speakers' narratives often centred around conflict or achievement wherein the protagonists presented themselves as successful or heroic, the female speakers' stories were more likely to be about ordinary, everyday events. Coates (2003) gives an example of a narrative told by a woman which involved buying earrings in a sale. Coates (2003: 36) notes how this kind of story is likely to be viewed with puzzlement by men: 'Where is the heroism? What contest has the protagonist entered and won? What skill has been demonstrated?' (2003: 37). A more typical narrative for a male speaker would be one provided by Coates (2003: 48) involving a story about a sports match told by a 16-year-old at a boarding school to two of his friends, which contains the utterance, 'I did the most amazing left with this half-volley you will ever see'.

Coates (2003) also notes that other male interlocutors can attempt to deflate the male speaker who is telling a story by undermining him in various

ways. For example, one man in Coates's (2003) data tells a story about a Volkswagen Beetle that was swept off a bridge in Africa but proved to be watertight so that when it was back on dry land, it was still roadworthy. Another male interlocutor responded at the end of the story by saying, 'yes that seems to be the sort of thing one might attribute to the publicity department at Volkswagen', implying that the storyteller is foolish for believing that the story is true (2003: 58). Coates argues that for men, then, 'telling stories in itself is a competitive activity, with speakers competing to boast about their triumphs or their cock-ups' (2003: 56). Even when the narrator of the story is not the protagonist-hero, the competitive aspect comes from being able to tell a good story which entertains others. Within these kinds of stories, women are often absent – Coates notes that 72% of them depicted an all-male world (2003: 45).

In a fighting mood

Finally, four male keywords in the Spoken BNC are suggestive of a discourse which implicitly refers to violence or conflict: *bloody*, *hit*, *cut* and *against*. In all but a couple of cases, *bloody* is used as a (reasonably mild) curse word and, apart from hell, it is the only case of swearing appearing as a keyword. This is perhaps a surprising finding, given earlier work that has noted how swearing tends to be associated more with male speakers than female speakers. For example, McEnery (2005: 29) found a different picture when he examined another spoken corpus (the 1994 version of the Spoken BNC), showing that male speakers were more likely than female speakers to use 'stronger' swear words (the *f*-word and the *c*-word), whereas female speakers were more likely to use 'weaker' swear words, such as *hell*, *bugger*, *bitch*, *pissed*, *arsed*, *shit* and *bloody*. However, if we apply the same keyness criteria we used in our comparison of male and female speakers in the 2014 data to the 1994 data, we find that only one swear word emerges as key for the male speakers' speech: *fucking*.

Love (2021), who compared the 1994 version against the 2014 version of the Spoken BNC, found that the 2014 corpus contained 27.6% less swearing than the 1994 corpus, which was largely due to a decline in use of *bloody*. Generally, his analysis of the 2014 corpus indicated that male speakers still swore more often than female speakers, although the difference had declined from being 2.33 times more frequent in male speakers in 1994 to just 1.68 times more frequent in 2014. Stapleton (2010: 293) has suggested that women who swear are likely to be 'subject to more social censure', and while the data suggest that this is still likely to be the case for British English, it appears that this is an aspect of language use where cultural norms and expectations are changing.

In addition to swear words, another word that can be connected to conflict, and which was key for the male speakers compared to the female speakers, is *against*. When viewed in context, it emerges that this word tends to occur in male speakers' talk in contexts involving some form of opposition or conflict, as in the following examples:

Male: erm so the Americans were very suspicious of him but because he was waging war against India er Kashmir at the time

Male: what I objected to was where I thought erm I was being unfairly discriminated against

Male: oh right touring the country giving talks on the sanctity of marriage and campaigning against same sex marriage . . . what the fuck?

Another word that was key in the male speakers' talk, *hit*, tends to be used to refer to events involving some kind of impact, either physical or metaphorical.

Male: and he come running up and go bonk and he hit his head on the on the top of the bucket cos

Male: I'm trying to be better with my money but when so work with the business like the costs hit you like

We did not find a clear sense of the male keyword *cut* being used in an explicitly violent way, as male speakers tended to use it in contexts such as cutting up bread or cutting across a river. However, one semantic set of words that was key for men was the category 'Warfare, defence, and the army: Weapons', consisting of words such as *military*, *invaders*, *shoot*, *war*, *gun* and *combat* (Table 2.1 shows the five semantic categories that were used more by men compared to women, and the five which were used more by women compared to men). These words tended to be used literally to refer to various conflicts, as opposed to being used in metaphorical senses. The male speech in the corpus definitely has more references to literal, large-scale conflict, compared to female speech.

In one of the other corpora we looked at, we found another context where conflict-based discourse appears to be associated with men's language use. This was in the dataset of forum posts about anxiety, where men were more likely to view anxiety as a problem that needed to be solved. In some ways, this was quite subtle. For example, men were more likely to describe themselves as an *anxiety sufferer*, whereas women were more likely to say they were an *anxious person*. This may seem like a tenuous distinction, but it indicates that men viewed anxiety as a (temporary) condition that they were

TABLE 2.1 Semantic categories most distinctively used by men and women in the Spoken British National Corpus 2014.

<i>Semantic category</i>	<i>Most frequent words in category</i>	<i>Male frequency per million words</i>	<i>Female frequency per million words</i>
<i>Used more by men</i>			
Politics	<i>vote, Labour, politics</i>	346.98	152.99
Warfare, defence and the army: weapons	<i>war, shot, army</i>	879.98	408.64
Games	<i>football, chess, dice</i>	298.00	155.40
Sports and games generally	<i>score, scored, scores</i>	76.57	40.58
Government etc.	<i>country, government, council</i>	739.94	401.29
<i>Used more by women</i>			
Judgement of appearance	<i>nice, lovely, amazing</i>	2590.72	3712.96
Clothes and personal belongings	<i>bag, wear, shoes</i>	1426.77	2001.91
Degree: boosters	<i>really, very, so</i>	7136.15	9608.54
Fear/bravery/shock	<i>scared, scary, dare</i>	368.82	490.37
Suitability	<i>fit, qualified, timing</i>	115.20	152.00

experiencing, whereas women were more likely to view anxiety as part of their identity or personality. Similarly, men were more likely to frame anxiety as a *condition*, *disorder* or *illness* and refer to the possibility of a *cure*. And men with anxiety were also more likely to use words such as *fight* and *fighting*, where they often constructed anxiety as a foe to be vanquished.

I have faith in you mate deep down your a strong ass man who can work threw anything fight my friend fight with everything you have and always remember im here for you

we have too stay mentally strong and believe we are okay cause we are, we can beat this its just a matter of reprogramming our brain everyday and every night, its tough believe me I've been going through it for about 2 years but im still fighting I'm almost back too normal and i know we can all beat this so called thing called anxiety.

Not all men viewed this as the right approach to anxiety, with some advocating that, rather than fighting anxiety, it is something that should be accepted.

Why do you combat it? The more you fight it the more you focus on it and increase the focus on it. I've had anxiety for quite sometime and really the

only thing that has helped me get over it is by accepting that it is there and not changing my life to conform to it.

Despite the different positions here, male forum users oriented to the topic of fighting, and they also viewed anxiety as something that one could ‘get over’, indicating a general mindset where the focus was on developing strategies and taking action to tackle a problem. On the other hand, women tended to use the anxiety forum to share stories and offer sympathy to one another, using responsive words such as *xxx*, *hugs*, *love*, *hun* and *OMG*, as well as ASCII-based emoticons, such as :) and emojis like ❤️ and 😊. The female forum users also suggested practices and remedies that could be used to alleviate feelings of anxiety, if and when these occurred. These included taking a *hot bath*, getting *fresh air*, drinking *chamomile tea* or reading a *good book*. Thus, women were more likely to suggest strategies for managing anxiety or reducing it temporarily when needed, whereas men tended to want to completely erase it from their lives.

Conclusion

Collectively, the linguistic features and examples discussed in this chapter have painted a picture of men as emotionally repressed, obsessed with numbers, self-assured and competitive. However, we have also noted meta-analyses that reveal that the linguistic differences between male and female language users are perhaps not as acute as some individual studies might suggest. Other studies, such as that by Galasiński (2004), which showed how men can have a high level of emotional awareness, have presented counter-narratives around men’s language use. Despite that, our own analysis of three large corpora did find gendered lexical differences which echo aspects of the existing research which has taken a ‘difference’ perspective – one which has been largely discredited in contemporary research on gender and language.

So, how do we make sense of these contradictions? First, we should bear in mind that studies of men’s language occur in different contexts – a pub is different from an interview, and language use will vary according to the context in which it is produced. Additionally, many of the studies examined are qualitative and involve small numbers of men within a particular cultural context, so it is difficult to generalise beyond them. With the large-scale corpus studies, it is important to bear in mind that the lexical differences we have found are not absolute. In other words, they do not describe all men, all the time. Likewise, while in some cases we can make fairly reliable inferences about the contexts in which the interactions in such large datasets have taken place (e.g., while playing board games), this is usually not so easily inferred, as the scale of such datasets means that we necessarily lose some degree of contact with these contexts.

Even with the words that exhibit the most extreme differences in frequency of use between male and female speakers, we are seeing trends as opposed to absolutes. Take one of the strongest keywords for the male speakers in the Spoken BNC – *ain't*. This word occurs 1,008 times in speech by this group. This is also used 297 times by female speakers. Taking into account the overall amounts of talk in the corpus by male and female speakers, this translates to 231.78 occurrences per million words for male speakers and 42 occurrences per million words for female speakers. This means that male speakers are around 5.5 times more likely than female speakers to use *ain't*, but female speakers clearly do still use it. We should also bear in mind that only 84 out of 305 (27.54%) of the male speakers in the corpus were recorded as using *ain't*. That's not to say that the other 72.46% of male speakers in the data never use the word *ain't*, but at least within the limits of the data sampled for this corpus, *ain't* is used by only a quarter of male speakers. Another perspective on *ain't* would be that the majority of male and female speakers alike did not use the word during the time that they were being recorded. As a result, when we focus on keywords, we aren't necessarily looking at language use that is typical but, rather, language use that is salient in the context of some comparison. Male speakers who use *ain't* a lot are therefore at an extreme end of a continuum, and we will notice their behaviour because it stands out. And this is where the problem lies, because we tend to view such language users as being typical of all men as opposed to being outliers. With this in mind, what would actually be typical of male speech is not using *ain't* very much at all.

Additionally, when we create a list of male keywords or a set of linguistic characteristics associated with being a man, we should not assume a correlation effect. We have seen that *mate*, *percent*, *eh*, *bloody*, *world* and *across* are all keywords for speech by male speakers compared to speech by female speakers. However, that does not mean that just because a man uses *mate* a lot, then he will also use the other words just as much. The larger point here is that the features of men's language use that we have identified, such as non-standard English, quantification, confidence, conflict and game-playing, etc., will, if taken together, result in a kind of hyper-masculine gendered performance. However, in reality, most men will not use all of these features together, all of the time. Instead, they may use some of them and, even then, not all of the time.

The gender differences discourse is very strong, and seductively so. Indeed, it gives us a simple framework for making sense of the world, and it perhaps explains to an extent why the studies that report differences, as opposed to similarities, get so much attention and 'feel' as if they are telling us an important truth about the world. When we represent men, we tend to focus on the aspects of gender performances that are most strongly associated with the differences between them and women. Yet, this focus on difference can

then result in a feedback loop, whereby real-life male behaviour is influenced by those representations and expectations about what is seen as ‘normal’ or even ‘expected’, so words like *ain’t* become a way of indexing masculinity and can be used as part of a stereotypically masculine gender performance. Although we might want to view representations of masculinity as separate from real-life performances, the two are linked, reinforcing one another. With this in mind, we now move onto the next chapter, which is concerned with representation, both in terms of how language is used to represent masculinity and men, including the ways that men communicate.

Notes

- 1 www.youtube.com/watch?v=dImBEXmbQ9c
- 2 It is not known whether any of the male and female speakers in the corpus were trans. One speaker in the Spoken BNC contributed 1,375 words of speech, but they did not identify as male or female, so they were not included in the analysis for this chapter.
- 3 Log-ratio is the binary log of the ratio of relative frequencies. For each word type in the corpus, a score is obtained. A score of 0 means that a word has exactly the same relative frequency in both data sets (e.g., for male vs female speakers). In order to examine words which are more typically associated with male speech, we have taken all words that are more frequently used by males and also have a log-ratio score of at least 0.5 (this means these words are used 1.4 times as often by male speakers compared to female speakers). To avoid idiosyncratic cases, we stipulated that the word must be used at least once by at least a quarter of the male speakers in the corpus, and no single male speaker must be responsible for more than half of the word’s uses. Additionally, a keyword had to be used at least 500 times by male speakers collectively.

3

REPRESENTATIONS OF MEN AND MASCULINITIES

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we considered how masculinities can be performed through male language use. In this chapter, we shift our focus from performance to representation, considering how people – particularly boys and men – are constructed through the kinds of language and imagery that are used in relation to them, or that they use in relation to themselves. Hall (1997) famously defined representation as follows:

The process by which members of a culture use signifying systems to produce meaning. . . . Objects, people, events in the world do not have in themselves any fixed, final or true meaning. It is us, in society, within human cultures, who make things mean, who signify. Meanings, consequently, will always change, from one culture or period to another. Representation involves making meaning by forging links between three different orders of things: what we might broadly call the world of things, people, events and experience; the conceptual world – the mental concepts we carry in our heads; and the signs arranged into languages (and other modes), which stand for or communicate these concepts.

Hall (1997: 61)

From this view, the meanings that are attached to men and masculinities are constructed, challenged and negotiated through the discourses that we use to communicate about them. The repetition of particular discursive representations of gender can cumulatively contribute to the performativity of gender, namely, ‘the underlying conditions that make performance possible, or by

virtue of which a given performance does or does not succeed' (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 150). Through their repeated articulation within and across contexts, particular representations can attain dominance and become naturalised or seen as 'common sense' ways of understanding the world and our place within it.

With this in mind, in this chapter our exploration of the representations of men and masculinities through discourse addresses not only different modes of communication but also various contexts and types of texts in which such representations abound, including everyday interactions, advertisements, news media and texts that are about and directed at children. While this chapter will touch upon various forms and expressions of masculinity, we will not consider specific topics such as hegemonic masculinity and toxic masculinity in too much detail, as these are covered more extensively in subsequent chapters. Instead, this chapter serves as a foundation for our consideration of representations of men and masculinities within subsequent chapters by providing insights into the multifaceted nature of masculine representations and the kinds of values that might be attached to these. By the end of this chapter, we will be better able to understand the diverse ways in which men and masculinities are represented – giving us insights that can help us to critically analyse these representations, to understand their implications and to reflect on the possibilities for redefining masculinity in more inclusive and equitable ways in the future.

Representations in everyday discourse

We begin this chapter by considering how men and masculinities are represented in corpora representing general language use in a broad sense. In contrast to the kind of work we looked at in the previous chapter, which considered how men *use* language, here we consider how all people (whether they identify as men or not) use language and other forms of discourse to *represent* men and masculinities. The research that provides this sort of insight has been propelled by the use of corpus data and techniques of analysis which allow researchers to study linguistic patterns and trends in large, representative bodies of language use. Depending on how it is designed, corpus data can represent language in more specific or more general contexts. Corpora fitting the latter description have proven useful for studying how certain social groups are referred to in everyday talk, with analyses identifying the discourses that surround such groups and considering how these discourses contribute to their representation and, returning to the arguments set out in the previous section, their 'construction'. The benefit of basing such an analysis on general language corpora is that these can, by dint of their greater representativeness, represent a potentially wider range of discourses around men and masculinities than would likely be visible within a smaller dataset – say,

one assembled for purely qualitative research, and which represents language used by just a handful of people.

Corpus studies in this area have found that such representations both draw upon and help to propagate certain stereotypes around men and women. For example, using a corpus linguistic methodology, Pearce (2008) examined the collocates (i.e., frequently co-occurring words) of *man* and its plural form *men* (the two forms are referred to here in small capital letters as MAN) in the 1994 version of the British National Corpus, which contains 100 million words of general written and spoken British English language use, mostly from the early 1990s. The corpus contains writing from books, newspapers, letters and scripts, as well as transcribed speech from domestic and workplace contexts. Pearce found that MAN tended to be used as the grammatical agent (or 'doer') of various physical action verbs, such as *chase*, *climb*, *jump*, *leap*, *march*, *haul*, *race* and *stomp*. Men were represented as using their bodies to *do* things – to explore and interact with the world and others. Related to this representation is one that places men as dominant social actors through subject-positioning verbs, such as *conquer*, *dominate*, *lead* and *mastermind*. Pearce also found that men were both the subject and object of a number of physical violence verbs (thus, men are represented as both carrying out and experiencing physical violence – mostly from other men), and they were also frequently represented as criminals, being positioned as the object of verbs such as *accuse*, *arrest*, *convict*, *hang* and *jail*, as well as being represented as succumbing to seduction by being the object of verbs such as *bewitch*, *charm*, *enthral*, *entice* and *flatter* (in such cases, women often carried out these actions). Men were also represented as physically and socially dominant through adjectives used to attribute certain traits and characteristics to them. In terms of physical dominance, men were often described as, for example, *able-bodied*, *big*, *broad-shouldered*, *stocky*, *tall*, *beefy* and *bull-necked*. Men were also represented as socially dominant by being frequently described as *distinguished*, *grand*, *influential*, *leading* and *rich*.

One way of interpreting and understanding the significance of how one group is represented is to compare such representations to those of other, comparable groups. As such, as well as looking at the collocates of MAN, Pearce (2008) also considered the collocates of WOMAN. Pearce found that, in contrast to the representations of men, women tended to be the subject of emotionally intemperate verbs, such as *berate*, *nag* and *wail*. They were also likely to be the object of sexual verbs, such as *bed*, *date*, *ravish*, *sexualize* and *shag*. WOMAN was also more likely to be the object of verbs suggesting the exercise of power by others, such as *assist*, *compensate*, *direct*, *immunize*, *interpret*, *monitor*, *provide* and *regulate*. In terms of adjective collocates, women were more frequently described in terms of their romantic relationships. This included adjectives that denoted their marital or reproductive status (e.g., *childless*, *fertile*, *married*, *lone*, *widowed*, *barren*, *menopausal*

and *remarried*), evaluated their physical attractiveness (e.g., *pretty*, *attractive*, *beautiful* and *pleasant-looking*) and implied promiscuity (e.g., *blowsy*, *fallen*, *promiscuous* and *scarlet*). Pearce's comparison shows how, in general British English in the 1990s, men and women were represented in ways that keyed into certain gender stereotypes, with men more likely to be depicted as powerful, large and involved in violence, and women more likely to be sexualised and discussed in terms of their relationship status and their ability to have children.

Similar findings were reported in a later study by Herdağdelen and Baroni (2011), who examined representations of male and female social actors in two corpora representing online language use between 2005 and 2007. Rather than looking at generic terms, as Pearce did, Herdağdelen and Baroni considered gender-marked personal pronouns as well as male and female names. Focussing on verb phrases that collocated significantly with references to male or female social actors, as well as those that occurred with both, the researchers found large differences between the two corpora, which represented *Twitter* (X) and general UK websites. On *Twitter*, female social actors were frequently referred to in terms of their emotions and desires, through collocating phrases such as *feel like*, *want to*, *feel good*, *make smile* and *make cry*, whereas male social actors were referred to in terms of profit-oriented actions, such as *make money*, *want (to) make money* and *earn money*. These distinctions were not evident on the general UK websites, where instead female social actors were frequently represented as having children (e.g., *give birth*, *become pregnant*). Meanwhile, male social actors were represented as taking positions of power (e.g., *take over*, *become king*, *raise up*). While many of the stereotypical representations previously identified by Pearce therefore also emerged in this study, Herdağdelen and Baroni's approach demonstrates how the context in which the language is used can have a bearing on the specific kinds of representations we are likely to encounter.

Another contextual factor that can influence how men are represented is time. Baker (2015) analysed how *man* was represented in *The Corpus of Historical American English*, which represents written American English across a range of genres (fiction, magazines, newspapers and nonfiction) in texts published between 1810 and 2009. Baker focussed on adjective collocates that directly modified *man* across four time periods: 1810–1859, 1860–1909, 1910–1959 and 1960–2009. Baker found that uses of *man* have, over time, focussed less on moral qualities and more on the bodies of the men being represented. While this trend was equally as observable in the data for the word *woman* as it was for *man*, the ways in which female and male bodies were talked about was different. While a 'good' male body was based on musculature, a 'good' female body was based on being beautiful. Baker also noted a distinction in the late 20th/early 21st century between men who have 'good' muscular bodies and those who are

overweight. These external qualities were, in turn, linked to internal qualities; men with muscular bodies were also represented as having qualities like being wealthy, kind and intelligent. Also, such men were often the heroes or main characters in fiction. On the other hand, men who were represented as overweight were depicted as having negative internal qualities, for example, being tired, incompetent or pompous. Baker argued that these trends suggest a further strengthening of the idea of the ideal form of masculinity being centred on a fit body, with a corollary being that those with the resources or natural propensity to obtain bodies associated with ideal expressions of their gender (be those masculine or feminine) are likely to be even more advantaged.

Baker's (2015) study points to an interesting development, then, in terms of increased attention being paid to men's bodies in public discourse. This could be connected to several developments in Western societies, including increasingly liberal attitudes which mean that people have felt more able to talk openly about bodies over time. Yet a consequence of this change in the discourse around men and their bodies has also been connected to male objectification and sexualisation, much in the same way that women's bodies have been (Bordo 1999). Baker points out how advances in feminism and women's rights might have contributed to the distinction between men as observers and women as observed becoming less rigid during the 20th century. He also considers how advances in the gay liberation movement are likely to have resulted in men's bodies being discussed more in public discourse, including in gay imagery in which the male body is often presented as the source of sexual desire.

As well as social developments, Baker also considers how the trends he observed might be linked to changes in labour and consumption practices, particularly in the industrial West. Where strong male bodies were previously stigmatised as being associated with low-paid manual labour, the move towards more automated, technology-based, service-providing work roles has increased leisure time and provided more opportunity for individuals to engage in 'body projects' (Shilling 2003) through which individuals can express their identities. Accordingly, body projects such as bodybuilding and supplement use have led to a focus on male physiques that are more sculpted than those that resulted from manual labour (Edley 2017). Such changes are perhaps at least as likely to be connected to labour practices within capitalist societies as much as they are with the advances of social movements. In fact, for Luciano (2001), the fact that men's bodies have been used more in advertising over time indicates a capitalist imperative for such changes over and above an impulse towards gender equality based on humanist principles *per se*. Whatever the case may be, the changes observed by Baker suggest a dominant contemporary conceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity that is perhaps more strongly associated with external qualities, such as a

muscular physique, than it is with internal qualities, such as bravery, sanity, and honesty.

Vrais hommes

Often, men who represent highly prized forms of masculinity are positively evaluated as being somehow more authentically male or masculine – typically being described as ‘real men’. But what qualities make for ‘real men’? This is a question we asked by looking at representations of real men in a corpus called FrTenTen2023. This is a very large corpus representing French language use online, and there are also versions of the corpus in 37 other languages (at the time of writing). To get a sense of what qualities are attributed to a real man in this corpus, we searched for uses of the term *vrais hommes* (which broadly translates to ‘real men’ in English). We then looked for the words that collocated strongly with *vrais hommes* in the corpus, where we found a number of adjectives that were particularly likely to occur with this expression. These adjective collocates give a sense of the kinds of qualities that are regularly attributed to ‘real men’ online. The words with the strongest associations with the expression ‘vrais hommes’ included adjectives such as *virils* (virile), *forts* (strong), *courageux* (courageous), *seuls* (hairy) and *tatoués* (tattooed).

When we look more closely at how these words are used to represent ‘real men’, we can see that these adjective collocates regularly occur with each other (and other adjectives besides). In the following examples, real men are described as not only virile but also powerful and authoritarian (example 1) and strong and courageous (example 2). Armed with these qualities, ‘real men’ are also prepared to defend freedoms – a notion that keys into a wider nationalistic sentiment, where the freedom of the nation is presented as being in need of defence by ‘real men’.

1. Dans la mesure où ce sont de vrais hommes: virils, puissants et autoritaires.
[To the extent that they are real men: virile, powerful and authoritarian.]
2. cad de vrais hommes, forts, courageux, virils . . . prêt à défendre leurs libertés . . . que devient la liberté en France?
[real men, strong, courageous, virile . . . ready to defend their freedoms . . . what is becoming of freedom in France?]

As well as having certain internal characteristics, real men are also marked by certain physical qualities, such as being *seuls* (hairy), *tatoués* (tattooed) and *musclés* (muscular).

3. Parce qu'en tant que fan de haches et de vrais hommes, les tatoués, les poilus qui viennent du Nord, dès que résonne au loin le fracas de la bataille

il faut que je me précipite pour prendre ma ration de sang et de virilité barbare!

[Because as a fan of axes and real men, the tattooed, the hairy ones who come from the North, as soon as the din of battle resonates in the distance I have to rush to take my ration of blood and barbaric virility!]

Men not meeting these standards – especially those seen as choosing not to live in this way – are regularly placed in opposition to ‘real men’. As well as having their masculinity and manhood questioned, such men tend to be framed as weak or submissive. This is evident in example 4, which discusses this opposition between the two sets of men quite explicitly, and negatively evaluates men not meeting this standard as effeminate and contemptuous.

4. Pour les individus masculins d’origine populaire, la représentation du monde social s’articule autour de couples d’oppositions entre la virilité et la docilité, la force et la faiblesse, les vrais hommes, les ‘durs’, les ‘mecs’ et les autres, êtres féminins ou efféminés, voués à la soumission et au mépris. [For male individuals of working-class origin, the representation of the social world revolves around pairs of oppositions between virility and docility, strength and weakness, real men, the ‘tough’, the ‘guys’ and others, feminine or effeminate beings, doomed to submission and contempt.]

This handful of examples alone shows how the identity of being a ‘real man’ is not about possessing any one quality, but is about meeting several criteria – both internal and external – all at once. We also get a sense of how the notion can be deployed, rhetorically, for different purposes. This includes, among other things, to advance intersecting notions, such as the crisis of masculinity and the threat against – and need to protect – the nation state. Whatever argument is being made, a fairly consistent feature of the ‘real man’ discourse is that it rests on constructing – or at least implying – some opposition between certain kinds of men and others. In this context, men meeting the standards to qualify for the label of ‘real man’ are celebrated and positively evaluated, while those deemed to be failing at this are evaluated negatively, and often presented as not being masculine at all. We will explore these opposing sets of identities more in the coming chapters, as the identities of ‘real men’ are closely aligned to the qualities associated with hegemonic masculinity, which we explore in Chapter 4, while alternative forms of masculinities are liable to be marginalised and subordinated, which is the focus of Chapter 5.

Lads and dads

Having considered the kinds of language that are used to talk about men and masculinities in everyday language, we now turn our attention to mediated

representations, which tend to offer representations of particular types of men, including relational masculine identities, rather than representing men in a general sense. Representations of men and masculinities abound in contemporary genres of mass media, such as lifestyle magazines, film and TV, videogames, music and two genres we consider in the following sections – advertisements and the news. Such sites are important to study since, as Lawson (2023: 62) points out, they constitute ‘powerful means through which discourses of masculinity (and gender more broadly) are normalized’. In this way, mass media representations not only reflect social norms but also have the capacity to shape them (Fairclough 1995). This social power of mass media, to normalise the particular ideas and versions of reality that it puts forward, is partly ‘derived through the fact it employs an ongoing process of repetition and reiteration. Thus, audiences are subject to repeated instances of “this is the way the world is”, usually via a multitude of outlets’ (Lawson 2023: 62). This incremental power of mass media discourse is observed by Fairclough (1989 [2015]), who argues the following:

The hidden power of media discourse and the capacity of . . . power-holders to exercise this power depend on systematic tendencies in news reporting and other media activities. A single text on its own is quite insignificant: the effects of media power are cumulative, working through the repetition of particular ways of handling causality and agency, particular ways of positioning the reader, and so forth.

Fairclough (1989: 54)

Baker and Baker (2019) make a similar observation with respect to men and masculinities specifically, when they consider how mass media has ‘long-term effects on audiences that compound over time due to the repetition of images and concepts [where] repeated use of language helps to construct and solidify particular understandings of masculinity as “received wisdom”’ (p. 363; see also: Gill 2006).

Studies of media representations of men and masculinities have addressed a wide range of formats and genres, including those named earlier. Analysts frequently adopt a critical perspective on such discourse, usually drawing on critical approaches to language analysis (e.g., critical discourse analysis) in order to provide contextually sensitive accounts of such representations, taking into consideration the discursive practices that give rise to them and their wider societal impacts. As contemporary mass media communication is characteristically multimodal – making use not only of written texts but a combination of modes, such as imagery, fonts, layouts and sound (Machin and van Leeuwen 2007) – such analyses are also often based on multimodal approaches.

The genre of men's lifestyle magazines has proven to be a popular site for researchers examining mediated representations of men and masculinities (see, for example, the collection edited by Benwell 2003). Such studies have noted the recurrent projection of hegemonic masculine ideals, with the archetype of the assertive and (physically) dominant man being positively appraised and offered as something of a role model for readers (Gill 2008). So-called lads' magazines have received particular scrutiny in this regard, as well as for their (predominant) portrayals of women as sexual entities (being shown in terms of their physical features as opposed to holistic qualities). These magazines have been found to have a somewhat complex relationship with feminism, oscillating between promoting gender equality on the one hand but regressive and even misogynistic stances on the other (Benwell 2003). In the case of the latter, the use of humour and irony in such magazines can act as a shield against critique, with accusations of misogyny being deflected through claims that the discourse is merely 'banter' or 'in jest' (we look at banter in more detail in the following chapter). For example, Benwell's (2002) analysis shows how although men's lifestyle magazines were originally seen as representing something of a fresh departure for men and for gender relations, close attention to their use of irony, their representations of 'masculine hegemony' and 'otherness' and their use of 'focalisation' indicate the discursive representation of masculinity in these texts to be at least partly opposed both to femininity and homosexuality.

Men's lifestyle magazines have also been identified as promoting consumerist identities, whereby the 'ideal man' is presented as one adept in acquiring products to enhance his image, stature and desirability (typically to women) (Benwell 2003). In this way, the representations of masculinities in these magazines intersect with discourses around health, fitness and the body (Stibbe 2004). For example, Boni (2002) examined how representations of men and men's bodily practices in the Italian edition of *Men's Health* magazine might shape men's identities and perceptions of their bodies. The study was based on frame analysis and discourse analysis of the linguistic and visual framing of the male body, along with analysis of focus groups which aimed to capture how readers made sense of the representations in the magazine. The analysis revealed a proclivity for *Men's Health* to offer representations that promoted a regimen of self-surveillance and maintenance through which men (including intended readers) were framed as being equipped to combat health risks associated with modern lifestyles. Boni (2002) points out how the discourse within the magazine aligns with Foucault's (1979) notion of 'biopower', whereby the body is treated as an object that must be disciplined and optimised. This focus on the body extends to traditional masculine traits, with the magazine reinforcing norms of toughness and dominance while promoting a consumerist linkage to physical appearance and health-related products. The magazine suggests a sculpted, muscular physique as the ideal,

which is exemplified by its promotion of exercise routines and body care products. However, the audience reactions analysed by Boni (2002) demonstrated varied interpretations, with some readers adopting the magazine's health and fitness ideals – thereby aligning their personal goals with those espoused by the magazine – but others criticising these ideals as unrealistic and driven by profit motives rather than genuine health promotion. For instance, some focus group participants expressed scepticism about the body images promoted through the magazine's visuals.

As well as studying magazines directed at men, research has also considered how men and masculinities are represented in other types of publications (including magazines targeted at women but also publications that are not ostensibly marketed towards any particular sex identity group). This research provides interesting insight into how more generic representations of men and masculinities, such as those discussed in previous paragraphs, refract into, and are recontextualised within, texts for other audiences. These studies have observed how the representations often serve to reinforce traditional values, not only in terms of how men are represented but also in terms of maintaining the separation between the 'spheres' of men and women.

An example of such a study is Sunderland's (2004) analysis of parenting magazines, which showed how, regardless of changes to the gender make-up of the workforce, such magazines still promoted conservative views of the roles of men and women in terms of bringing up children. In the magazines, Sunderland (2004: 121) observed the 'traditional interpellation of mother as the main parent', on the one hand, and the 'interpellation of the father as part-time, supporting parent rather than co-parent', on the other. While Sunderland's study took place two decades ago, recent research has confirmed the prevailing nature of this distinction. For example, Brookes et al. (2016) carried out a multimodal critical analysis of gendered discourses in advisory leaflets about baby feeding. Focussing on linguistic and visual representations of the social actors featured in the materials, Brookes et al. (2016) found that while mothers were framed as being the primary caregivers responsible for feeding the babies, fathers were depicted in a notably secondary and supportive role. The representation of fathers in baby-feeding materials reveals distinct patterns of involvement which reinforce traditional gender roles and the perceived naturalness of motherhood in feeding practices. Fathers were represented as encouraging and supporting mothers to breastfeed rather than being actively engaged in the feeding process themselves, with the pamphlets suggesting that fathers can contribute best by supporting mothers, through phrases such as 'Your support and understanding will help your partner breastfeed your baby', and 'Women are much more likely to breastfeed for longer when they have their partner's support'. Visually, fathers were less present in the domestic settings depicted in the materials, and when they did appear this was often in non-domestic settings such as hospitals or antenatal classes, which visually implies their involvement to be more peripheral or

exceptional compared to the more routine domestic involvement of mothers. Brookes et al. (2016) argued that the materials they analysed reflected and reinforced the kinds of traditional gendered parenting roles described by Sunderland (2004) and others, according to which feeding and caregiving are primarily the mother's responsibility, with both the role of fathers and the prospect of shared parenting being side-lined.

'Present' fathers and 'nurturing' mothers

Recent years have witnessed an increase in the accessibility of generative artificial intelligence (AI). This technology, which includes tools such as ChatGPT, is trained on vast bodies of (typically online) language and imagery, which it draws on to create new content (text, but also imagery and videos). Human users enter a textual prompt, which might be a question or an instruction, and the AI tool then draws upon its knowledge of the world (based on the data on which it has been trained) to generate content that responds to the user's prompt in a relevant way. As these tools are increasingly being used by creative professionals to create texts within more mainstream media, it is becoming more important for critical linguists and discourse analysts to interrogate the outputs of such tools. To look at potentially gendered ideologies relating to parenthood, we asked ChatGPT two questions: 'What makes a good mother?' and 'What makes a good father?'. The answers were given as two numbered lists (which follow), where the use of numbering might imply a prioritisation of traits.

What makes a good mother?

1. **Love and Affection:** A good mother shows unconditional love and affection to her children, making them feel valued and secure.
2. **Support and Encouragement:** She supports her children's interests and development, providing encouragement and believing in their abilities, which boosts their self-esteem and confidence.
3. **Patience and Understanding:** Children require patience as they learn and grow. A good mother understands this and is patient, helping her children navigate their emotions and experiences without undue pressure.
4. **Nurturing:** A nurturing environment is crucial for a child's development. This involves not only caring for a child's basic needs, such as food, shelter, and clothing, but also attending to their emotional and intellectual needs.
5. **Guidance and Discipline:** Effective mothers provide clear guidelines and discipline that help children learn appropriate behaviors and consequences, fostering responsibility and respect for others.

6. **Role Modeling:** Children often emulate their parents. A good mother acts as a positive role model, displaying behaviors that she wishes to instill in her children, such as kindness, honesty, resilience, and hard work.
7. **Open and Honest Communication:** A good mother maintains open lines of communication with her children, encouraging them to express their thoughts and feelings and listening to them attentively.
8. **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Being flexible and adaptable helps a mother handle the unexpected challenges of parenting and the diverse needs of her children as they grow.
9. **Consistency:** Consistency in rules, expectations, and love provides children with a stable, predictable environment, which is important for their security and development.
10. **Self-care:** A good mother also takes care of herself. Recognizing her own needs and managing her well-being helps her maintain her emotional and physical health, which is beneficial for the whole family.

What makes a good father?

1. **Presence and Engagement:** A good father is actively involved in his children's lives, showing interest in their activities and being present for both everyday events and significant milestones.
2. **Support and Encouragement:** He supports his children's dreams and goals, providing the encouragement needed to pursue them, which helps build their self-esteem and confidence.
3. **Love and Affection:** Expressing love and affection openly and consistently is crucial. A good father makes sure his children feel loved and valued.
4. **Guidance and Discipline:** Effective fathers provide guidance and discipline that help children understand the consequences of their actions and learn to take responsibility, fostering respect for others and self-discipline.
5. **Patience and Understanding:** Children need patience as they grow and learn about the world. A good father understands this developmental process and helps guide them through their challenges without undue frustration or anger.
6. **Role Modeling:** Fathers serve as role models for their children, and a good father displays the behaviors and values he wishes to instill in his children, such as honesty, integrity, and resilience.
7. **Communication:** Maintaining open lines of communication is essential. A good father listens to his children and communicates with them in ways that foster trust and openness.
8. **Protection and Security:** Providing for the family and ensuring a safe and stable environment is a key role of a father, offering physical, emotional, and financial security.

9. **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Children's needs change as they grow, and what works at one stage may not work at another. A good father adapts his parenting style as needed to meet these changing needs.
10. **Self-care:** A good father also recognizes the importance of his own health and well-being. By taking care of himself physically and emotionally, he is better equipped to care for his family.

Taken together, these responses reveal interesting differences regarding some of the values that are imbued in the data on which ChatGPT is trained, relating to what makes a 'good mother' and a 'good father', and these values reflect broader gendered ideologies within society. Broadly, the notion of good motherhood was constructed with more reference to emotional expressivity and availability. For example, we can note that being 'nurturing' is one of the traits associated with good motherhood but not with good fatherhood. Then, while 'Love and Affection' is associated with both mothers and fathers, it is tellingly ranked more highly for mothers. Looking at the text accompanying this item on the list, we can see that for mothers the function of expressing love and affection is to make children feel valued, whereas for fathers it is framed as being crucial, and the focus is more on them expressing this in a consistent way. Likewise, while both lists include 'Role Modeling', for mothers this includes demonstrating kindness, whereas this is absent from what should be expected of fathers as role models. Another item across both lists relates to communication; for mothers this is framed as 'Open and Honest Communication' but just as 'Communication' for fathers. This communication is also described as leading to different ends; good mothers listen to ensure the emotional wellbeing of their children, 'encouraging them to express their thoughts and feelings and listening to them attentively'. For fathers, it is more about fostering trust in the children. Then, while both good mothers and fathers exhibit 'Patience and Understanding', for mothers this is framed as involving them not applying pressure (potentially keying into a negative representation of some mothers as 'pushy'), whereas for fathers it is about them not being angry or frustrated (perhaps acknowledging an association between masculinity and expressions of anger and aggression). There is also evidence of a representation of men as protectors of (presumably, more vulnerable) others; what makes a 'good father' includes 'Protection and Security' – an item that is absent from the list for 'good mothers' – and this involves the fathers 'providing' for the whole family and 'offering physical, emotional, and financial security'.

The other item that appears on the list for fathers, but not mothers, is 'Presence and Engagement'. This involves being 'actively involved in his children's lives, showing interest in their activities and being present for both everyday events and significant milestones'. We might think of this as a minimum expectation

of any parent, yet its absence from the list for good mothers perhaps indicates an expectation that fathers will not necessarily do this. Being ranked first, this means that simply being there is pitched as the most important thing that a father can do for his children. However, a consequence of this representation is that fathers performing this minimal role might be praised as being ‘good’, or even exceptional, in a way that mothers doing the same thing would not (this is perhaps expected of mothers, and so goes unmentioned for them).

Research by Putland et al. (2023a) has shown that such AI tools are likely to inherit, and thus reproduce, the (often subtle) ideologies and biases that exist in the kinds of real-world language use on which they are trained. As such, the gendered representations around motherhood and fatherhood in the provided lists were not invented by ChatGPT but rather reflect prominent gendered discourses around parenthood that exist ‘out there’ in real world language use. Scrutinising the language produced by such generative AI tools can therefore provide an insightful means through which to identify prominent societal discourses, including those relating to gender, as these are reflected in this emerging means of crafting creative content.

As well as addressing topics such as parenthood, discourse-based studies of magazines have also highlighted how these kinds of texts can draw upon gendered discourses in representing other activities and aspects of identity. For example, Koller’s (2004) analysis of metaphors in business magazines demonstrates a prevalence of ‘masculinized metaphors’ which, she argues, create and perpetuate gender bias by exploiting aggressive language. Koller notes a particular prominence of metaphors drawing on domains of sports/competition and violence/conflict. Sometimes these are combined, for example, when business relationships are depicted as violent sports. For instance, one magazine in Koller’s data quotes a sales rep as saying, ‘We’ve got WorldCom on the mat. Now it’s time to kick them’, whereby a business negotiation is likened to combat sport. Koller claims that such language use normalises masculine leadership styles that are characterised by aggression and competition.

Coffey-Glover’s (2019) corpus analysis of women’s lifestyle magazines demonstrates how men are presented and effectively ‘sold’ to women in a way that will enable such women to perform ‘hegemonic femininity’. Coffey-Glover likens these texts to the kinds of ‘lads’ magazines’ discussed earlier (and further in Chapter 7), since they offer stereotypical depictions of men, for example, as naturally aggressive and sex-obsessed. For instance, one of the magazines in Coffey-Glover’s data features an interview with a male professional gladiator called Tornado which contains the following question and response:

Interviewer: Tornado is described as being ‘violently destructive’ and ‘full of unstoppable energy’. How would you describe the real you?

Tornado: Maybe not as bad, but I’m in the Marines so obviously I’ve got that controlled aggression.

Another magazine in the data advises its female target readers that ‘Men are likelier to ask out a woman who’s wearing red because the colour makes them think of sex’. Ultimately, Coffey-Glover argues that such representations contribute to normative constructions of gender and sexuality, depicting men in ways that emphasise traditional masculine traits aligned with women’s interests and desires. For example, descriptions of men as primarily driven by carnal desires perpetuate the stereotype of hypersexual masculinity, catering, Coffey-Glover contends, to a form of femininity that seeks to manage male sexuality. Furthermore, the portrayal of men as naturally aggressive glorifies physical strength and assertiveness as innately male qualities, supporting a gender dynamic wherein men are seen as the dominant partner. The magazines therefore often emphasised heterosexuality as a normative orientation (discussed more in Chapters 4 and 5), framing women’s romantic and sexual interests exclusively around men, thereby marginalising other sexual orientations and reinforcing the gender binary within heterosexual relationships. Taken together, these portrayals serve to normalise specific masculine behaviours and traits, while shaping expectations of femininity around these norms, all for the purposes of instructing (female) readers on how to interact with men and on what to expect from romantic or sexual partnerships.

Mass media formats such as film and TV, in aiming for wide appeal, offer a spectrum of masculine representations. Yet, we should also bear in mind that within this spectrum, we will also find the persistence (and arguably, dominance) of traditional types of men being depicted. Indeed, one does not have to look far to find dominant forms of masculinity in film and TV, and most ‘leading men’ are still marked by attributes such as physical strength, emotional restraint and economic aptitude.

Men in ads

Another genre of mass media communication in which depictions of men and masculinities have been widely studied is advertising. As something that tries to sell a particular product, service or identity to audiences, Fairclough (2015) argues that advertising can be considered a strategic and goal-oriented genre rather than a communicative one. Cook (2001) describes advertising as a ‘parasitic’ genre, in the sense that it cannot exist alone but depends fundamentally on other discourses, and that it is in this way that advertising can (and to ensure commercial success, must) adapt to societal changes. Advertising cuts across all of the mass media formats we have considered in the previous section, and more besides, in order to reach (potential) consumers. This pervasiveness of advertising makes it an important genre to consider as part of any survey of contemporary representations of masculinities. Moreover, the persuasiveness and ‘pull’ of contemporary advertising undoubtedly rests on its combination of verbal and visual elements (Cook 2001). Through this interaction of modes, adverts can arguably present propositions and convey

ideologies, including those relating to gender, more subtly than might be possible if they relied on language alone.

Like mass media in general, advertising texts have been observed to draw on a wide variety of masculinities in order to market their products and services. This is demonstrated by a study by Islentyeva et al. (2023), who examined the discursive strategies employed in the representation of masculinity in a sample of 50 advertising campaigns – representing 36 brands operating mostly in the UK or US but also France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland – launched between 1999 and 2020. The authors sampled posters from campaigns advertising a range of male-targeted products, including beverages (e.g., Coca-Cola), food (e.g., McDonald's), daily care products (e.g., Clinique), male fragrances (e.g., Givenchy) and clothing (e.g., Nike). They identified five recurring strategies in the representation of masculinity. Some of these fit with prevalent, stereotypical representations (e.g., foregrounding sex appeal, strength, dominance over women and the image of the 'classic gentleman'), while others could be viewed as more progressive, foregrounding fatherhood and notions of gender equality (though even these were observed by the authors to be embedded within a dominant framework of hegemonic masculinity).

Stereotyping around the world!

Despite the rise in adverts that seek to diversify – and arguably, 'detoxify' – representations of men and masculinities, we do not have to look very far to find cases of contemporary advertising keying into more traditional discourses around masculinity. An example is the long-running international advertising campaign by Snickers, in which male characters are depicted as acting in a hyper-feminine way (typically being shown as female characters) until they eat a Snickers, at which point they return to their original male (and masculine) form.

One advert produced as part of this campaign in Spain in 2021 drew complaints as it was perceived to be homophobic. The advert, which we have transcribed and translated into English, presents a scenario in which a waiter (W) is running through a drinks order with two customers. The first customer (C1) is played by Aless Gibaja, a Spanish DJ and influencer who over many years has cultivated an image of being camp (having an exaggerated, humorous gender performance which goes against expected norms for men). Gibaja is known for his catchphrase, 'around the world', which was incorporated into his book *Manual para ser feliz around the world* (*Manual to be happy around the world*) and featured in a pop video, 'Menealo'. As the transcript shows, Gibaja is shown as a camp, excitable and hyper-feminised man with long hair, who, after eating a Snickers ice cream bar, appears as a different, more stereotypically masculine man. In this respect, the advert

departs from the usual format of showing a female character transform into a male one, meaning that this advert presents the character as undergoing a transformation in their gender rather than their gender and sex. As a result, the character's hyper-feminine behaviour and speaking style was interpreted by many viewers as constituting a homophobic discourse which equates gay men to women.

W: Entonces, sería un agua con gas al tiempo con la rodaja de limón y un sexi zumo de naranja

C1: Con vitaminas A, B, y C: abrazitos, besitos, [mwah – kissing sound], y caricias 'around the world' [sung in English]

W: Anda, come uno de los Snickers

C2: Mejor?

C1: Mejor

Caption on screen: No eres tú cuando tienes hambre

Translation

W: So, that was a sparkling water, room temperature, with a slice of lemon and a sexy orange juice

C1: With vitamins A, B, and C: hugs, kisses, [mwah – kissing sound] and caresses 'around the world'

W: Come on, you'd better have a Snickers

C2: Better?

C1: Better

Caption on screen: You're not yourself when you're hungry

To explore how Gibaja's character (C1) achieves a more feminine speaking style, it is useful to consider the notion of genderlect, which we mentioned very briefly in Chapter 1. Broadly put, genderlects are stereotypical constructs about the ways that men and women use language (Tannen 1990). Genderlectal styles can come from all linguistic levels. However, some are more associated with gendered stereotypes than others (Gottburgsen 2000). As stereotypical constructs, although genderlects might reflect the ways that some people use language, they certainly do not reflect the ways that all people belonging to any group use language. Rather, they are exaggerated

versions of perceived gendered speaking styles and are themselves produced and reinforced by discourses about how men and women use language. The use of genderlectal features is, like all forms of language use, inextricably tied to context. Language users could employ such styles in order to construct particular kinds of masculine or feminine identities, both in real-life and mediated contexts, including in mass media such as advertising. Indeed, Motschenbacher (2010: 52) argues that advertising discourse is particularly relevant to discussions of genderlect, 'because it illustrates that identity stylisations can be achieved performatively without necessarily being based on the notion of a speaker whose socio-demographic characteristics are reflected in the way [they] use language'.

In this advert, Gibaja's character is first presented, through the waiter's speech, as having ordered a drink that bears some hallmarks of stereotypical femininity. The character is presented as having made a series of specific requests which could be viewed as exhibiting a feminised trait of expressing particularly discerning, even 'picky', food/drink preferences, specifying that they want 'sparkling water', at 'room temperature' and 'with a slice of lemon'. Gibaja's character then speaks, requesting 'Vitamins A, B, and C'. The initials, A, B and C correspond to the first letters of the Spanish renderings of the three items that follow: *abracitos* (hugs), *besitos* (kisses) and *cari-cias* (caresses). This sexualised vocabulary lends itself to the construction of a camp and hyper-feminised style, as does the singing of 'around the world' (Gibaja's catchphrase) that follows. This style is further constructed through paralinguistic features. These include physical gestures, such as exaggerated and dance-like shoulder movements which coincide with the intonation of the speech, blowing a kiss at the waiter at the point of making the kissing sound ('mwah'), and winking at the waiter, both at the point of blowing the kiss and then again when suggestively taking a bite from the Snickers ice cream bar. The advert then returns to the standard format, as the waiter advises Gibaja's character to 'have a Snickers'. Once the bite is taken, the second male customer (C2) then asks, 'better?'. At this point, the shot pans back to C2, who is no longer played by Gibaja but a different bearded male actor, whose shoulder-length sleeved t-shirt has been replaced with one with longer sleeves, and the pink glasses with black ones. C2 then responds, in an audibly deeper voice, 'better'.

On the one hand, it could be argued that representation of non-stereotypically masculine men in the media is a good thing. However, Gibaja's character was implied to be an undesirable identity – as having a personality that needed to be fixed by eating a Snickers. There was also a sense that viewers were being invited to laugh at (rather than with) him. The advert was met with significant backlash on social media, with many accusing the brand of insulting gay men. The State Federation of Lesbians, Gays, Trans and Bisexuals expressed their disappointment, tweeting that it's 'shameful and regrettable'

for companies to perpetuate stereotypes and promote homophobia. Spain's Equality Minister, Irene Montero, criticised the brand, questioning who would believe using homophobia as a business strategy would be a good idea. She emphasised the importance of recognising diversity and tolerance and urged decision-makers in the media to reflect these values. Additionally, the left-wing political party Podemos highlighted the concerning timing of the advert, noting that its release followed several homophobic hate crimes in Spain, including attacks on five gay men in Barcelona. Responding to the criticism, Snickers Spain decided to remove the advert, and said that their intention was to convey humorously how hunger can alter one's character, rather than to stigmatise or offend. Mars Wrigley, Snickers's parent company, issued an apology for any harm caused by the advert, and emphasised their commitment to equal rights and inclusion. Importantly, this reaction and its consequences remind us that audiences are not passive recipients but can challenge and reject discourses that they perceive to be harmful, stereotyping or otherwise offensive.

No handbags or cake

Looking at advertising texts has helped to show how highly prized forms of masculinity can be drawn upon – and indeed, further valorised – in this discourse context. A similar process can be observed in other kinds of everyday texts, such as greetings cards. Greetings cards offer a context in which gender stereotypes are prominent. Jaffe (1999) discusses the social meanings of greetings cards, contending that they occupy an intermediate position between the social categories of 'gift' and 'commodity'. Jaffe argues that it is this ambiguous status that gives cards their 'unique communicative potential', as 'card senders can exploit various and multiple dimensions of the card's gift and commodity-like qualities to express socially authenticated identities and sentiments, as well as to send subtle and complex new messages about identities and relationships' (p. 115). So, at this point, we want to consider what kinds of messages about identities and relationships are communicated by greetings cards that are designed to be sent to men. We looked at the website of the online greetings card retailer, *Moonpig* and searched for all birthday cards 'for men'. What we find communicated by the language and imagery on the covers of the cards is a rather restricted set of (masculine) identities and relationships. Figure 3.1 gives an illustrative sample that shows these identities and relationships and how they are communicated discursively.

Although the cards are depicted here as black and white line drawings, the first point to note is that the original versions of the cards are dominated in terms of their colour choices by shades of blue – a colour that is associated with masculinity within contemporary society (Koller 2008). Carrying out the same search on birthday cards 'for women', we see instead that the design



FIGURE 3.1 Men's birthday cards.

of these cards is (perhaps predictably) dominated by pinks. The men's cards are also focussed on identities that revolve around 'masculinised' pursuits, such as sports (with images of sports cars and footballs), particular modes of transport (bicycles and sailing boats), DIY (saws, spanners and screwdrivers) and videogames (see Card A in Figure 3.1). By contrast, cards for women focus on items that are emblematic of shopping and consumer femininities, such as shopping bags and shoes. Women are shown as speaking on the phone and toasting with (sparkling) wine or holding a cocktail or gin and tonic. On the other hand, the only recurring drink referenced in the men's cards (linguistically or visually) is beer (Card B). In the men's cards we also find recurring images of burgers, which are often perceived as a 'more masculine' thing to eat (Hurley and Roe 2022), and a notable absence of images of (birthday) cake, which is shown frequently in the women's cards, along with chocolate and ice cream, which are often perceived as 'more feminine' foods (Hurley and Roe 2022).

Some of the men's cards convey what we might consider to be 'hyper-masculine' identities, such as that of a lumberjack, which is perhaps more to do with physical appearance than activity, constituting an instance of what has become known as a 'lumbersexual' identity (Card C), this being a portmanteau of 'lumberjack' and 'metrosexual' (Vey 2022). The term is defined somewhat unfavourably in the Urban Dictionary as 'A not-so-manly man dressing like a lumberjack (although a lot more refined) and sporting a beard that has the volume of a lumberjack's beard and the groom of a hipster, cashing in on the "rugged, outdoor stereotype"'.¹ The focus on men's beards is also evident in other cards, including some which linguistically express the sender's 'love' for the recipient's beard. Most of the cards focussing on men's physical appearance are humorous though, for example, making fun of older age and signs of older age (such as balding or greying hair). Humorous cards also convey certain ideas about men's relationships, particularly with women and with their families. This includes cards that represent men as the suffering partners of women who are 'obsessed' with shopping, as ironically engaging in feminised pursuits and as being detached from their children. Such cards could be viewed as using humour to denigrate feminised activities and roles and to legitimise a discourse of fathers being 'part-time' and emotionally detached from their children. Card D meta-discursively pokes fun at the genre of men's birthday cards by explicitly acknowledging some of the recurring features noted earlier, as well as by defining men as 'not women' through the reference to no handbags or cake. This is an important point, as discourses about masculinity can often be realised through negation or disavowal – that is, the absence or rejection of certain interests or qualities associated with femininity (we return to this point in Chapter 5).

News that's fit to print

The news is a particularly powerful form of mass media. This power derives from the capacity of the news to influence the attitudes and beliefs of large numbers of people (Richardson 2007). On this basis, Baker and Baker (2019: 363) describe the news as a 'good "site" for making sense of popular discourses in societies'. Yet like other forms of mass media, the news is not neutral but is, as Fowler (1991: 1) puts it, 'a highly constructive mediator'. In this way, representations found in the news do not constitute a transparent 'window' on society but are, instead, partial accounts that are shaped by 'a number of competing forces of differing strengths and directions' (Iggers 1999: 100). Such competing forces include contextual factors at the sociocultural and institutional levels (e.g., editorial practices), the affordances and constraints of the mode and linguistic grammar in which the discourses are rendered (Fowler 1991) and criteria regarding what events are deemed 'newsworthy' (Galtung and Ruge 1965) or how such events can be discursively constructed as newsworthy (Bednarek and Caple 2017). One of the institutional factors concerns news organizations' political orientations and how news can be linguistically presented in a way that journalists and editors perceive will be consonant with the ideological stances of their target readers. Interestingly, research suggests that readers tend to accept newspaper explanations about sex differences as scientifically valid, as opposed to viewing these as reflecting the political perspective of a given newspaper (Brescoll and LaFrance 2004). Also akin to other forms of mass media, the constitutive functions of news representations compound over time, where through their frequent (re)articulation, such representations and the ideas and ideologies they connote can achieve 'common sense' status in society.

A number of studies of representations of men have taken a comparative approach, contrasting these with representations of women. A common finding in such studies is the prevalence of representations that reinforce the notion of difference, in the process drawing on stereotypical ideas around men and women. These patterns in representation have frequently been interpreted as reflecting and sustaining hegemonic power structures. An example is Caldas-Coulthard and Moon's (2010) corpus study of the categorisation of gendered social actors in UK newspapers, in which they contrasted adjectives used in relation to gender-marked nouns in tabloids with those used in broadsheets, focussing in particular on terms such as *curvy*, *hunky* and *kinky*, as well as comparing the adjectives that pre-modify terms such as *man*, *woman*, *girl* and *boy*. Their analysis found that women face disproportionate scrutiny in their portrayal, often being judged on their appearance and sexuality, with the tabloids engaging more than the broadsheets in the overt sexualisation of female social actors. Men's portrayals, on the other hand, focus more on their social status and their behaviours. Thus, the patterns identified

by Caldas-Coulthard and Moon in many ways reflect the patterns in general language representations we discussed at the beginning of the chapter. The ‘ripple’ effects of such representations invite us to view and evaluate men and women differently, according to the qualities attributed to them in such news coverage, not only in the contexts of the news stories we are reading but potentially also within everyday interactions with people in our own lives.

The more privileged ways in which men are represented in the news has also been identified in studies focussing on representations of men (and women) in reporting about particular topics. For example, Vincent’s (2004) study of UK news coverage of the Wimbledon tennis championships identified how (mostly male) journalists writing about female tennis players tended to background their athletic achievements while foregrounding more sexualising representations of them. On the other hand, the journalists were found to display more reverence to the male players for their athletic achievements. For example, the articles frequently lauded the male players’ strength, stamina and tactical skills, with descriptors such as ‘powerful’, ‘strong’, ‘aggressive’ and ‘enduring’ being applied to them more frequently than to female players. By contrast, female players were talked about in ways that served to suppress their athletic capabilities, with these being overshadowed by commentary on their ‘grace’ and ‘elegance’, or even about their attire. Additionally, male players were often depicted as part of heroic narratives, particularly during critical matches. In particular, their matches were framed as ‘battles’ in which they ‘conquered’ their opponents, ‘overcame’ adversities, and ‘battled’ through harsh conditions. In a follow-up study, Crossman et al. (2007) analysed coverage of male and female tennis players in the 2004 Wimbledon Championships by *The Times* (UK), *The New York Times* (US) and *The Globe & Mail* (Canada). Using content analysis to examine coverage for a total of 16 days surrounding the event, the authors found that male players received significantly more coverage in both articles and photographs. Gough (2007) analysed articles about gender and dieting, finding that dieting was represented as a feminine, woman-centred activity, with cooking seen as traditionally feminine and as something done for other people’s pleasure. Men’s cooking, meanwhile, was framed as a more solitary and selfish activity, with men’s food rendered metaphorically as ‘fuel’ and men’s knowledge about it generally depicted as lacking (except in the case of male celebrity chefs). The feminisation of diets and cooking was also a theme identified by Brookes and Baker (2021) in a comparative analysis of tabloid weight loss narratives about men and women.

As well as comparing representations of men and women, studies of news discourse have also compared representations of masculinities and femininities as concepts. In a recent corpus analysis of a decade of representations of masculinities and femininities in British newspapers, Baker and Baker (2019) found that the British national press privileges masculinity over femininity in

various ways. This is evidenced by a greater number of references to masculinity, its association with power and strength, the use of a detailed categorisation system surrounding it and the implication that it is challenging to achieve and must be 'proven'. Moreover, they found that newspapers address masculinity in more nuanced and conflicting ways than femininity, for example, by presenting various 'types' of masculinity, which ranged from weak to strong and good to bad. These multifaceted representations highlight masculinity's social importance and the need for understanding and re-evaluation. Baker and Baker (2019) also found that masculinity was framed as having significant potential to effect social change and exert control, sometimes through violence. Despite the recognition of masculinity's hegemonic status, the sustained critique in the news media is interpreted to hint at the potential for future shifts in power structures. This sustained critique and acknowledgement of hegemonic masculinity suggest that its power can be questioned and potentially replaced. Indeed, the authors also reported a growing suggestion of combining traditional traits of masculinity and femininity to form a more balanced identity. Celebrity figures such as David Beckham and Sarah Palin are cited as exemplifying this blended identity. Yet despite this emphasis on the combination of gender traits, existing stereotypes are still perpetuated, with the characteristics of masculinity being tough and conquering juxtaposed against a gentle and nurturing femininity.

From men to boys

In the final section before the conclusion of this chapter, we switch our focus slightly; rather than considering any particular format or genre of discourse, we want to look at discourse that is used about and directed towards children – particularly boys. Doing so is important, as children are often viewed as being socialised into particular gendered identities (Connell 2001), not least through the discourses (and embedded ideologies therein) that they are exposed to at home and at school, in the television they watch, the books they read, the toys and games they play with, and so on.

A popular site for investigating the gendered discourses to which children are exposed is in books and stories that are written for them. This is because, as Peterson and Lach (1990) observe, children's literature can reflect the attitudes towards gender that are prevalent within society at a given time. Sunderland has extensively examined the portrayal of gender in children's literature, revealing stereotypical and often binary depictions of male and female roles. Across a series of studies, she found that boys frequently emerge as dominant and adventurous figures, whereas girls are often illustrated in more passive or domestic capacities (Sunderland 2010). Sunderland has observed an underrepresentation of female characters, with male protagonists, male named characters and male speaking roles dominating the

narratives (Sunderland 2010). This ‘male default’ portrayal positions male figures as normative, especially in leadership roles (Sunderland 2000). There is also a clear heteronormative bias, with the stories emphasising heterosexual relationships and offering limited representation of LGBTQ+ relationships (Sunderland 2010). Traditional gender roles further manifest in themes of heroism, with boys typically positioned as rescuers of passive female characters. Such literature can often mirror patriarchal norms, then, by placing male characters in power roles while pitching female characters in subordinate positions (Sunderland 2000). Even occupational roles in these stories are gendered, for example, presenting male characters as doctors and female characters as nurses. Sunderland (2010) has also identified distinct language styles for male and female characters, with girls often portrayed as polite and hesitant and boys as direct and assertive, drawing on and propagating the kinds of genderlectal stereotypes we described earlier, as well as gendered norms relating to what is regarded as ‘polite’ behaviour in men and women (Chalupnik et al. 2017).

In more recent work in this area, Hunt (2015) employed critical discourse analysis in conjunction with corpus linguistics to examine gender portrayals achieved through the use of references to body parts in the *Harry Potter* book series (see Figure 3.2). Hunt’s analysis highlights the different ways in which male and female characters are represented as engaging with the narrative world that is constructed in the books. Male body parts are not only mentioned more frequently but are also portrayed in a manner that accentuates activity and interaction with the environment. For instance, the word *feet* is often associated with male characters and is used to convey vigorous action, with verbs such as *scrambling*, *leaping* and *staggered* featuring as statistically significant collocates of this body part. By contrast, for female characters, this same body part engages in far fewer dynamic actions, evidenced by a lack of similarly active verb collocations. Hunt’s (2015) analysis also shows how greater physical capability tends to be associated with male characters through the depiction of their movements and interactions during events of conflict or danger. For example, male characters are often described in contexts where their bodies are on the move – they *scramble*, *clamber* and *stagger* – depicting robust engagement with physical challenges. Female characters, on the other hand, exhibit a more restricted range of physical activities, with terms associated with their movement reflecting a lesser degree of agency and often requiring assistance from male characters. Hunt (2015) also demonstrates how body parts are used symbolically within the books to communicate gendered power dynamics. For instance, uses of *hands* and *fingers* differentiate social power and authority, with male characters typically represented as using hand gestures to command attention or silence, thereby assuming authoritative roles within interactions, meanwhile female characters are depicted as using similar hand gestures to achieve quieter, less

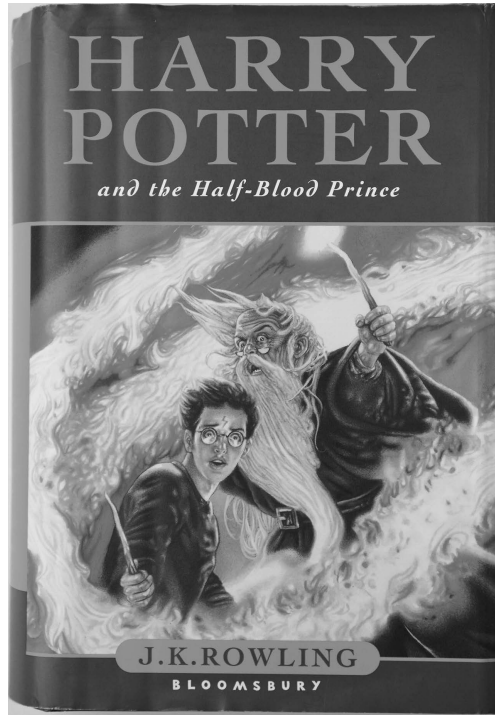


FIGURE 3.2 Male characters using their hands on the cover of one of the *Harry Potter* books.

Source: Greg Balfour Evans/Alamy Stock Photo.

assertive forms of communication, such as attracting attention from others in a subdued manner. Overall, then, male characters are not only represented as being more active and involved in physically engaging with the narrative world constructed within the books, but they embody a form of agency and authority that is not equally afforded to female characters.

More recent research suggests that the situation for the representation of female characters, though still limited when compared to male characters, is likely to at least have become more diverse over time. For example, Čermáková and Mahlberg (2022) examine the gendered descriptions of body language in children's fiction from the 19th century and compare these with contemporary works. Taking a corpus linguistic approach, the researchers analysed repeated sequences of words containing at least one body part noun and a 'gender indicator'. They observed how in the 19th century there were fewer and more limited descriptive sequences for female characters than male characters. However, contemporary literature demonstrated a growing

similarity in descriptions of male and female characters, indicating increased diversity in portraying female characters and their interactions.

A small but recently growing body of work has considered the kinds of gendered discourses that children are exposed to in the contexts of toys and gaming. With reference to Hall's (1997) definition of 'representation' presented at the beginning of this chapter, Caldas-Coulthard and van Leeuwen (2002: 93) argue toys to be 'representational in the sense that they signify what society is like: its roles (power relations inscribed in social roles), technologies (representation of tools and instruments – toy cars, trains, computers, telephones, etc.), identities and practices'.

In an interesting study, Caldas-Coulthard and van Leeuwen (2002) examine the gendered ideologies that are conveyed by children's toys. They considered the toys themselves as texts and explored gendered ideologies inherent in their design, as well as in the linguistic design of the texts that accompany and 'frame' the toys. They compared a series of toys directed at boys (e.g., Action Man) against a series of toys directed at girls (e.g., Barbie), as well as gendered toys-as-social-actors that were not directed at either boys or girls in particular. Their analysis demonstrates how toys exhibit distinct gender divisions; boys' toys emphasise action and power, while girls' toys reflect domestic roles and aesthetics. These toys mirror broader cultural patterns, perpetuating unequal gender norms. For instance, female dolls often symbolise domesticity and restricted movement. Conversely, boys' toys emphasise action, danger and authority. Such varied representations can influence the identities of boys and girls from a young age, framing their perceptions of the 'real' and 'imaginary' worlds.

In a study of how toys are marketed online in a gendered way, Putland (2020) carried out a multimodal critical discourse analysis of the websites of LEGO City and LEGO Friends, which are traditionally marketed towards boys and girls, respectively. The LEGO City homepage, aimed at boys, featured visuals of police chases and emergency scenarios, along with text that urged users to assume decidedly active roles, for example, through implorations to them to 'save the city' and 'be the hero'. On the other hand, the LEGO Friends homepage, targeted towards girls, was found to be dominated by images of picnics and leisure activities, with linguistic choices promoting more socially oriented activities and cooperative play, such as through invitations to 'join the fun' and 'explore friendships'. The visual and linguistic modality of each homepage was also found to reinforce these thematic differences. For instance, LEGO City used a blue and grey colour palette with a bold font suggestive of seriousness, while LEGO Friends employed pastel colours and playful fonts, indicative of warmth and approachability. Furthermore, LEGO City's interactive elements involved games that simulate rescue missions, aligning with traditional masculine roles, whereas LEGO Friends focussed on interactive stories that involve community-oriented and

more nurturing tasks, aligning with traditional feminine roles. The settings and character representations also differed significantly. While LEGO City was characterised by urban, chaotic environments and professional characters in action-oriented roles, LEGO Friends' settings were more harmonious and community-focussed, with characters depicted in casual attire and as engaging in nurturing activities.

Also focussing on the LEGO brand, Mackenzie et al. (2020) examined the construction of gendered identities in a series of collectable cards created by LEGO in conjunction with the UK supermarket chain, Sainsbury's. In particular, they focussed on the 'Create the World LEGO Cards' franchise and, specifically, the representation of LEGO minifigures therein. The authors analysed how these figures are named, visually depicted and linguistically described. They found that female minifigures were underrepresented, appearing half as frequently as male minifigures. Moreover, female characters were often characterised by their appearance, such as being youthful and slim, while male characters were defined more by their actions or professions. In another study, Coffey-Glover and Mackenzie (2023) examined gender representations in the 'Disney Heroes' series of trading cards aimed at young children. Their mixed-methods analysis revealed that these cards depicted male characters as more influential and 'heroic' than female characters and as having a greater impact on their surroundings. As such, they conclude that although there have been improvements in terms of more equitable representations of male and female characters over time, such child-directed discourse is still liable to largely maintain prevailing gender stereotypes.

Conclusion

Considering texts from everyday language use through to mass media, our foregoing exploration has highlighted the role that discourse in such contexts can play in not only reflecting but also shaping societal gender norms. We have seen how men are frequently portrayed in dominant roles which emphasise their physicality, power and authority. Women, meanwhile, are often depicted in relation to their emotions and aesthetics and are positioned in passive roles. Although there is not (as we discussed in Chapter 1) any single way of 'being a man', we cannot get away from the fact that the vast majority of the studies have tended to show how men are represented in fairly stereotypical ways. More specifically, in whatever context we looked at, men tended to be represented in ways that reflected the kinds of typical masculine performances we saw in Chapter 2. Even cases that go against the grain in some way – for example, the Snickers advert we looked at in detail – ultimately reinforce normative ideals of masculinity by (implicitly) devaluing those performances that subvert the norm, precisely because of their subversive nature.

What is clear, then, is that the ways in which men and masculinities are represented ultimately speak to the truth that all masculinities are not equal. And it is precisely through their repeated performance, representation and positive appraisal that normative definitions and ways of performing masculinity have attained (and maintain) their dominant cultural status. Importantly, such representations are never 'neutral' but, rather, are imbued with ideologies that reflect, among other things, the values of the culture and society in which they take place, the ideological interests of the person or institution responsible for creating and disseminating the representation, and the value that is attributed to the kinds of masculinities that the man or men in question are viewed as characterising (and/or which are attributed to them through the act of representation itself). At this point, it is relevant to acknowledge the long shadow that hegemonic masculinity seems to cast over the various contexts addressed in the research we have discussed in this chapter, as well as those explored in the case studies we have presented. It is to this topic that we turn in the next chapter.

Note

1 <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Lumbersexual>

4

HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

Introduction

Having explored men's performances of masculinities and representations of men in the previous two chapters, we now move on to consider more closely how these performances and representations can be related to power. In particular, this chapter examines the relationship between language and hegemonic masculinity, or the 'correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power' (Connell 1995: 77; see also: Connell 2005). Hegemonic masculinity refers to the privileging of some forms of masculinity as powerful, the subordination or marginalisation of other forms, and the ways that this is achieved through complicity, even from those who do not necessarily stand to benefit.

In this chapter, then, we identify what is meant by hegemonic masculinity, before examining how male hegemony is enshrined in language use, language ideologies and language systems. We consider how idealised hegemonic men are represented in fictional contexts, such as James Bond novels and John Wayne films, and how powerful men use language in real contexts, by examining the language of political leaders. Such men can display dominance over others through the use of silence, nonverbal language (e.g., strong handshakes, gaze, invading space) or by breaking linguistic norms and conventions. We will see how such features can be indexical – connotating masculine power. We'll look at the ways that hegemonic masculinity is enshrined both in language ideologies (or beliefs about language that are represented as common sense) and how language systems themselves are structured in order to enable male power. Finally, we consider criticisms of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, the difficulties in defining it, its changing nature and alternative understandings of the phenomenon it denotes (such as a masculine bloc).

Defining hegemonic masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity is a framework for understanding masculinity outlined by Connell (1987, 1995 [2005]). Importantly, hegemonic masculinity involves power relations between genders and within genders. The concept of hegemony comes from the Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci, who used it as a way of explaining why small numbers of people were able to yield power over the rest of society rather than being deposed through revolution. Cultural hegemony occurs when those lower down in society accept the ideology of the ruling class, identifying with their values and interests.

Connell views masculinity as a hierarchical system, whereby some men occupy more privileged and more powerful positions than others. If we consider that one of the most stereotypical forms of male interaction is through engaging in competition and conflict, then this 'leaderboard' view of masculinity feels apt. At the top of the hierarchy is society's normative conceptualisation of a perfect male specimen – the most honoured way of being a man. Some aspects of this 'perfect specimen' may change over time or differ between cultures, but there are a few stable features – strength, assertiveness, confidence, courage, stoicism, aggression and independence. Additionally, hegemonic masculinity is likely to be embodied through an intersection of various identity characteristics, such as heterosexuality and whiteness, and being able-bodied, muscular and wealthy. A key aspect of hegemonic masculinity is that the view of perfect masculinity is accepted and upheld by large amounts of people in a society, including those who do not meet the criteria – Connell refers to this as complicity. The positive representations of certain kinds of masculinity examined in Chapter 3 indicate one way in which complicity is achieved – we are conditioned to view those forms of masculinity as deserving their privileged status. Additionally, hegemonic masculinity subordinates and marginalises other forms of masculinity, such as gay masculinity (explored more in Chapter 5). However, to an extent, the vast majority of men benefit from hegemonic masculinity because there is always someone who is lower down the hierarchy than they are. And crucially, the hierarchy does not admit women at all.

It is perhaps more meaningful to consider the hierarchy as a pyramid rather than a ladder (see Bornstein 1998: 43–45), with very few men occupying the higher echelons. In fact, the perfect hegemonic man does not exist, although he is a popular type of character within film, being represented by actors like Clark Gable, Kirk Douglas, Charlton Heston, Sean Connery, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Gerard Butler and Henry Cavill. It is very unlikely that any single man can continuously embody all of the qualities of hegemonic masculinity, so the concept is therefore an ideal rather than a reality, and it is through representations in popular culture that shared understandings about it are reached.

While hegemonic masculinity was originally conceived as benefitting all men, research has since indicated that it involves the regulation of men through the policing of ‘violations’. Hegemonic masculinity is as much about *not* being a woman as it is about being a man, and its definition involves the possession of some traits as well as the rejection of others (Logan 2017: 118). Edwards and Jones (2009) carried out interviews with a diverse range of male undergraduates, asking them about their understandings of being a man. The interviewees spoke of being socialised according to a set of cultural expectations which were described as ‘very narrow, rigid, and limiting ways of being a man . . . expectations were not just about who men were supposed to be but also about who they couldn’t be, such as gay, feminine, or vulnerable’ (2009: 214–215). These young men felt as though they needed to wear a mask to be perceived as men, and they described feeling pressured to express a stereotypically masculine gender identity. The consequences of such performances included policy and rule violations, the degradation of women and the lack of meaningful relationships. The men experienced a loss of identity and ‘sacrificed some of their humanity by denying aspects of who they really were’ (2009: 219).

Kiesling (2007: 657) notes that it is difficult to use the concept of hegemonic masculinity in order to understand and explain men’s communicative practices, which is partly due to the challenge in defining what hegemonic masculinity is and also due to the way in which the term has become almost synonymous with masculinity in general in academic literature. He instead suggests that hegemonic masculinity comprises a combination of four cultural discourses that are constructed as desirable to men. The first is gender difference (the view that men and women are categorically different), the second is heterosexism (a view of masculinity as involving sexually desiring women and not men), the third is dominance (a man should be strong, authoritative and in control) and the fourth is male solidarity (the notion of a bond between men that marginalises women). Kiesling (2007: 660–661) explains that the cultural discourses of masculinity are linked to language through the concept of indexicality (Ochs 1993; and see Chapter 2). Indexical meanings are those that arise through social context. For example, on average, men have a deeper voice than women, so through our experiences of hearing language, a deep voice will index masculinity. Indexing can sometimes take an indirect route – so, for example, a deep voice may index a quality like authority, and due to a further association of authority with masculinity, the deep voice indexes masculinity, too.

Never apologise

As mentioned earlier, the US actor John Wayne is one of the most exemplary cases of hegemonic masculinity. Wayne appeared in 169 feature-length films

between 1926 and 1976, many of which were war films or westerns. He starred in 23 films directed by John Ford, in which Wayne played domineering, stoic and invulnerable characters that lived up to Ford's vision of the ideal man. Ford initially found Wayne to be too gentle, and during the filming of *Stagecoach* (1939), Ford reportedly yelled at Wayne to 'Walk like a man, for Christ's sake, instead of skipping like a fairy' (Adams 2014: 76). As an exemplar of hegemonic masculinity, we will consider an excerpt from another Ford film, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949). In this film, Wayne plays a cavalry veteran, Captain Nathan Brittles, who is stationed at Fort Starke and is tasked with dealing with a breakout by the Cheyenne and Arapaho from their reservation following the defeat of George Armstrong Custer at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. His commanding officer's niece, Olivia Dandridge, is popular among the younger officers. In the following excerpt, Lieutenant Cohill tries to prevent Lieutenant Pennell from taking Olivia on a picnic. Brittles, as the superior officer, intervenes in the dispute.

- 1 Lieutenant Cohill: Lieutenant, the post is closed. Sorry to spoil your outing, Miss Dandridge.
- 2 Miss Dandridge: Sorry, indeed! Mr Cohill, haven't you anything better to do than to ride around in that little red sash making yourself obnoxious?
- 3 Cohill: If you have complaints about my orders, Miss Dandridge, you may submit them to Major Allshard, preferably in writing.
- 4 Miss Dandridge: Duplicate or triplicate?
- 5 Lieutenant Pennell: Ah come on Flint. Don't be a spoilsport.
- 6 Miss Dandridge: That's exactly what he is. Because I wouldn't trust you to take me on a picnic last Sunday now you're hazing Mr Pennell. Drive on Ross and if you . . .
- 7 Cohill: You take those reins and I'll slap you in the guard house.
- 8 Miss Dandridge: You wouldn't dare.
- 9 Captain Brittles: Someone placing you under arrest Miss Dandridge?
- 10 Miss Dandridge: It's Lieutenant Cohill Sir. He's suddenly decided he can order me around, and I . . .
- 11 Cohill: Sir I was merely following orders . . .
- 12 Brittles: You're at attention Mr Cohill. Please proceed Miss Dandridge.
- 13 Miss Dandridge: I don't want to make a scene Captain. I'm sure that Mr Cohill is a fine officer. I know his father, General Cohill, and I know his sister. Lieutenant Cohill has made up his mind that Lieutenant Pennell hasn't rank enough to be seen in my company.
- 14 Pennell: Sir, if I could just . . .
- 15 Brittles: You're at attention Mr Pennell. Do you wish to further amplify your complaint Miss Dandridge?

- 16 Miss Dandridge: Complaint? Oh, Captain Brittles, I'm not complaining. Why I love Fort Starke and simply adore the entire cavalry.
- 17 Brittles: Our pleasure, ma'am.
- 18 Cohill: Yes, indeed.
- 19 Brittles: Mr Cohill, wipe that grin off your face. You have the floor.
- 20 Cohill: Sir, I have denied Mr Pennell permission to leave the post.
- 21 Brittles: For what purpose did you wish to leave the post, Mr Pennell?
- 22 Pennell: Picnicking, sir.
- 23 Brittles: Picnicking? Picnicking, Miss Dandridge? Where, in St. Louis?
- 24 Pennell: Oh no sir just out by the waterfall. But I'm sorry . . .
- 25 Brittles: Never apologise Mister. It's a sign of weakness. Mr Cohill, I see no reason why Mr Pennell should not go picnicking.
- 26 Cohill: Very good sir.
- 27 Miss Dandridge: Thank you, Captain Brittles.
- 28 Brittles: But Miss Dandridge, Mr Cohill was quite right in denying you permission to leave the post under the present emergency. So, may I escort you to your quarters? [He lifts Miss Dandridge off the cart and leads her away] You may proceed with your picnic, Mr Pennell.

In the excerpt, Captain Brittles shows dominance over the other men, interrupting them several times (lines 12, 15 and 25). He also controls the dialogue, choosing who gets to speak next, either by directing a question to the other speakers (lines 9, 15, 21 and 23) or by telling them that it is their turn to speak (lines 12 and 19). Because Brittles holds a higher office, he is not required to acknowledge the rank of lower officers, so he can address them as Mr Cohill and Mr Pennell, as opposed to using their rank (Lieutenant). However, he demonstrates a 'chivalrous', somewhat exaggerated form of politeness towards Miss Dandridge, referring to her as ma'am (line 17). Brittles appears to initially side with Lieutenant Pennell, allowing the picnic to take place (line 25). This is one of John Wayne's most quoted lines, as he spells out a key aspect of hegemonic masculinity: 'Never apologise – it's a sign of weakness'. His reaction to Lieutenant Pennell's apology could be seen as a form of hegemonic masculinity in terms of 'policing' other men's use of language. In a more subtle way, Brittles's enunciation of 'picnicking' (lines 23 and 25) is rather exaggerated. One interpretation of this could be that he is questioning Lieutenant Pennell's masculinity for wanting to engage in a relatively frivolous activity. Another interpretation is that he is questioning whether Lieutenant Pennell's intentions with Miss Dandridge involve more than picnicking.

In the final line of the excerpt, Brittles indicates that it is too dangerous for Miss Dandridge to leave the encampment. Again, he addresses her politely, 'may I escort you to your quarters', but does not wait for her answer, instead

physically removing her from the horse and trap. This results in Lieutenant Pennell having to go on the picnic alone. The scene brings to mind the vernacular term *cock-block*, where first Cohill attempts to restrict Pennell's access to Miss Dandridge, then Brittles does so, and ends with Brittles having demonstrated dominance over the other three characters in a range of ways. It is worth noting how Brittles appears to toy with the other characters (and the audience). We do not know whose side he is going to take, and ultimately, it is his own side – the scene is thus played for humour, with Brittles having the last, hegemonic laugh.

Beyond words

While hegemonic masculinity is associated with certain types of men, its features can also be employed by others in order to index a powerful identity. Many of the features that are more strongly associated with male language use that were discussed in the previous John Wayne excerpt and in Chapter 2 are also viewed as powerful ways of communicating. Trudgill (1972) refers to non-standard language use as a form of covert prestige and also notes that it has associations with toughness, which is seen to be a desirable masculine attribute. Language use that doesn't convey emotion can also be seen as powerful since the speaker can come across as self-composed and impervious to antagonism. Additionally, a confident speaking style, where certainty and precision (e.g., through quantification) are expressed, is likely to be seen as linked to power, as is one where the interlocutors don't avoid conflict but tackle it head-on. However, there are other aspects that are less about the content of one's speech and more about the way in which something is communicated, either through voice tone or nonverbal language.

A deep, commanding voice is an example of a feature of one's communication style that is often associated with hegemonic masculinity. Male vocal folds are approximately 60% longer than female vocal folds (Fant 1960), contributing to an average rate of male vocal fold vibration during phonation (F_0) which is about 5 standard deviations below women's (Puts et al. 2012). Puts et al. (2016) have shown that male voices that have low- F_0 vocalisations are perceived by heterosexual men as being more dominant, while heterosexual women find them more attractive. Both the US actor Rock Hudson and former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher changed their voices to make these deeper in order to be perceived as credibly dominant. Hudson was gay, and his agent, Henry Willson, gave him lessons in acting in a stereotypically masculine way – ensuring, for example, that Hudson didn't cross his legs, sway his hips or hold his wrists limp. Hudson was assigned a vocal coach, and there are reports that he was made to scream from the top of a mountain when he had a cold (Hofler 2005). In reality, it is more likely that he had surgery on his throat to make his voice deeper.

In the 1970s, television producer Gordon Reece was tasked with giving Margaret Thatcher an image makeover, including altering her voice, which her critics had viewed as being rather shrill. Reece apparently enlisted a vocal coach who made Thatcher carry out humming exercises in order to deepen her voice so that she would sound more authoritative. The change was seen as a key factor in her political success. To an extent, having a deep voice can function as an eligibility condition (Van Leeuwen 2008: 10), or qualification, that is required in order to be eligible to play a particular role in a given social practice (e.g., being the leading man in a Hollywood movie or being Prime Minister). Facets of hegemonic masculinity can thus be seen as contributing towards conscious performances of gender.

Power is often associated with the amount of speech that someone engages in, although popular science and self-help books have sometimes put forward the view that women speak more than men. The dust jacket of a book called *The Female Brain* (Brizendine 2006) claims that men speak 6,000 words a day compared to women's 20,000 words a day. However, academic research has tended not to find much evidence to support the view that women are more loquacious than men. A meta-study of children's language variation carried out by Leaper and Smith (2004) found that girls were slightly more talkative and used more affiliative speech than boys, although the average effect sizes (indicating the extent to which the difference is actually meaningful) were negligible. Another meta-analysis by Leaper and Ayres (2007), this time focussing on adults, found that, overall, it is men who talk more, although again the difference was small. The spurious claims about women talking a lot could be seen as a form of social regulation, then, serving to remind women to speak less.

Another aspect of how masculine power is expressed through language is the use of silence. Indeed, a positive representation of a man is to call him 'the strong, silent type'. Gal (1989) notes the paradoxical power of silence in certain institutional contexts like religious confessions or police interrogations, where the silent listener judges. Sattel (1983) describes male silence in domestic settings as a form of power, giving an example of a scripted argument between a man and a woman, where the man does not respond to the woman, and she becomes increasingly annoyed by his silence. So, alongside the popular view of the talkative woman, there is a mirror representation of the 'strong, silent man'. An article in the popular magazine *Psychology Today* (Nelson 2011) quotes Peggy Noonan, a political speechwriter, who says the following:

I admire and have often been instructed by the strong silence of men. They're silent not because they have nothing to say, but because they don't have to fill up the air with words. They don't need to be looked at

to dominate. They already dominate, just by looking at themselves, but they're serene about it. Other people wonder what silent people are thinking and respect their silence.

It seems, then, that it is not the *amount* of speech that someone engages in that makes them powerful, but whether or not they have opportunities to speak and whether they are paid attention when they do.

Bond said nothing

Between 1953 and 1966, Ian Fleming wrote 12 novels featuring a suave but brutal British spy named James Bond. Fleming said that he wrote the novels for 'red blooded, heterosexual adults', although he viewed Bond as

[A] blunt instrument wielded by a government department who would get into bizarre and fantastic situations. . . . he's always referred to as my hero. I don't see him as a hero myself. On the whole I think he's a rather unattractive man.

Fleming and Chandler (2014: 31)

Despite this, Bond has numerous sexual encounters with attractive women throughout the books (see Figure 4.1), and the film versions cast conventionally attractive actors like Sean Connery and Pierce Brosnan to play the title character. Bond could be seen as an example of hegemonic masculinity, although Miller (2020) outlines various paradoxes in Bond's masculinity, noting that Connery was himself actually sexually objectified, with his body being routinely held up for public gaze. Meanwhile, the popular press disagreed on whether Brosnan's Bond was the acme of metrosexuality (see Chapter 7), or its antithesis.

Across the 12 novels, it might be assumed that Bond would frequently be associated with action – engaging in physical activities such as fighting villains, chasing suspects or breaking into buildings. After all, this is the kind of action that he is frequently pictured as carrying out in the film adaptations. However, interestingly, in the novels Bond actually tends to be most strongly associated with verbs relating to mental and cognitive processes, such as *guessed*, *suspected*, *reflected*, *noticed*, *sensed*, *concluded*, *remembered* and *recognised*. This indicates that Bond is actually marked as using his intellect as opposed to physical skills, with the reader being given a privileged perspective on his thought processes. Bond's internal world is therefore a dominant aspect of the novels. Even in terms of interaction, Bond is not represented as being particularly talkative. We examined the most frequent three-word phrases featuring the word *Bond* across the 12 novels and identified those

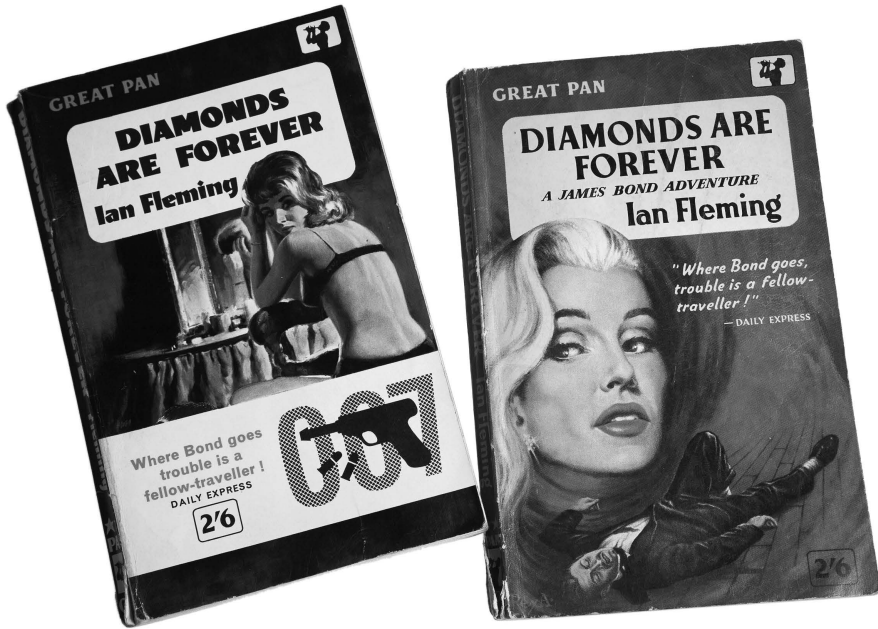


FIGURE 4.1 Early issue paperback covers from *Diamonds Are Forever*.

Source: Chris Howes/Wild Places Photography/Alamy Stock Photo.

that referred to Bond's language use in some way. The most frequent of these was '*Bond said nothing*', which occurred 13 times.

For example, in the following excerpt, taken from the fourth Bond novel *Diamonds Are Forever* (1956), Bond has posed as a petty crook in order to make contact with Tiffany Case, a diamond smuggler, who at the start of the chapter has told him, 'I'm not going to sleep with you'. In the scene from which this excerpt is taken, the two are being driven back to their hotel after a meal.

Bond said nothing. He looked out of the window and cursed his job. All he wanted to say to this girl was: "Listen. Come with me. I like you. Don't be afraid. It can't be worse than alone." But if she said yes he would have been smart. And he didn't want to be smart with this girl. It was his job to use her, but, whatever the job dictated, there was one way he would never 'use' this particular girl. Through the heart.

In front of the Astor, he helped her out on to the sidewalk and she stood with her back to him while he paid the driver. They walked up the steps in the stiff silence of a married couple after a bad evening ending in a row.

They got their keys at the desk and she said “five” to the boy on the elevator. She stood with her face to the door as they rode up. Bond saw that the knuckles of the hand that held her evening bag were white. At the fifth she walked quickly out and made no protest when Bond followed her. They walked round several corners until they came to her door. She bent down and fitted the key into the lock and pushed the door open.

Then she turned in the entrance and faced him.

“Listen, you Bond person . . .”

It had started as the beginning of an angry speech, but then she paused and looked straight into his eyes, and Bond saw that her eyelashes were wet. And suddenly she had flung an arm round his neck and her face was against his and she was saying “Look after yourself, James. I don’t want to lose you.” And then she pulled his face against hers and kissed him once, hard and long on the lips, with a fierce tenderness that was almost without sex.

Bond does not speak during this excerpt, although in the first paragraph the reader is privy to his thought processes regarding Tiffany Case (who is positioned as subordinate to him through the nomination, ‘this girl’), while he muses on the hypothetical consequences of articulating his feelings for her. In the second paragraph, Bond is described as helping Tiffany Case out of the taxi, positioning him as both gallant and in-control. His control continues when he pays the driver. The silence of the two main characters is then likened to that of a married couple after an argument, indicating a way in which the author frames their silence as signifying an intimate relationship.

In the third paragraph, Tiffany Case tells the elevator operator which floor she wants to go to, but Bond is not described as saying anything. Through his silence, we infer that Bond does not intend to go to his own hotel room, and sure enough, Bond is described as following Tiffany Case to her room. Although she walks quickly, she ‘made no protest’, framing her action (or lack of action) as ambiguous. In the final part of the excerpt, Tiffany Case begins to make an angry speech when she gets to her hotel room. However, she only manages four words before embracing Bond and passionately expressing her true feelings for him.

The excerpt indicates the potential power of silence in representations of hegemonic masculinity. Bond does not need to engage in any sort of conversational work to seduce Tiffany Case; he doesn’t reveal his feelings to her but simply follows her to her room. The excerpt feels like a battle of wills, with Tiffany Case cracking first. Although the scene does not end with the characters having sex, it is implied that this happens later in the novel. We should bear in mind that this novel was written in 1956, and Bond’s behaviour is likely to be interpreted rather differently from a 21st-century perspective, as

stalking. Indeed, other scholars have noted the emergence of a new form of hegemonic masculinity in the later film versions of the Bond novels, within a corporate context of the superhero franchise (Cenizal and Su 2015) or even non-hegemonic masculinity, which is more fluid and vulnerable (Cox 2014).

Male hegemony can also be expressed through other nonverbal forms of communication, including gaze. John Berger's essay about art criticism describes how gaze can function as an aspect of male power.

Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.

Berger (1972: 47)

When men interact with one another, eye contact can imply dominance. Butler (2008: 867) notes how in the context of men's prisons, questions like 'What are you looking at?' can be used as a way of 'replacing feelings of shame and/or inferiority with feelings of pride, achieved through an aggressive display of "manly" behaviour'. During pre-bout weigh-ins, boxers are often photographed 'invading' each other's space, with their faces a few inches away from each another, while attempting to stare the other man down (see Figure 4.2). These repetitive poses make good publicity material, although, ironically, the closeness of the two men and their interest in one another could afford a more homoerotic interpretation of such images.

The not-so-gentle art of subordination

One aspect of language use often associated with men is banter. This is a linguistic activity that can be interpreted in different ways. Haugh and Bousfield (2012) suggest that banter can be classed as a form of mock impoliteness and describe it as exchanges of jocular humour, mocking, insults and teasing between friends. Dynel (2008: 246) describes banter as an 'interactional bonding game', and Alexander et al. (2012) note that it can enhance social cohesion. Betts and Spenser (2016) characterise banter as a fun activity between friends, although they also caution that it can act as a precursor to bullying, as interactions that start as a joke may get out of hand. Kotthoff (1996) has argued that banter can promote social divergence and exclusion, while Rivers and Smith (1994) go further by comparing it to relational bullying. Banter is therefore an interesting feature of language use to consider in relation to hegemonic masculinity, particularly in terms of how it is used to subordinate others.



FIGURE 4.2 The male–male gaze: Mike Pyle and Jake Ellenberger at the UFC 108 weigh-ins at the MGM Grand Garden Arena on 1 January 2010 in Las Vegas.

Source: Francis Specker/Alamy Stock Photo.

I got some girl in bed with me

Decapua and Boxer (1999)¹ analysed recordings of spontaneous talk among male co-workers in a brokerage firm in Washington, DC. This is an extremely competitive setting wherein the employees must reach a certain level of gross production each month in order to stay in the company, and large amounts of money can be made through commission. Daily and monthly profit totals are posted for each broker, resulting in constant comparisons. Decapua and Boxer (1999: 5) write that ‘these men attempt to establish and reinforce their standing within a continually fluctuating hierarchical order via a form of boasting and banter that emphasizes sexual prowess and athletic abilities – traditional male domains’. In the following excerpt of a conversation between two of the brokers, Dave tells Burt about his recent participation in a hockey game.

Dave: Shit, I got this fucking bruise on my leg from blocking that shot.

Burt: What'd ya want, ya play the game and if you get physical, ya block the shot with your body. Ya know, you're such a wimp. I'm gonna call you Merlot.

Dave: What the fuck're you talking about?

Burt: That's because you bruise like a grape.

Decapua and Boxer (1999: 7)

In this exchange, both men use aspects of salient masculine performance, such as swearing and non-standard forms, which we discussed in Chapter 2. Dave's initial utterance could be interpreted as a form of positive self-presentation, where he describes how he obtained an injury from blocking a shot during the game. However, rather than displaying sympathy or appearing impressed at Dave's heroism during the game, Burt is instead dismissive, casting Dave's utterance as an unwarranted complaint when he asks 'What'd ya want?'. Burt goes on to state that blocking the shot with your body is part of playing the game, thus implying that injuries are nothing to be concerned about. He then insults Dave by calling him a wimp and sets him up to be the butt of a joke by saying he is going to call him Merlot (the name of a red wine). When Dave asks what Burt is talking about, Burt provides the punchline to the joke by saying that Dave bruises like a grape. The competitive aspects of this interaction should be clear, with Burt effectively destroying Dave's attempt at boasting and establishing dominance over him by questioning Dave's masculinity and making a joke about him.

Banter is sometimes characterised as a form of dominant masculinity which intersects with social class. For example, Bolt (2010) analyses how the talk of Zimbabwean migrant male citrus fruit pickers on South African border farms diverges along class lines. Banter, often relating to stories of sexual promiscuity, occurred between the pickers, with Bolt (2010) describing how one supervisor joked about how another worker was responsible for raping a woman at a nearby farm, causing other workers to laugh. While this kind of banter enabled camaraderie among a diverse set of men and helped them to maintain good relations with powerful supervisors, not all men engaged in it, and some of the pickers who were from middle-class, educated backgrounds viewed the other men as vulgar, violent and inferior. For example, one middle-class worker who did not engage in banter wore pleated trousers, a tucked-in long-sleeved shirt and gold-rimmed glasses, which earned him the nickname 'Magogoros' (glasses). Bolt describes Magogoros as telling his

co-workers not to address him in the same crude tone that they used towards one another.

Offering a different perspective on banter, Hugman's (2021) analysis of banter in the dressing room of a football team in New Zealand indicates how more supportive sentiments can be combined with jocular abuse. Hugman (2021: 47–48) describes an interaction between players after a match which the team lost. One of the players makes a self-deprecating joke about his performance, but other players defend his efforts, making good-natured, humorous remarks. Hugman (2021) notes that during the game itself, players would be more likely to berate one another for making mistakes, but in the dressing room, relational work takes priority over transactional discourse. In another interaction (2021: 48–49), two players engage in jocular abuse against a third player who used the bathroom before a match, resulting in an unpleasant smell. However, the third player, rather than contesting the abuse, supports it by talking about what he ate the previous night. The player then claims he will produce the smell around the opposition team, indicating a style of banter which Hugman (2021: 50) calls 'medially collaborative', wherein players straddle the line between indexing intimacy and normative masculinity. Hugman (2021) suggests that this kind of dressing room banter might function as a benevolent bonding strategy as opposed to being a reproduction of normative masculinity.

We shouldn't assume that women and girls never try to establish hierarchies through competitive talk. For example, Wiseman (2002) describes female high school cliques in America as being extremely competitive. However, the ways that hierarchies are established may differ. For example, women may be more likely to use less obvious ways of gaining dominance over others, based on exclusion or by offering an inauthentic compliment. Setting is also important. Thinking back to the male narratives that Coates (2003) analysed in her book *Men Talk*, Kulick (2003: 239) notes how these mostly took place in pubs, whereas when Coates studied women's talk, their conversations tended to occur at home. He asks whether conversations among female groups in pubs would display the same characteristics as their talk at home. The same point could be made about setting and male conversations. Decapua and Boxer's (1999) study focussed on men who were working in a highly competitive context. We cannot conclude that the same men would necessarily behave in that way in other settings.

Calm down, dear!

As an example of the way in which hegemonic masculinity subordinates other gender identities, read the following excerpt from a British car insurance advert which aired in 2003, featuring the filmmaker Michael Winner.

- 1 Winner: It's unbelievable that some insurance companies don't want to insure me!
- 2 (Winner is distracted by three young women standing by the side of the road and crashes his car into another car.)
- 3 Winner: There's this company that only wants good drivers. They don't want you to pay for my repairs.
- 4 (Shot of Winner's car hitting another car.)
- 5 Winner: The company's called Esure. They could save you up to thirty per cent on your car insurance.
- 6 Woman: You hit me! You went into the back of my new car.
- 7 Winner: Calm down, dear! It's a commercial. I'm only acting. I'm really a very good driver. That's why I'm with Esure. You should be too.
- 8 Woman: Hello mum, I'm on the telly.
- 9 (Winner rolls his eyes.)

In this advert, Winner is positioned as a hegemonic man. Visible aspects of his identity index this, such as his whiteness, his clothing and his received pronunciation (or standard British English) accent. His behaviour also marks him as hegemonic. His car accident is caused by him looking at three women in a way that indicates his heterosexuality (line 2). When a female actor accosts Winner for crashing into her car, he responds with, 'calm down, dear' (line 7)—a directive which positions her as acting in an irrational and excessive way. One way in which women have been subordinated to men is through representations of them as overly emotional or hysterical (Gilman et al. 1993). This form of representation is so ingrained in society that Winner does not need to make it explicit; simply telling the woman to 'calm down' is enough to bring it to mind. Additionally, Winner's use of the nomination *dear* indicates a patronising stance. While the denotative meaning of *dear* is positive and affectionate, in contexts like this it suggests a dismissive attitude. Winner goes on to break the 'fourth wall' by announcing that he's 'only acting' and is 'really a very good driver'. The advert therefore appears to be targeted at older men, like Winner, who are considered to be safe drivers and so are less expensive to insure.

In April 2011, during Prime Minister's Questions in the UK House of Commons, Prime Minister David Cameron was questioned about hospital waiting times. Cameron responded by signalling that he intended to quote Labour MP Howard Stoate, who had since become a doctor. Cameron (erroneously) claimed that Stoate had lost his seat. This caused an opposition party MP, Angela Eagle, to shout that Stoate did not lose his seat but had stood down from his position. Cameron responded by saying, 'Calm . . . calm down, dear, calm down. Calm down. Listen . . . listen to the doctor.'

Calm down and listen to the doctor’, which could be interpreted as an inter-textual reference to the Michael Winner advert. Labour’s official spokesperson said that Cameron’s remark was sexist, insulting and patronising, and while many people agreed with this position, others claimed that although the remark was insulting, they did not believe it was sexist. It was pointed out that Cameron had directed the same phrase to a male MP in 2007 (*Independent* 27 April 2011). However, it could be argued that Cameron’s use of ‘calm down, dear’ directed towards a man was a related form of subordination – by using a phrase associated with a man remonstrating with a woman, Cameron could be viewed as implying that the other MP was ‘less’ than a man. In other words, the remark could still be interpreted as being demeaning to women.

Enshrining hegemony through language ideology

Another way in which language is referenced in order to maintain hegemonic masculinity is through the assertion of language ideologies. Silverstein (1979: 193) sees language ideologies as ‘sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use’, while Rumsey (1990: 346) refers to them as ‘shared bodies of common-sense notions about the nature of language in the world’.

He said, she said

Language ideologies can be accessed in subtle ways, for example, through representations of different kinds of people’s language use. The differences in the ways that men and women are described as using language can be extremely revealing in this regard. In the following case study, we consider the English Web 2020 Corpus, which consists of 36 billion words of ‘linguistically valuable web content’, collected between 2019 and 2021. The kinds of texts in the corpus include blogs, discussions, legal texts and news, covering topics such as arts, business, games, health, home, recreation, reference, science, society, sport and technology (see Jakubíček et al. 2013 for more information). For this small case study, we examined the verb *said*, which occurs more than 41 million times in the corpus. We were interested in the ways in which people are described as saying things, so we focussed on the lexical adverbs (words like *happily* or *quickly*) that appeared after *said*, and we looked at how typically such adverbs occurred after the phrases *he said* and *she said*. The top 50 lexical adverbs occurring with each condition are shown in Table 4.1. These are ordered by their LogDice score. This is a measure of the strength of collocation (introduced in the previous chapter) which takes into account the extent to which a word occurs near another word and the extent to which it occurs far away from the same word.

TABLE 4.1 Lexical adverbs collocating directly after *he said* and *she said*.

he said	softly, quietly, slowly, gently, firmly, simply, calmly, finally, cheerfully, sternly, flatly, proudly, quickly, gravely, sadly, coldly, shortly , hoarsely , gruffly , sharply, sarcastically, dryly, thoughtfully, bitterly, loudly, grimly , solemnly , abruptly, angrily, casually, lightly, bluntly, earnestly, seriously , politely, emphatically, happily, coolly, kindly, pleasantly , apologetically , weakly, confidently, carefully , matter-of-factly, jokingly , harshly , evenly , mildly , brightly
she said	softly, quietly, slowly, firmly, gently, calmly, coldly, cheerfully, sweetly , flatly, happily, brightly, sadly, breathlessly , proudly, simply, sternly, excitedly , sarcastically, thoughtfully, angrily, suddenly , dryly, quickly, sharply, finally, loudly, bitterly, lightly, coolly, matter-of-factly, bluntly, casually, abruptly, playfully , kindly, briskly , weakly, politely, hurriedly , earnestly, warmly , confidently, gravely, emphatically, nervously , faintly , shyly , hesitantly , wistfully

Table 4.1 indicates that the strongest collocating lexical adverbs are quite similar for male and female speakers, with both most likely to be described as saying something *softly*, *quietly* or *slowly*. But as we look further along the two lists, differences start to emerge. To demonstrate this, the adverbs that are unique to one part of the table are shown in bold. We can see from this that men are more likely to be described as saying something in a way that represents them as serious and somewhat intimidating (*gruffly*, *grimly*, *solemnly*, *seriously*, *harshly*), whereas women tend to be represented as speaking in a more friendly (*sweetly*, *playfully*, *warmly*), excited (*breathlessly*, *excitedly*) or uncertain (*nervously*, *shyly*, *hesitantly*) way. The table indicates how men are represented as speaking in more powerful ways, then, contributing towards male hegemony.

Additionally, language ideologies can be on-record, involving specific claims about how people use language. Such claims often contain elements of evaluation, casting certain kinds of language use as either superior or deficient, this functioning as a way of legitimating the speech of some groups at the expense of others.

Nakamura (2008) describes how, in late 19th- and early 20th-century Japan, a standard, national language was conceptualised as the language of male citizens. There were stark differences between men's and women's rights and roles, with men considered as primary citizens (having control over property, inheritance and children), whereas women could not vote or own property. Women were expected to manage household affairs and provide support, comfort and children to men. Nakae (1888: 18) claimed that 'there is no language in which men's everyday words and women's everyday words are so different from each other as Japanese'. Through conduct and etiquette

manuals, women were instructed not to speak too much and to use indirect and polite forms of speech. In 1872, a new Educational System law required everyone, including women, to have an education, although schooling was gender-segregated. While language used by Japanese schoolboys was socially accepted, schoolgirls' speech, called *jogakusei kotoba*, was criticised. It was characterised by the use of the sentence-final particles *teyo*, *dawa*, *noyo* and *koto*, as well as Chinese loan-words and Western words. The latter influence was viewed with particular concern – there was fear that schoolgirls would become Westernised, and that this would subsequently prevent them from being 'good' (i.e., obedient) wives and mothers.

In 1902, the linguist Hisatane Okano wrote that, '[a]mong such different speeches, the unification of speech and writing should adopt as the standard language . . . the language of men (*danshi no gengo*) in the middle class'. It was agreed that a variant of Japanese, used in Tokyo, would become the standard, with lexicographer and historian, Ōtsuki Fumihiko arguing that 'the language of Kyoto, though good for women, can sound weak coming from men' (1905: 17). He later claimed that the Kyoto variant was not suitable for giving orders to soldiers, for criminal examinations by judges or even for conducting a telephone conversation. As a result, books on Japanese grammar excluded features associated with women, for example, noting that the first-person pronoun *atai* was a term used by women (e.g., Yoshioka 2001 [1912]), while associating language used by schoolboys with the national language. Nakamura (2008: 43) writes that 'gendered indexicalization through every-day linguistic practices renders the androcentric ideology of "Japanese national language" into highly naturalized "dominant language ideologies"'.

With gendered language ideologies, it is the *association* of linguistic features with gender, whether accurate or not, that is most important. The early 20th-century linguist Otto Jespersen put forward a view of 'women's language' as inferior in a chapter in his book, *Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin* (1922). This book made numerous (unproven) claims about women's language use. Jespersen claimed that women helped to maintain the 'purity' of language (by using veiled and indirect expressions), while men were responsible for creativity and innovation. Women apparently didn't know how to use intensifying adverbs, could not finish sentences properly and had a limited vocabulary, although they spoke more than men. Jespersen quoted examples from fiction, including *Vanity Fair* (published in 1848), to back up his arguments. However, such cases tell us about representations, which relate to linguistic ideologies, as opposed to telling us about how language is actually used. Jespersen's views on 'women's language' are typical of a 'Deficit' model, casting women's language use as a less proficient approximation of men's. Related to this, it is interesting to note that, historically, a way of subordinating non-heterosexual men was to imply that they use

language in a way that is similar to women. For example, in 1709, Ned Ward published *The Secret History of London Clubs*, writing about a subculture of men who had sex with one another and met in clubs, taverns, inns and coffee houses. The term *gay* had not been associated with such men by this point, and these men were known as ‘Mollies’. Ward wrote that the Mollies ‘rather fancy themselves women, imitated all the little vanities that custom has reconcil’d to the female sex, affecting to speak, walk, tattle, curtsy, cry, scold, and mimick all manner of effeminacy’. The use of verbs like *tattle*, *cry* and *scold* evaluates such men negatively and also disassociates heterosexual men from such ways of communicating, positioning both women and Mollies lower down the gender hierarchy.

More recently, gendered language ideologies have been used to criticise the ways in which people engage in conflict. In online conservative forums, the metaphor of the longhouse has been used as a way of explaining and criticising certain forms of social interaction that are sometimes disparagingly referred to as ‘woke’, particularly in online contexts. Historically, the longhouse was a communal hall, the social focal point for agrarian societies, and it is described as being ruled by a Den Mother. Some of the articles that refer to the Longhouse have quoted evolutionary biologist, Joyce Benenson (2013), who has claimed that women and girls have evolved strategies to minimise the risk of retaliation, such as avoiding direct interference with other girls’ goals, disguising competition, competing overtly only from a position of high status, enforcing equality among women and excluding other girls.

Thomas Edsall, writing in *The New York Times*, claimed that ‘female’ approaches to conflict and competition have become normative among professional classes. On the one hand, such approaches could be ‘the cause of democratic peace’, as argued by Barnhart et al. (2020), although on the other, conservative commentators have argued that the ‘feminisation’ of public discourse has resulted in a different way of approaching conflict, as described in this excerpt from the ecumenical journal, *First Things*:

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the realm of free speech and the tenor of our public discourse where consensus and the prohibition on ‘offense’ and ‘harm’ take precedence over truth. To claim that a biological man is a man, even in the context of a joke, cannot be tolerated. Instead, our speech norms demand ‘affirmation.’ We are expected to indulge with theatrical zealotry the preferences, however bizarre, of the never-ending scroll of victim groups whose pathologies are above criticism. (Note well, however, that the ‘marginalized’ aren’t necessarily at home in the Longhouse, as evidenced whenever non-white leftist women decry the manipulative power of ‘white women’s tears.’) Further, these speech norms are enforced through punitive measures typical of female-dominated groups – social

isolation, reputational harm, indirect and hidden force. To be ‘canceled’ is to feel the whip of the Longhouse masters.

Lom3z (2023)

One way of interpreting such articles is to view them as aiming to construe certain linguistic behaviours typically associated with the political left-of-centre, such as ‘cancelling’ or claiming that others have caused micro-aggressions, as being inherently feminine. The aim of casting these forms of language use as feminine is to diminish their value, because to maintain hegemonic masculinity, ‘women’s communication’ must be cast as inferior.

Enshrining male hegemony in language structure and use

It could be argued that language systems have hegemonic masculinity, or a tacitly accepted idea of male power, enshrined within them. In English, for example, the status of being male has often been used as the default or unmarked case. This has resulted, for example, in documents in the Indian legal system appearing to only relate to men unless otherwise specified. To demonstrate, Clause 13 of The General Clauses Act 1897 states the following:

13. Gender and number. – In all 2 [Central Acts] and Regulations, unless there is anything repugnant in the subject or context, – (1) words importing the masculine gender shall be taken to include females

While this example is an explicit case of male as default human, there are numerous instances that are implicit. The word *man*, in particular, has often been used to refer to human beings in general, as the following examples indicate.

Does the Minister think there will be sufficient members of the Navy to man the new ships, if and when they are built?

Baroness Smith of Newham, House of Lords,
14 October 2021

And Lilian is my right-hand man. I don’t know what we’d have done without her in those dark years.

Paper Faces by Rachel Anderson, 1991

Michael Burleigh’s Day of the Assassins reminds us that political murder is as old as mankind.

Jonathan Powell — New Statesman, 30 June 2021

In the first example, *man* functions as a verb, referring to the act of working on ships. Such cases have often occurred in situations in which men have

been particularly likely to take on certain roles. However, such cases linguistically exclude women from being able to carry out such roles and can result in misgendering, as in the second example. Hellinger and Bußmann (2001: 10) argue that the normalisation of these kinds of male expressions ‘are reflections of an underlying gender belief system, which in turn creates expectations about appropriate female and male behaviour’. Generic male terms can also appear in other languages. In Spanish, for example, the generic masculine applies when it is unclear whether the subject is male or female. So, a male friend would be *amigo*, a female friend would be *amiga*, and any group of friends, including those involving male and female friends, would be *amigos* – using the male form plus the plural marker, -s.

Another way in which maleness is implied to be the default status is through the application of female suffixation to denote marked cases. Occupational terms such as *actor*, *god*, *heir*, *priest*, *steward*, *mayor*, *baron* and *shepherd* are assumed to be unmarked as male because -ess can be added to them to mark them as female. In the past, other forms of identity have also been marked in this way, as the following examples demonstrate.

The Jewess, who was born in Frankfurt, and her two children survived the first years of the war in various hiding places in Holland.

Nordic Daily, 17 January 2023

Ruth was a foreigner, a Moabitess, a gentile!

Sermon by Albert Gunter, from the BNC 1994

Similar female-marking systems exist in other languages, too. For example, in Arabic, a suffix called *taa marbuta* (which is pronounced as ‘ah’) is added to words to make feminine forms. Thus, the English word ‘writer’ is *katib* in Arabic, but the Arabic term for female writer is *katibah*, and like Spanish, plural forms relating to groups involving male and female members are marked as male.

Naming systems can also indicate male hegemony. In many countries, surnames are derived from the name of a male ancestor. For example, many Scottish surnames begin with *Mac* or *Mc* and are followed by a male name (e.g., *MacDonald*, *McNeill*, *MacGregor*), where the *Mac* part means ‘son of’. Another example of such a patronym is *Fitz* in Irish. When a man and woman are married, traditionally the woman takes the man’s surname, with her original surname being referred to as her ‘maiden’ name – a term which implies virginity. As Morgan notes, ‘[w]e do not even have our own names, but bear that of the father until we exchange it for that of the husband’ (1977: 106). Title systems can also indicate male hegemony. For example, in English a man is typically referred to as *Mr*, followed by his surname. Women are referred to as *Mrs* if married or *Miss* if unmarried. A female

equivalent to *Mr, Ms*, has been in use since the middle of the 20th century, although analysis of reference corpora suggests that it has not made inroads into popular usage (Baker 2010).

A more subtle way in which male hegemony is encoded into language is through male-firstness (Freebody and Baker 1987: 98); that is, the practice of referring to male identities before female ones. In the English Web 2020 corpus, the phrase *men and women* occurs 613,369 times, whereas the phrase *women and men* occurs just 89,021 times. *Man and woman* occurs 17 times more often than *woman and man*, and there are similar patterns for other gendered pairs, like *boy and girl*. Male-firstness is common in other languages, too. For example, in the French Web 2020 Corpus, *hommes et femmes* occurs 83,787 times, while *femmes et hommes* occurs 19,821 times. However, the practice is rather less pronounced in the German Web 2020 Corpus, where *Männer und Frauen* occurs 97,759 times and *Frauen und Männer* occurs 89,911 times. Indeed, putting aside who gets to 'go first', when we examine language use, we generally find more references to male social actors than female social actors. Compare, for example, the English Web 2020's 134 million uses of *he* to its 53 million uses of *she*. Anaphoric references to male identities occur two and a half times as often as references to female ones. This kind of male bias is not distributed evenly across all contexts of language use, though. In the BE06 Corpus, which contains 15 registers of written English from around 2006, the highest ratio of *he* to *she* is found in religious texts, followed by press editorials. Meanwhile, one register – Romance and Love Stories – actually has slightly more uses of *she* than *he*. Overall, though, these register differences help to reinforce male hegemony by situating men in contexts that are seen as more serious or important.

Studies of grammar textbooks have also found cases of male bias. For example, Macaulay and Brice (1997) examined ten such books that were published between 1969 and 1994. They coded 200 examples from each book, examining aspects like grammatical function, thematic relations and lexical choices. Male social actors were more likely to be subjects and agents, referred to with pronouns and proper names, and described more as engaging in intellectual activities like reading. They also had more varied occupations and were more often engaged in violent activities. Female social actors, on the other hand, were more likely to be referred to with kinship terms like *wife*, and were also more likely to have their physical appearance described. Apart from the latter finding, similar results were reported by Pabst et al. (2018) in a replication study involving textbooks from 2005–2017, and by Kotek and Dockum (2021) in their analysis of 20 years of the output of three Linguistics journals.

The tendency for women to be characterised in what Van Leeuwen (1996: 54–55) calls 'relational identification' is especially enshrined in language use.

Women are more likely to be discussed in terms of their ‘relationships to others, meaning that their identity is conceptualised as part of a dyad or network in which they are often cast in a supporting role. In other words, women are positioned as mothers and wives. A salient example involves the wording of marriage ceremonies, wherein the marriage officiant says, ‘I now pronounce you man and wife’. And one common way of referring to women would be to refer to them through their husband’s name.

Catherine was twenty-four when she became Mrs Edmund Nelson.

Nelson Vol 1, John Sugden, 2005

Preparatory work which casts women in a supporting role occurs early. Stubbs (1996) shows how in two letters that Robert Baden-Powell (the founder of the Scout’s Association) wrote to boys and girls, he instructed girls to make other people happy, whereas boys were told to live happy lives. The idea of men having identities in their own right, while women are viewed as existing within networks of relationships with others, is found in other spheres, too. For example, on an online forum created for people with anxiety, women were more likely to write about their relationships with others, referring to themselves with words like *mum*, or talking about people in their lives like their husbands or children (Baker and Collins 2023).

I also think what if I never wake up and what will happen to my children.

Female forum user

Men, on the other hand, were more likely to discuss how their anxiety affected themselves, using identity markers like *man* and *male*, which did not specify a relationship with another person.

I felt totally useless as a man and i started self harming.

Male forum user

Some languages have a gender-marking system for all nouns, and while the gender of some nouns can be semantically motivated (e.g., *fille* [girl] in French is feminine, whereas *garçon* [boy] is masculine), for many nouns the gender appears to be arbitrary (e.g., *voiture* [car] and *maison* [house] are feminine, whereas *livre* [book] and *poisson* [fish] are masculine). Other languages, for example, English, have a ‘natural’ gender-marking system, where gender is only semantically motivated. Meanwhile, a third set, including languages like Finnish, is genderless (e.g., *hän* means both ‘he’ and ‘she’). Prewitt-Freilino et al. (2011) examined 111 countries and the languages used therein, finding that the countries in which gendered language systems were used tended to have less gender equality compared to other countries. However, the researchers

note that the study ‘cannot address questions about the process through which these differences emerge or if language systems play a causal role’ (2011: 279).

Critiquing hegemonic masculinity

Wetherell and Edley (1999: 336–337) criticise the theory of hegemonic masculinity for failing to specify what it actually looks like in practice or how people might conform to it or try to resist it. They note that it is unclear whether there is one hegemonic strategy at any point in time or whether hegemonic strategies can differ across different parts of a social formation, creating tensions for men as they move across different social practices.

While many studies do position men’s language use as more powerful, it is important to note that the actual features associated with power can change. Consider, for example, Keenan’s (1974) study of Malagasy speakers in Madagascar, where speech is divided into *resaka* (everyday, simple talk) and *kabary* (ceremonial speech which is highly stylised and rule-bound). Within the culture, there is a strong taboo involved in *henatra* (shaming), which is viewed as stealing honour. Particularly with *kabary*, which is carried out by men, disagreements must be expressed with a great deal of politeness and indirectness, sometimes couched in proverbs and poetry. Within this society, men have a speaking style which is indirect and respectful, whereas women are more direct, speaking in a way that is associated with conflict, such as making accusations or haggling. Such features do not match perspectives of hegemonic masculinity in, say, the UK or USA. However, male speech in this context is viewed as being more skilled and, thus, superior. For example, male speech is used to negotiate relations between villages. Women, meanwhile, are excluded from such positions of power, instead handling everyday village interactions with children and older women. The linguistic features associated with hegemonic masculinity may differ from culture to culture, but the overall impact tends to be the same.

We’ll bump them off in the shithouse

Keenan’s study indicates that linguistic features associated with masculinity can be culturally specific. However, even within a single culture, there are competing components of masculinity. While we might conceive of hegemonic masculinity as the dominant form of masculinity in a society, the term *society* is somewhat vague. For example, we could conceive of a country like the UK, and all the people in it, as consisting of British society. But different regions of the UK may privilege different displays of masculinity, and this may also differ according to social class, age, ethnicity and sexuality. A young man might work in a primary school as a teacher but also be a member of a Chess Club, volunteer for the Territorial Army or visit gay nightclubs at the

weekend. Each of these contexts may have different views about what counts as a dominant way of being a man and the language features that index these.

In order to illustrate this point, in the following example we consider one way in which hegemonic masculinity is realised in Russia. Vladimir Putin is a former Russian intelligence officer who has served continuously as either the Prime Minister or President of Russia since 1999. Wood (2016: 11) writes that Putin's masculinity has competing components. On the one hand, he positions himself as a heroic commander-in-chief. Yet sometimes he appears to be a high-handed autocrat, dressing down his ministers (2016: 4). He often appears in public wearing expensive designer suits, making him appear like a wealthy businessman. Yet in 2007, he posed for a series of publicity photographs, appearing bare-chested in many of them – on a horse, fishing and wearing army fatigues, a cowboy hat and with a knife in his belt. Ashwin and Utrata (2020: 19) refer to this as a *muzhik* persona. The term *muzhik* originally referred to a male peasant, although 'it currently refers to a national, high-ranking, "real" masculinity, implying a contrast to less authentic versions of manliness'.

Putin has also used expressions that are associated with the lowest segments of society, *iazyk podonkov*, literally 'language of the scum'. In August 1999, when Putin was the recently appointed Prime Minister of Russia (the second highest position of power after the President), he was asked about a recent spate of terrorist attacks and insurgencies in the Northern Caucasus. He said the following:

Мы будем преследовать террористов везде. Значит, Вы же меня извините, в туалете поймаем, мы и в сортире их замочим в концов. Все.

Translation

We will follow the terrorists everywhere. If we catch them in the toilet, please pardon the expression, then we'll bump them off in the shithouse once and for all. That's it. End of issue.

Gorham (2006: 298) notes how the phrase 'we'll bump them off in the shithouse' filtered through the media, not just because it indicated that the Russian government intended to take a hard line on terrorism but because of the vulgar reference to the 'shithouse', coupled with *mochit*, which has a standard meaning of 'to make wet' or 'soak in water'. However, in the slang of the criminal underworld, *mochit* metaphorically means to 'bump off', 'kill' or 'waste'. While some journalists and commentators criticised Putin for using this phrase, the speech was generally well-received, and Putin was elected as President the following year.

Wood (2016) characterises Putin's use of the language of 'street masculinity' as being likely to be viewed as unreasonable by Western leaders, although Ashwin and Utrata (2020: 17) note how US President Donald Trump projects a version of gendered power that is similar to Putin's, embracing an idea of masculinity that is crass and sexist, revelling in bad manners and openly violating norms of basic civility. Wood (2016) notes how Putin's public speech contains references to sweat, snot, blood, bodily fluids, infection and castration – linguistic items that are tabooed among Russian upper-classes and women. In 2003, 2005 and 2014, the Russian Duma passed laws banning the use of obscene and vulgar language in the media and official language, so Putin's use of these terms indicates that he is the one person that is above the law. In other words, such uses of language function as a way for Putin to demonstrate his dominance over others. Simultaneously, Putin's use of *iazyk podonkov* makes him appear as a man of the people, helping to cement his hegemonic appeal (this is something we return to in Chapter 6 when exploring toxic masculinity).

Putin's different performances of masculinity show how difficult it is to conceive of a single, stable form of hegemonic masculinity – even within a single society, there are multiple conceptualisations. Putin is astute enough to know that people have different understandings of strength, and so he adapts his masculine performances when necessary in order to cement his power.

Even in the context of male bodybuilding, which would be expected to be governed by hegemonic masculinity, researchers have found a more complex picture. Marshall et al. (2020) looked at bodybuilding narratives by analysing 250 posts on the social networking platform *Instagram*. They found that some bodybuilders were emotionally expressive, expressing adoration for their children and pets and discussing the importance of positive and emotionally intimate relationships. The bodybuilders also signified affectionate relationships with one another, developing 'bromances' which went beyond standard male friendships (see also Robinson et al. 2018). Additionally, the bodybuilders engaged in self-objectification, a practice which is seen as historically feminine, with captions like 'Pleased my abs are still noticeable'. On the other hand, the compliments that the bodybuilders received tended to reinforce norms of hegemonic masculinity, for example, 'Looking lethal' and 'Powerful'. Marshall et al. (2020: 579) see these compliments 'as forms of surveillance that encourage the male bodybuilders [. . .] to pursue muscularity because that projects valued and admired hegemonic masculine dominance and mental strength'. Additionally, some of the site users aligned with hegemonic masculinity by associating weaker men with homosexuality through the use of memes. For example, bodybuilders who used a 'spotter' (another man who watches someone perform a weighted exercise and can provide assistance if needed) were likened to the two gay cowboys in the film *Brokeback Mountain*. Marshall et al. (2020: 584) conclude that 'by becoming muscular, male bodybuilders are able to rely on their bodies to project dominance, which compensates for the softer and more emotionally

expressive ways in which they engage with others on Instagram'. The study indicates, then, that the men who most clearly embody hegemonic masculinity can afford to break the rules, resulting in a kind of paradox whereby such men can also appear feminine in some aspects of their identity or appearance.

Another criticism of hegemonic masculinity is that not everyone appears to be fully complicit in it. Through analysis of interviews, Wetherell and Edley (1999) show that some men reject macho masculinity in favour of characterising themselves either as an ordinary 'Mr Average' man or as gender non-conformist, such as by wearing an earring. However, they note that these alternative identities still trade on hegemonic values of autonomy and independence – to wit, the courage, strength and determination of such men to engage in potentially demeaning activities. Wetherell and Edley (1999: 351) argue that 'paradoxically, one could say that sometimes one of the most effective ways of being hegemonic, or being a "man", may be to demonstrate one's distance from hegemonic masculinity'. They go on to say that the original account of hegemonic masculinity is too neat, so we need to consider the multiple and inconsistent discursive resources that are available for constructing hegemonic masculinity while also allowing for the possibility of complicity and resistance being mixed together.

Let's get a new hat

Connell (1995 [2005]) notes that hegemonic masculinity can 'authorise' elements of masculinity that are subordinated or marginalised, such as the way in which Black athletes might be held up as exemplars of hegemonic masculinity in the US (1995: 81) or the way that Black hip hop music has become popular, particularly among young White men. Additionally, heterosexual men might appropriate aspects of gay men's style or practices in order to construct a hybrid configuration of gender practice. For example, the reality television series *Queer Eye* features a team of gay men advising heterosexual men in terms of style, personal grooming, food and wine, interior design and social interaction, often with the aim of improving these men's relationships with women. In this excerpt from an episode in 2018, titled 'You Can't Fix Ugly', gay fashion expert Tan France takes heterosexual truck driver Tom Jackson to a clothes store to give him a fashion makeover.

- 1 Tan: I'll take your hat. I know you love the hat but let's take that off for now. And I'm not trying to get you out of the hat. Let's get a new hat. Have you ever considered a flat cap?
- 2 Tom: No.
- 3 Tan: No. Let's give it a go. Let's give it a go. So the reason why . . .

- 4 Tom: I probably look stupid.
- 5 Tan: No, no you don't. You don't look stupid at all. The reason why I would rather you have something like a flat cap is cos it doesn't cover your face as much. I want you to stop covering your face as much as you do cos you've got such a handsome face so let's show it off a little bit. So . . .
- 6 Tom: It's definitely different.
- 7 Tan: It's different. I know. And it's slightly more sophisticated than just a cap.
- 8 Tom: Right.
- 9 Tan: Let me try one more.
- 10 Tom: This might be a bit much, but I'll try.

In this excerpt, Tan takes Tom's hat away and suggests an alternative (line 1). Tan uses a number of minimising strategies to persuade Tom to give up his hat, acknowledging that Tom loves his current hat and noting (somewhat mendaciously) that he is not trying to take it away. He uses the word *let's* four times in lines 1 and 3, positioning the decision to get Tom a new hat as one that is shared between them, for example, 'let's get a new hat'. He also directs the interaction by framing the new hat in terms of a question: 'Have you ever considered a flat cap?'. In line 3, he starts to provide an explanation for the new hat but is interrupted by Tom (line 4), who makes a self-deprecatory remark. Tan emphatically disagrees with Tom four times (line 5) and then returns to his explanation. When Tom gives a rather noncommittal evaluation of the new hat in line 6, saying that it is 'definitely different', Tan agrees, repeating Tom's words but adding on a more positive evaluation, which is hedged: 'it's slightly more sophisticated'.

While Tan could be seen as exhibiting a lot of control during this interaction, it is carried out in a way that combines some of the more traditional linguistic behaviours associated with hegemonic masculinity with non-hegemonic (possibly even feminine-coded) behaviours, like hedging, acknowledging the other speaker and giving explanations. Although Tom is positioned as the less powerful man, being directed by another man who is afforded 'expert' status, we should bear in mind that the forms of expertise on *Queer Eye* are generally not seen as central to hegemonic masculinity but instead involve more stereotypically feminine areas to do with physical appearance, decorating and relationships. From one perspective, then, *Queer Eye* does not challenge hegemonic masculinity, as the gay men's expertise involves 'trivial' domains. In fact, Annus (2011) argues that *Queer Eye* marginalises women, repositioning gay men over them within the gender hierarchy and thus strengthening hegemonic masculinity as opposed to challenging it.

Thus, the improvements to Tom's life that result from him appearing on the show could be seen as somewhat superficial. Ultimately, Tom's masculinity

could be viewed as not being compromised by his acquisition of new 'queer' skills, but enhanced; later in the show, he describes himself as 'an elevated version of me, a new me'. On the other hand, it could be argued that *Queer Eye* successfully appropriates at least some form of power for the queer community, and 'the television audience's gaze is aligned entirely with the perceptions of the gay men' (Keller 2004: 55). And importantly, a show like *Queer Eye* would have been unthinkable for most of the 20th century, when gay identities in the US were much more stigmatised. The show indicates how conceptualisations around the 'right' ways to be a man are widening to become more inclusive.

Conclusion

Hegemonic masculinity offers an explanatory framework for understanding male power which goes beyond a simplistic notion that all men dominate all women, all the time. The theory offers a more complex, hierarchical perspective which looks at how the boundaries of acceptable gendered behaviour are set and regulated alongside gendered ideals. Although the theory was not created with language in mind, this chapter shows how certain linguistic features have been associated with powerful forms of masculinity, although we can also see that such features are not necessarily the same for every society, and even within a society there may be multiple ways of using language that are associated with powerful men.

Demetriou (2001: 355) argues for a more complex understanding of hegemonic masculinity, conceiving of a 'bloc' that unites allied groups. Demetriou acknowledges the ways in which this masculine bloc 'is capable of transforming itself in order to adapt to the specificities of new historical conjunctures' (2001: 355). Such a project would involve considering, for example, how the bloc 'changes through negotiation, appropriation, and translation, through the transformation of what appears counter-hegemonic and progressive into an instrument of backwardness and patriarchal reproduction' (2001: 355). Another perspective is given by Coles (2008), who uses the term *mosaic masculinities* to indicate that there are several dominant forms of masculinity, with men taking different elements of the hegemonic ideal to create their own ideals which reflect their abilities. Therefore, we need to consider intersectional aspects of identity, taking into account, for example, how a man's race/ethnicity, religion, social class, age and sexual identity can impact on individual, group and societal understandings of hegemonic masculinity.

A potential limitation of the theory of hegemonic masculinity is that it focusses on relationships between men while the role of women tends to be downplayed. Connell (1987: 183) argues that 'there is no femininity that is hegemonic in the sense that the dominant form of masculinity is hegemonic amongst men'. Powerful ways of being female are thus called 'emphasised

femininity' (Connell 1987: 183) – a term which positions all femininity as subordinate. Another potential criticism of the theory is to do with its scope. Collier (1998) notes how hegemonic masculinity is characterised negatively, representing men as aggressive, non-nurturing and unemotional – traits that are seen as the causes of criminal behaviour. A crucial deficit of the theory is that it excludes any kinds of behaviour that might be seen as 'positive' or as serving the interests of women, such as being a breadwinner, looking after children or maintaining a sexual relationship. We return to this point in Chapter 7 when we consider research on 'healthy' masculinity. However, in the next chapter we interrogate the theory of hegemonic masculinity further, focussing not on the most powerful ways of using language, but on those that are more commonly associated with subordinated and marginalised identities.

Note

- 1 For readers who are interested in knowing more about this paper, we note that it was the subject of some controversy within the journal which published it (*Women and Language*). It is published alongside two very different reviews, one which recommended publication, another which did not. The main concern of the second reviewer was that the authors' approach to the paper was 'reprehensible, even dangerous' because they published the conversations by the brokers without offering 'any judgements about that communication'. The paper was then sent to six commentators who provided further evaluation of its worth and the stance of the authors, and the initial reviewers and authors were then given space to provide further reaction. The discussion around the paper raises questions about researcher stance and motivation (for example, Commentator A makes a useful distinction between *criticising* and *critique*), as well as indicating the strongly negative impact of some forms of male banter.

5

SUBORDINATED AND MARGINALISED MASculINITIES

Introduction

In the previous chapter, in which we explored the phenomenon of hegemonic masculinity, we highlighted how powerful masculine identities are associated with traits such as strength, assertiveness, confidence, courage, stoicism, aggression and independence. We also saw how hegemonic masculinity is often embodied by characteristics such as heterosexuality, whiteness, muscularity and wealth, as well as by certain linguistic performances (e.g., using verbal and nonverbal cues to display dominance and authority) and the performance of certain professional roles and personal presentations. In that chapter, we also recalled Bornstein's (1998: 43–45) metaphor of a pyramid to explain the dynamics of gender power. Within this system, the most 'perfectly gendered' people (i.e., the kinds of men described earlier and focussed on in Chapter 4) are positioned at the top.

As the image of the pyramid suggests, this kind of power is relational and is in no small part secured by, and functions through, the implicit and explicit subordination and marginalisation of other gender identities, including other masculinities. In originally theorising around hegemonic masculinity, Connell (1995 [2005]) pointed out how hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to subordinated and marginalised masculinities. Subordinated masculinities, as defined by Connell (1995 [2005]), can be considered as those forms of masculinity that are culturally and socially devalued because they deviate somehow from the norms established by hegemonic masculinity (e.g., the masculinity associated with effeminate men). Marginalised masculinities, on the other hand, refer to forms of masculinity that are trivialised or otherwise discriminated against due to unequal relations that are

external to gender relations (e.g., relating to social class, religion, ethnicity and so on). Individual men who embody traits associated with marginalised masculinities can occasionally be exemplars of hegemonic masculinity (e.g., Black¹ sporting stars in America), but their power does not trickle down to other Black men – they are exceptions to the rule. Connell's (1995 [2005]) distinction between subordinated and marginalised masculinities represents something of an abstract theorisation, intended to demonstrate the logic of unequal gender relations. Given the increasing emphasis that is now being placed on intersectional identities, it is also worth noting that individuals can experience oppression at the axis of subordination and marginalisation (e.g., Black gay men).

In this chapter, we take a closer look at the language of, and around, a range of masculinities that might be considered to be subordinated or marginalised. Specifically, we look at the linguistic and broader discursive means through which such processes of subordination and marginalisation take place. We consider gay and queer masculinities, transgender masculinities, racialised masculinities, the masculinities associated with different social classes and professions, the masculinities of ill men (including medicalised masculinities) and vegan masculinities. In exploring these various masculinities and the groups who identify or are otherwise aligned with them (including being aligned with them by others), we pay particular attention, as noted, to the ways in which such masculinities are discursively subordinated and marginalised. Yet importantly, we also consider how those identifying or associated with such subordinated and marginalised identities discursively represent and position themselves, including how they negotiate and counter discourses of gender oppression.

Sexually subordinated masculinities

In Chapter 4, we saw how hegemonic masculinity enforces a strict adherence to traditional gender roles, including heterosexual norms – this is what Sunderland (2004: 39–40) identifies as a discourse of 'compulsory heterosexuality'. Relevant here is the concept of *heteronormativity*, a term coined by Warner (1993), who defined it as the organisation of all patterns of thought, awareness and belief around the presumption of universal heterosexual desire, behaviour and identity. Nagel (2003: 39–50), meanwhile, characterises heteronormativity as the 'assumption that everyone is heterosexual and the recognition that all social institutions . . . are built around a heterosexual model of male/female social relations'. Robinson (2016: 1) more explicitly highlights the power relationships inherent within heteronormativity, defining it as a 'hegemonic system of norms, discourses and practices that constructs heterosexuality as natural and superior to all other expressions of sexuality'

(see also: Chambers 2003; Marchia and Sommer 2019). The logic and beliefs underpinning heteronormativity are unpacked further by Baker (2008), who observes how it

covers a range of beliefs – that human beings fall into two (different but complementary) categories: male and female and that sexual relations are normal only when they occur between two people of the opposite sex. One of the main heteronormative arguments in society is that because a woman and a man are (normally) required for procreation, heterosexuality is normal.

Baker (2008: 109)

Baker also points out how the term is most often used in a critical sense, for example, in research that sets out to question or otherwise challenge the practices (including discursive practices) of social institutions that serve to reinforce these kinds of beliefs. In terms of discursive practices, of particular relevance here are discourses such as compulsory heterosexuality, as well as wider practices that implicitly or explicitly assume everyone to be heterosexual and that attempt to ‘erase, regulate, taboo, punish or silence anything that is not heterosexual’ (2008: 109).

Within a heteronormative framework, then, a range of sexual identities (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual and queer) are liable to be subordinated. This is because the identities of those belonging to such groups are likely to challenge heterosexual norms through their expressions of sexual orientation and/or gender identities. Research has shown, for example, how gay masculinities are viewed and often discursively constructed as being at odds with several traits that are, as noted, highly valued within hegemonic masculinity, such as strength, stoicism and, most importantly here, heterosexual prowess (Baker 2005). This conflict between the hegemonic ideal and sexually subordinated masculinities can often result in discrimination, with such identities and associated forms of gender expression being denigrated and construed as lesser or deviant. Such suppression is evident across various social contexts, from media representations to everyday interactions, where subordinated men are often stereotyped, overlooked or openly discriminated against.

In recent years, research seeking to illuminate the discourses through which non-normative gender and sexual identities are expressed and represented has increasingly adopted perspectives informed by Queer Theory. Put broadly, Queer Theory is a field of critical theory that seeks to challenge both traditional categories of gender and sexuality and the idea of categorisation itself. Studies undertaken from a queer perspective share the assumption that such categories of gender and sexuality are not fixed, natural or binary but, rather, are socially constructed and fluid (Motschenbacher and Stegu 2013;

Milani 2018). In this spirit, Queer Theory involves consciously expanding the scope of analysis to include any kind of sexual activity or identity that falls outside normative bounds. It also emphasises the variability and contingency that underpin the ways in which sexualities, identities and bodies are culturally and historically configured. Queer perspectives have been introduced into linguistics research addressing language use across an array of texts and contexts concerning the expression and representation of gender and sexuality, as well as of associated identities, desires and so on (for a collection of studies on queer masculinities, see Baker and Balirano 2018).

Baider (2018) analysed the discourse surrounding LGBTQ+ people within Greek Cypriot social media. Using a corpus-based approach to qualitative content analysis, Baider was particularly interested in examining how representations of the LGBTQ+ community could enforce societal norms and identities, particularly through the lens of hegemonic masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality. Recurring lexis and ‘thematic frames’ focussing on LGBTQ+ identities and rights revealed the pathologisation of such groups, who were commonly described as being an ‘anomaly’, a ‘problem’ and as deviating from the ‘natural order’. As well as expressing hate and issuing threats (e.g., ‘Go to hell fucking faggots, may you die!’), the framing of sexual minorities as a problem also paved the way for the challenging of LGBTQ+ rights, for example, with one commenter quoted as writing, ‘This is not about pride, it is about problems’. Baider (2018) argues that a discourse of compulsory heterosexuality manifests in such interactions through such implicit, but also explicit, representations of heterosexuality as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’, as well as through the framing of LGBTQ+ rights as dangerous, undesirable and a threat to society. These discussions about sexuality were not just about individual identity but were also frequently linked to national identity and cultural purity. For example, some commenters employed a conspiratorial frame, linking LGBTQ+ rights to a broader global Jewish conspiracy, all in service of presenting the acceptance of non-heterosexual identities and rights as a threat to the country’s national fabric (see also Reddy 2002 for a study demonstrating the intersection of such nationalistic and homophobic discourses in the context of African news media).

Sissy boys

This kind of nationalistic agenda has been used to target not only gay men but, more broadly, men who might be perceived as ‘effeminate’ in some way. In recent years, the government of China, for example, has taken significant action against such men, particularly celebrities, who have been labelled as 娘娘腔 (niangniangqiang) or 娘炮 (niangpao) – terms which roughly translate to ‘sissy boys’. As part of the broader censorship of media portraying non-normative gender and sexual identities, such men (including members of



FIGURE 5.1 Members of the Chinese boy group Nine Percent.

Source: Imaginechina Limited/Alamy Stock Photo.

the pop group Nine Percent – see Figure 5.1) have been banned from appearing on television and video streaming platforms (AP News 2021). Song (2022: 80) writes that ‘performances by boy bands TFboys and Nine Percent were never aired and . . . a number of effeminate-looking male stars have disappeared from TV programs’. As well as removing such gender expressions from screens, the government also published, through state-controlled media, representations of ‘sissy boys’ that offered a negative evaluation of these men, as in the following newspaper article.

新华网：“娘炮”之风当休矣

2018-09-06 辛识平

“油头粉面A4腰，矫揉造作兰花指”，这句顺口溜描述的正是时下某些所谓“小鲜肉”偶像令人错愕的形象与做派。当越来越多的“娘炮”及其言行刷屏霸屏，成为一些人热捧、哄抬的对象，人们对这种“辣眼睛”的反常现象不断表达担忧和反思。

以文化人，更在育人。“娘炮”现象之所以引发公众反感，还因为这种病态文化对青少年的负面影响不可低估。青少年是国家的未来，网络上“少年娘则国

娘”的批评尽管不无戏谑，但一个社会和国家的流行文化拥抱什么、拒绝什么、传播什么，确乎是关系国家未来的大事。培养担当民族复兴大任的时代新人，需要抵制不良文化的侵蚀，更需要优秀文化的滋养。

Translation

Xinhua News: **The ‘sissy boy’ trend should end**

2018-09-06 By Xin Shiping

The jingle ‘oily hair, powdered face, A4 waist, affected manner and orchid fingers’ describes the shocking image and style of some so-called ‘little fresh meat’ male idols nowadays. As more and more ‘sissy boys’ and their words and deeds dominate the screen and become the targets of some people’s praise and flattery, people continue to express their concerns and reflections on this ‘eye-catching’ abnormal phenomenon.

Culture not only educates people but also nurtures them. The reason why the ‘sissy boys’ phenomenon arouses public disgust is also because the negative impact of this sick culture on young people cannot be underestimated. Young people are the future of the country. Although the critical remark ‘if young men are sissy, the country will be sissy’ on the Internet is mostly a joke, what a society and a country’s popular culture embraces, rejects and spreads is indeed a big issue related to the future of the country. To cultivate a new generation of people who can shoulder the great task of national rejuvenation, we need to resist erosion from bad culture and more importantly, we need the nourishment of a good one.

In this article, the representations of ‘sissy boys’ clearly offer negative evaluations of these social actors and their perceived impact on Chinese society. First, the headline calls for the ‘trend’ of sissy boys to ‘come to an end’. The article then describes these men in terms of several feminised traits or behaviours which are used in a jingle about them. These include, among other things, having a ‘powdered face’ (i.e., wearing make-up), an ‘A4 waist’ (referring to a 21cm waist, which is the size of a sheet of A4 paper and references a dieting challenge for women which originated in China [BBC 2016]) and ‘orchid fingers’ (a term referring to a feminine hand position adopted by actresses in Chinese operas). Moreover, this overall appearance and demeanor is suggested to be disingenuous, with the manner of such men being labelled as ‘affected’.

The article then refers to how young, attractive male actors (known as ‘little fresh meat’) embody the sissy boy persona, with their image and behaviour being evaluated as ‘appalling’. There is an acknowledgement of the popularity of such men, though this is mitigated; it is only ‘some people’, and it is the men’s ‘words and deeds’ that are the target of ‘praise and flattery’,

not the men themselves. By contrast, the ambiguous and more general ‘people’ are described as being ‘disgust[ed]’ and as ‘continu[ing] to express their concerns and reflections on this “eye-catching” abnormal phenomenon’ – an evaluation that is redolent of the discourse of abnormality we noted earlier in the chapter, while the men themselves are objectified by being reduced to a ‘phenomenon’. Another representation redolent of what we saw earlier is the view of sissy boys as representing a ‘sick’ culture.

The article also intertwines such gendered representations with discourses around national identity and pride. Phrases such as, ‘if young men are sissy, the country will be sissy’ arguably heighten the significance and impacts of such men in a way that reflects a concern about the broader implications of non-traditional masculinity on the nation’s future. ‘National rejuvenation’ is then framed as depending on the ‘erosion’ of the visibility of such alternative masculinities, which are equated to ‘bad culture’.

The representation of sissy boys in this article, then, brings together negative evaluations of non-standard forms of masculine expression with nationalist sentiment. In this context, a positive future for China – specifically, its ‘rejuvenation’ – is presented as being at odds with such forms of masculine expression. Such a stance reflects deep anxieties about maintaining a robust masculine image that is aligned with nationalist ideals. Song (2022) points out how debates around male effeminacy in China can become deeply intertwined with nationalist rhetoric, with concerns about national strength and integrity being projected onto ideals of masculinity. This is certainly what we see in the previous article. Song (2022) argues that, as well as this, there is likely to be a broader agenda at play; more specifically, the rise in the visibility of effeminate male celebrities in China has been observed to coincide with the loosening of the government’s grip on the entertainment sector around the mid-2010s. As a result, there had been a surge in private tech company-produced content in the country. Celebrity sissy boys, who were inspired in their (often gender norm-challenging) style of presentation by K-Pop artists originating from South Korea, and often popularised through talent shows, were viewed by the Chinese government as a threat to its control. This was particularly the case as these celebrities relied heavily on social media metrics for their popularity.

While the representations and policies relating to sissy boys do not, strictly speaking, target LGBTQ+ individuals explicitly, the broader objection to alternative forms of gender expression underpinning such discourse, and the bans on coverage that accompanied this, are undoubtedly likely to impact on such individuals disproportionately. It is for this reason that Wang (2021) and others have argued that this sets a dangerous precedent for LGBTQ+ people in China, potentially fuelling further discrimination and violence (see also: Chia 2019). At this point, it is important to acknowledge that in 2021, a young Chinese man committed suicide after he was bullied for being effeminate (Yip 2021).

Watch out for 'Lily Law'

Importantly though, men with subordinated gender or sexual identities can use language as a form of resistance and, in the process, challenge such discrimination.

In the 20th century, a language variety called Polari, rising out of forms of language used by travelling entertainers, was adopted by camp gay men in the UK (Baker 2019). Polari could be seen as an anti-language (Halliday 1978) – a form of language used by social groups that exist in opposition to society in some way. Anti-languages can contain relexicalizations of concepts that are important to the 'anti-society', and these relexicalizations can be used for secrecy. In the UK, homosexuality was illegal until 1967. Prior to this point, gay men were able to use Polari to conduct conversations about censured and then-illegal aspects of their lives in public spaces without others being able to understand them (for example, 'vada the dolly omee ajax' meant 'look at that good-looking man nearby'). Polari also enabled gay men to make new contacts. If they suspected someone might be gay, they could use a Polari word in a conversation and see if it was met with another Polari word. But importantly, Polari was not just a relexicalization. It also encoded an alternative social reality, based around the values of the anti-society, as the following example illustrates.

A newspaper called *Gay News* had a regular film review column based on films that were showing at a cinema in London called the Biograph, which was also a cruising place for gay men. In 1972, the columnist started warning readers that the police were patrolling the cinema.

Remember I was saying in the last issue to watch out for 'Lily Law' and her wandering at the Bio. Well, she seems to have got bored and is keeping herself busy somewhere else. Now you can get on with your relaxation without any interference, apart from that silly usherette man who still can't keep his hands off his flasher. I hope that the batteries of his torch run out soon.

In this example, the author uses a Polari phrase, *Lily Law*, which refers to the police. The police were viewed with distrust by gay men in the 20th century, due to their entrapment activities and their refusal to help gay men who had been subject to blackmail or physical attack. A notorious case involved the computer scientist Alan Turing. Turing played an instrumental role in cracking the Enigma code used by the German military during World War II. This is estimated to have shortened the war by two years, saving millions of lives. In 1952, Turing reported a burglary to the police. During the investigation, he acknowledged his homosexuality, which resulted in him being charged with 'gross indecency'. He was then injected with stilboestrol, a

form of 'chemical castration', which caused him to grow breasts. Turing died two years later at the age of 41, most likely from self-administered cyanide poisoning.

Cases like this help to explain a large number of Polari phrases that referred to the police: *Lily Law*, *Betty Bracelets*, *Hilda Handcuffs*, *Jennifer Justice* and *orderly daughters*. All these phrases are alliterative or involve rhyming – techniques which helped to make the terms distinctive and amusing. Polari speakers made use of camp humour in order to convey a sense of defiance and sang-froid in the face of oppressive circumstances. The terms for the police are also feminising, and the *Gay Times* article refers to them using female pronouns. Gender-switching was extremely common in Polari – gay men 'christened' one another with 'camp names' like *The Black Widow*, *Tokyo Rose*, *Diamond Lil* or *Scots Flo*, and they referred to a gay man as an *omee-palone* (man-woman), while a lesbian was a *palone-omee*.

The creation and use of in-group slang and the promotion of related discourses are a form of resistance that can empower oppressed groups, being important for supporting the creation of (discursive) spaces in which such non-normative masculinities can be more openly expressed. At the same time, such expressions can nevertheless orient to hegemonic masculine norms. Although the use of feminising identity labels was affectionate when used on one another, Polari speakers knew that the police would view it as insulting to be called *Lily Law*, so this form of feminising language had different functions, depending on who it was intended for. Polari speakers thus subverted but also exploited the view that to be seen as a woman was an insult.

More straightforwardly, Baker's (2005) diachronic analysis of gay men's personal adverts between 1973 and 2000 indicated the existence of what Rowe (2000) terms 'hegemonic homosexuality'. Specifically, the kinds of idealised and desirable gay identities that the men constructed in their ads (both in terms of their self-presentations and their descriptions of their desired others) consisted of stereotypically masculine qualities. This included positively valuing qualities such as being 'straight-acting', while denigrating mannerisms associated with gay men and other elements of gay subculture. A common trend among advertisers was the disavowal of effeminacy, through negations like *non-effeminate*, *non-camp*, *not camp* or *no camp*, as well as the rejection of association with other gay men through terms like *non-scene*. Notably, references to 'straight-acting' masculinity were highest in the period following the emergence of the HIV-AIDS crisis, which had impacted gay communities.

Some men also indicated 'authentic' masculine identities by describing themselves as having traditionally male occupations, like fireman or soldier, or occupations that signified high earning potential, like doctor or executive. Others described themselves as possessing muscular and hairy bodies, and signalled an interest in sports. In one case, the man writing an advert

indicated that he was seeking a man who ‘normally’ identifies as straight but ‘just happened to be looking at these pages’. In this context, such men are viewed as desirable because of their association with ‘authentic’ hegemonic masculinity but also because they are perceived not to have been ‘tainted’ by contact with other gay men (see, for example, Eguchi 2010 on ‘sissyphobia’). Milani (2015: 1) writes the following:

Men who desire sex and have sex with other men are not necessarily victims of masculine hegemony. Quite the contrary, they collude with dominant masculinist discourses that devalue women and femininity, whilst at the same time contest marginalising discourses that reproduce gay men as inherently effeminate.

The notion of hegemonic homosexuality has also emerged as relevant in analyses of gay men’s language use in other contexts, too. For instance, Sarson (2020) analysed how gay men in the UK perceive the speech styles of men labelling themselves as ‘straight-acting’ on dating apps. Based on interview data with app users, Sarson found that such individuals draw influence in their communication styles from the archetype of the ‘lad’ in British society, mimicking certain speech patterns to align themselves with a dominant, hegemonic form of masculinity. This style included, for example, employing a terse and direct manner on dating apps in order to maintain a sense of social detachment and emotional restraint. Such hyper-masculine, even hegemonic, performances of gender identity are of course likely to be shaped by the contexts in which the communication takes place, as well as the broader cultural context in which it is situated. To demonstrate this, consider Duangwiset and Jackson’s (2021) study, which found that Thai gay men were especially flexible with regard to their gender expressions, incorporating elements of both femininity and masculinity across diverse social contexts, including everyday interactions, romantic partnerships and sexual encounters. Alongside gendered behaviours and mannerisms, an integral aspect of such gender expression involved the use of both masculine and feminine forms of language use; within their networks of gay peers and acquaintances, the men employed gendered linguistic patterns to convey both femininity and masculinity. Thai gay male identity, the authors argue, is therefore not based on a firm separation of femininity from masculinity. Instead, by alternating between masculine and feminine forms of expression, Thai gay men are able to adapt their styles according to the particular individuals they interact with across different aspects of their lives.

One well-documented way in which men subordinate others is through random acts of verbal abuse towards strangers in public places. This phenomenon tends to focus on men giving women unwanted sexual attention, sometimes referred to as cat-calling (McDonald 2021). A survey of 16,600

women across 22 countries found that 84% of the respondents had experienced this form of harassment before the age of 17 (Hollaback and Cornell University 2015). A form of harassment that has not been remarked on as often involves men being verbally abusive towards other men who they do not know. This can particularly occur if a man is visibly different from the norm in terms of his body, clothing or behaviour. For example, the gay author Quentin Crisp, who wore make-up and dyed his hair red, wrote about being followed by strangers who would sometimes overtake him and ask, 'Who the hell do you think you are?'. When Crisp would respond, they would start to 'work themselves up into a frenzy by shouting, swearing and laughing' (Crisp 1968: 67–68). Another man, George Lucas, kept personal diaries in which he sometimes described abusive encounters with strangers. While Lucas was also gay, he was not visibly feminine, and instead, he frequently describes how younger men would shout comments at him about his bald head:

The day began ill, as I was passing the Abbey on the way to the office I heard "skin'ead" said jeeringly from a cab stationary at the kerb; and when the halted traffic began to move, and the vehicle passed me, I perceived had four youths within, and a slack-faced long-haired one in a combat jacket looking derisively out of the window.

17 May 1970

These examples represent displays of dominance and forms of male-male regulation whereby anyone who is viewed as visibly different is seen as weak and fair game for attack. It is notable that Lucas's descriptions occur in a personal text. Taboos around being seen as a victim are likely to make some men not want to go on record about being targeted in this way.

The picture we have painted in this chapter thus far might, necessarily, seem somewhat negative regarding the rights and freedoms of LGBTQ+ groups. As well as reflecting the focus of the chapter, this is also partly because it is in response to such contexts and (continued) forms of oppression that much linguistic (and particularly, discourse-based) work around masculinities has taken place. However, since the early 1990s, numerous observers (e.g., Dugan 2002; Richardson 2005; Weeks 2007) have documented the significant social and political changes that have taken place regarding the role and treatment of people from minority sexuality backgrounds. Such changes have ushered in greater levels of social acceptance, as reflected in (and partly supported by) public representations of such groups becoming more frequent and more positive, for example, in contexts such as news media. Likewise, numerous industries can now be seen to be tapping into the purchasing power of consumers from minority sexual identity groups, and discriminatory laws have been repealed and new legal protections implemented in many places (particularly across the Global North but also in some places within

the Global South, e.g., Brazil, India and South Africa (Brown 2012)). With that said, at the time of writing, 64 countries continue to have laws against homosexuality, and some countries (e.g., Russia, Hungary and parts of the US) have recently passed legislation banning the discussion of homosexuality in schools.

Not assigned male at birth

As well as considering intersectional forms of masculinity, Milani (2015: 2) suggests that researchers go one step further by ‘dislocating masculinities from maleness, thus considering the ways in which women and transgender and intersex individuals also perform a variety of different masculinities’. This would help to ‘de-emphasise the normative relationship between men and masculinity’ (Wiegman 2002: 51). In this section, we consider linguistic research that has focussed on masculinity in relation to trans people, intersex people and women.

Transgender people represent one of the most stigmatised and oppressed groups in society today (United Nations Human Rights 2024). Linguistic research has helped to illuminate and throw critical light on such discrimination, perhaps most notably in studies of newspaper representations of trans people (e.g., Baker (2014) and Zottola (2021)). Another textual genre that has been investigated for its potential to circulate harmful and discriminatory attitudes towards trans people is children’s picture books. For example, Bartholomaeus and Riggs (2019) analysed the depiction of transgender characters in English-language children’s picture books, finding a predominant adherence to binary gender models, which often resulted in the simplification of trans identities to notions such as having a ‘girl brain’ in a ‘boy body’. Such notions, Bartholomaeus and Riggs argue, have the potential to reify gender binaries while diminishing the complexity of transgender experiences. Many books were also found to pathologise trans identities by suggesting that they are errors in need of correction, potentially harming transgender individuals’ self-perception and reinforcing stigma. The books were also found to support normative gender roles, for example, associating dresses with trans girls and sports with trans boys, thereby eliding diversity within transgender experiences. Taken together, these kinds of representations suggest that for trans individuals, authenticity in male gender identity requires adherence to traditional masculine norms and might require validation through medical diagnosis, limiting the understanding and acceptance of trans boys who do not conform to such norms. Despite providing visibility, these kinds of books largely reflect and possibly reinforce restrictive and conventional views of gender.

What is apparent, then, is the prominence of hegemonic, normative gender norms in representations of transgender people. Similar forces have also

been identified as shaping perceptions of the language used by trans people, too. As an example, Zimman (2013) explored variability among individuals perceived as having ‘gay-sounding’ voices by examining the vocal characteristics of trans men. Typically, trans men undergoing testosterone therapy experience a substantial decrease in vocal pitch while retaining some stylistic elements associated with their previous female social roles. Zimman’s sociophonetic analysis of the voices of trans and cisgender men found that although trans men’s voices may be identified as gay-sounding, their sociolinguistic patterns also displayed differences from those of gay-sounding cisgender men. Zimman’s results support the argument that individual vocal elements do not convey meaning isolated from their stylistic context; instead, it is the aggregate of these elements that forms identities, personae and stances. While some phonetic features were found to have stronger connections to gay identities (such as the articulation of /s/), and as such are often discussed in related linguistic studies (see: Campbell-Kibler 2011), the way that trans men utilise these features can signify different meanings depending on the perceived gender of the speaker. For instance, an /s/ produced with a highly negative spectral skew might indicate typical femininity if the speaker is perceived as female, yet the same type of /s/ would signify a gay identity if the speaker is perceived as male. Zimman’s (2013) findings also provide further evidence for the role of hegemonic masculinity in shaping gender- and sexuality-based perceptions of voices, ‘wherein a narrow range of acceptable masculinities is valorized while others are stigmatized through association with femininity or homoeroticism’ (2013: 33).

Voices that read as masculine

The website *Not A Phase* is aimed at supporting trans+ adults and contains a section which includes several vocal training videos. The following text is an excerpt from the accompanying notes of one of the videos, aimed at showing some of the key features of the voice ‘that should be exercised when looking for a more masculine voice’.²

- Men and masc people don’t owe the world any particular kind of voice
- ‘Passing’ can however become important for personal safety sometimes, and it’s valuable to like your own voice
- It’s important to remember that different accents, languages, and cultures often have different ways of using voice
- In most cultures, voices will read as Masculine if they have a lower pitch, a darker resonance, resonate in the chest more, use a heavier vocal fold closure, and use volume rather than pitch for emphasis

Although this is a short excerpt, it blends together a number of different discourses. The first bullet point articulates a gender diversity discourse, challenging the traditional perspective that men should sound a certain way. This is phrased in terms of telling men and masc people that they don't 'owe the world any kind of voice'. The choice of wording here is interesting, with the term 'owe the world' helping to convey the idea that trying to sound a certain way for other people is ridiculous. However, the second bullet point provides two justifications regarding why trans men might want to alter their voices to sound more stereotypically masculine – for personal safety, and in order to like your own voice. So, this bullet point acknowledges real-world contexts and restraints that might impact on trans people. It implies that trans men might want to sound stereotypically masculine, and it does not challenge this position. The third bullet point offers a different perspective again, by pointing out the intersectional aspects of masculinity; namely, how it is likely to be expressed differently according to accent, language and culture. This perspective implies that masculine performances are likely to differ from person to person, meaning that there is no single model for sounding male. Finally, the fourth bullet point provides a more generalised view of what a masculine voice sounds like (articulating a 'gender differences' discourse) by noting some similarities 'in most cultures', such as lower pitch, darker resonance and heavier vocal fold closure. Each bullet point therefore acknowledges a different perspective from the one before it, regarding masculinity and voice, leaving it up to readers to make their own decisions about whether to try the voice exercises available on the site.

Studies of representations of trans people have shown us how such depictions could lead to discrimination, while guidance such as that provided by websites like *Not A Phase* could be seen as helping trans men to manage (or better still, avert) such experiences. Kłonkowska (2018) set out to investigate more directly trans peoples' experiences of discrimination through an analysis of interviews with trans men, trans women and gender non-conforming individuals in Poland. The analysis revealed that the trans men experienced a distinct kind of social invisibility compared to trans women, which was attributed to societal allowances for those perceived as masculine in individuals assigned female at birth. This invisibility, while shielding trans men from certain forms of direct discrimination, also led to ignorance about their specific challenges, particularly in accessing gender-affirming care that respects their identity without imposing stringent masculine norms. Furthermore, despite this reduced visibility, trans men nevertheless were found to face substantial pressures to conform to traditional masculine norms, which were often reinforced by interactions within medical and other social contexts. Kłonkowska notes that the transition from female to male is frequently seen as a social elevation, which simplifies trans men's acceptance in society but complicates their personal identity dynamics by demanding a convincing

performance of masculinity. While offering a superficial acceptance, this dynamic also imposes psychological stress on trans men as they navigate issues of visibility, acceptance and the need to conform to hegemonic masculine ideals. This, as in other contexts where hegemonic norms are enforced, is found to be limiting in terms of the expression of diversity within trans masculinities, pushing individuals towards a narrow, often restrictive interpretation of what it means to be a man. At the same time, Klonkowska's study importantly also highlights opportunities for trans men to challenge and redefine masculine norms.

Resistance to discriminatory and transphobic ideologies is also a theme that emerged from Jones's (2020) study of a support group for young transgender people. The analysis showed how the young people used language to assert their agency and shape their identities in the face of discrimination. For example, one trans male participant described responding to misgendering by saying, 'but I'm a boy, can you not see that?' – a rhetorical question through which that person affirmed their identity. As well as using direct correction, participants also attested that they employed humour as a means of challenging their misgendering, for example, using sarcasm in response to invasive questions about their bodies or gender-affirming procedures, in the process confronting underlying assumptions while affirming their gender identity. Jones (2020) also observed how the support group itself served as an important platform for sharing personal experiences and coping strategies, creating a sense of solidarity and collective identity among the young trans people.

Another study highlighting the challenging of stigma and harmful norms within interactions between trans individuals is Edelman and Zimman's (2014) analysis of trans men's language use within homoerotic online spaces. Specifically, this study investigated how language use in online conversations, personal adverts and video content could serve to negotiate identities and genital embodiment. The trans men communicating within these spaces were found to use language creatively as a means for transforming potential stigmatisation into expressions of erotic pleasure and personal agency, for instance, through use of terms such as 'bonus holes' and 'original equipment' to redefine their genitals. Using such terms, the trans men were able to openly discuss their genital status in ways that asserted their desirability while challenging norms around conventional male genitalia. Edelman and Zimman argued that such language use allowed the trans men to emphasise erotic capital, placing the onus on the reader to understand and appreciate their bodily configuration.

There is less work on intersex identities and masculinity but a relevant study to mention here was carried out by King (2015), who analysed a series of autobiographical stories told by Mani Bruce Mitchell, who was born in New Zealand in 1953. Initially named Bruce and raised as a boy, investigative

surgery indicated that Mitchell had a uterus and was subsequently named Margaret and raised as a girl. As an adult, Margaret ‘came out’ as a lesbian but then changed her name and lived as an intersex person, using the pronoun *hir*. In *hir* stories, King (2015: 235) notes how Mani describes himself as performing both ‘normative versions of masculinity and femininity’ during childhood (e.g., helping dad on the farm and dressing up). However, Mani’s stories also subvert heteronormative ideologies about masculinity and femininity to ‘reclaim a certain control over the meanings ascribed to them’ (2015: 236). King argues that gender-focussed linguistic analysis needs to consider ideology, social construction and biology. He notes the following:

To dismiss the possible intersections of masculinities with bodies and biological processes, or equally, to underestimate the dislocation of masculinities from sexual phenotype, is to place limits upon our ability to hear and see, and to risk perpetuating the unintelligibility of intersex experience.
(2015: 237–238)

To conclude this section, we now consider two studies that involve linguistic performances performed by queer women, the first of which involves representations in erotica, while the second analyses a British hiking group. Koller (2015) analyses a two-part short erotic story by US author Pat Califa called *The Leather Daddy and the Femme*, which involves a description of a sexual encounter between a male-bodied leather daddy (a dominant gay man who wears leather) and a female-bodied first-person narrator. In the first part of the story, the narrator displays the persona of a young gay man – a ‘twink’ – who performs oral sex on the leather daddy. Then, after the narrator reveals her female body, she is vaginally penetrated by the leather daddy. In the second part of the story, which takes place the following day, the narrator uses a strap-on dildo to penetrate the leather daddy. Both characters thus switch roles and genders, and Koller (2015: 169) notes how ‘masculinity is used as a linguistic resource that can be drawn on to construct particular identity positions’. The characters in the story use language that is connoted as masculine – commands and taboo words, as well as addressing each other in gendered ways (*daddy*, *little boy* and *bitch*). Additionally, the text uses metaphoric expressions to give the characters different masculinities – for example, the metaphor PEOPLE ARE MACHINES is realised through physical action verbs like *pounding*, *slamming* and *pumping*, as well as through attributes like *steel blue eyes*. In other parts of the story, sexual roles are represented through animal metaphors, with characters referred to as a *weasel* or an *alley-cat*. Koller (2015) concludes that ‘queer pornography both exaggerates and destabilizes notions of masculinity’.

Jones (2015) analyses a conversation between members of a British hiking group called The Sapphic Stompers, who mainly adopted androgenous

or butch styles. She describes how the women orient towards the practice of putting on lipstick – something associated with heteronormative femininity. One woman, Claire, views this as unappealing: ‘it’s horrible urgh’. Another woman, Marianne, defends her own use of makeup, describing it as a ‘funny conflict thing’ and says her partner uses lipstick which is ‘quite nice actually’. Claire humorously draws on what could be seen as a stereotypically masculine practice, to assertively suggest that Marianne should ‘put her foot down’ with her girlfriend. Jones says the rejection of lipstick should not be seen as an act of masculinity, though – most men would not need to renounce lipstick to assert their masculinity, but some lesbians would do so to assert their butchness. Jones thus views ‘butchness’ in women ‘as a subversive act which deconstructs and challenges heteronormative ideals of femininity’ (2015: 178). She warns that labelling non-feminine behaviour in women as ‘female masculinity’ may, in fact, inadvertently reproduce harmful ideologies which link non-normative sexualities to gender inversion and perpetuate ‘an understanding of butch lesbianism as a form of drag’ (2015: 193).

The studies in this section show the potential for the gender/sex duality to be separated – it is not only assigned-at-birth men who can perform masculinity. However, the studies also indicate how difficult it actually is for this separation to take place – cultural understandings of gender are so ingrained that stereotypical, hegemonic views of masculinity are continually held up as the yardstick.

Racialised masculinities

Men (and others) from certain ethnic and racial backgrounds can experience marginalisation when their cultural practices or physical appearances are perceived as not conforming to the norms established by the predominantly White standards of masculinity from the Global North, which characterise hegemonic masculine frameworks. The dynamics of such marginalisation have been illuminated by studies examining how men from these backgrounds are represented in terms of racialised masculinities, in which their ethnicity and racial identities become marked in terms of their difference to (White) norms. Research in this area has also explored how such men navigate and challenge such marginalisation.

Looking at South African media, Levon et al. (2017) set out a topography of masculine normativities in the country. They found representations of masculinities in South Africa to be both significantly racialised and classed and showed how these identity aspects intersected with each other. While Black masculinities were often depicted in relation to violence, crime and physicality, White masculinities were typically associated with sports, leadership and an overall more favourable cultural status. While the representations of Black men therefore reinforced stereotypes associating them with danger and

aggression, White men, on the other hand, were aligned with traditional and globalised ideals of masculinity, thereby upholding a privileged normativity for this group. Such marginalisation of Black masculinities, together with the concurrent valorisation of White masculinities, supports a hegemonic masculinity that is White, middle class and culturally dominant. The kinds of representations Levon and colleagues studied drew upon this standard in unfavourably evaluating Black masculinities.

Marginalising discourses around racialised masculinities can also be utilised by commercial organisations, for example, in adverts. This is demonstrated by Hiramoto and Kapoor's (2023) analysis of the representations of racialised masculinities in male-targeted advertising of skin-lightening products in India. The authors describe how in India, masculinities are heavily influenced by colourism – that is, in this context, a socially and culturally embedded preference for lighter skin tones. Analysing video advertisements for these products, Hiramoto and Kapoor (2023) demonstrate how the preference for lighter skin tones was operationalised within these texts, for example, by associating lighter skin with higher social status, attractiveness and success. Men with darker skin, on the other hand, were portrayed as the opposite and as wanting to cure their social ineptness by lightening their skin (with this action thus offered as a key to achieving personal and professional success). For example, the TV adverts they analysed revolved around plots in which men with darker skin tones were shunned by women or performed acts of stupidity. But then once they applied the skin-lightening product, the men were shown performing acts that demonstrated their intelligence and so they then attracted positive attention from women. The adverts are somewhat formulaic, and the attractiveness of the men is underscored in each advert, as having applied the skin-lightening product the men are greeted by women with the catchphrase, 'Hi handsome, hi handsome!'. While holding the product, the user then directs his gaze towards the camera to advise readers that 'anyone can be handsome', reinforcing the product's promise of making users 'handsome' by lightening their skin. These complementary representations thus reinforce racial hierarchies and uphold discriminatory practices which favour lighter-skinned individuals over those with darker skin. This, in turn, promotes a narrow and exclusive standard of beauty and success that is inherently racialised and classist. In this way, these adverts link directly to hegemonic masculinity, promoting a version of male desirability that is intertwined with race, class and skin colour. Lighter skin is presented not just as a cosmetic preference but as a critical component of the dominant form of masculinity; in other words, it becomes integral to social and professional achievements and acceptance.

As well as being drawn upon for commercial purposes, there is evidence that marginalising discourses around racialised masculinities can also refract into institutional contexts. For example, Mortensen and Milani (2023)

examined Danish media representations of, and educational initiatives for, male heterosexual non-European asylum seekers. They identified how such texts serve to construct and regulate the sexualities of these men, framing them as deviant and as requiring correction. These representations are analysed in the broader context of Denmark's self-image as a 'free spirited' and sexually liberal nation. Against this backdrop, the asylum seekers are seen as sexually abnormal and dangerous. They are represented as neither understanding nor respecting Danish norms around sexuality and consent, which in turn leads to their portrayal as behaving inappropriately and thus requiring state intervention. For example, one of the texts in the data contains the following instructive passage which, among other things, presupposes a lack of understanding around sexual consent on the part of the asylum seekers:

Danes have a high alcohol consumption. . . . At night you'll meet women. They're out having fun. Maybe they're drunk, are walking and talking, singing. Or drinking. They're wearing fine clothes and make-up. Now they're going to be beautiful and party. Some may wear short dresses. They may wear low-necked dresses and a lot of men may want to be with them. If one meets such a group of women on the street, one can greet or smile. One should not yell about sex or talk about their bodies. One should neither kiss or touch their breasts.

Mortensen and Milani (2023) describe, as 'regimes of normativities', the processes by which these representations become normalised within the kinds of media and educational materials they analysed, indicating that these depictions are not only widespread but institutionally endorsed and perpetuated. The implications of such representations are significant, since they reinforce stereotypes that associate non-European men with sexual deviance and danger. This, the authors argue, is not only likely to affect public perception and treatment of these men but also adversely impact their integration into Danish society.

As well as considering how racialised masculinities are represented in institutionalised contexts, research has also looked at how men from minority ethnic backgrounds perform masculinities in contexts where their identities might be marked or racialised. An example is Barber's (2014) study of young British-born Vietnamese men living in London, which showed how these men negotiated their masculine identities in ways that performed, but also contested, certain Orientalist stereotypes which rendered them subordinate within society. Based on interviews and participant observations, the men were found to be acutely aware of their marginalised position within the broader context of British masculinities, which they viewed to be dominated by Black and White norms. To counteract this, these men actively engaged in subversive performances to reclaim their identities and assert their masculine prowess. For example, some of the men drew on a discourse of riskiness,

with one participant describing his decision to move away from safe and familiar Vietnamese spaces, and into more threatening multiethnic or predominantly White environments, as follows: 'But with me, I just like to get out there, I don't care . . . so I am taking a chance but you know. [It's] a little challenge and that. A little risk – that makes it a buzz!' (p. 446). The body and aesthetic presentations (e.g., hairstyles and fashion choices) also emerged as key sites for the Vietnamese men's masculine performances, with one of the participants drawing on a discourse of masculine competitiveness to highlight the importance of such aesthetic choices in the attention economy: 'for Vietnamese guys, hairstyles are the only way of showing who you are. There is no way of doing it through clothes – 'cos when you are smaller than everyone else you can't compete on that level' (p. 448). Some of the men framed such aesthetic choices as means for constructing a masculine identity that was based on reclaiming and subverting Orientalist stereotypes. As one participant described, 'If it is a hip hop event club you dress a certain way, so I may wear a trainer that nobody has ever worn before or ever seen, or wear a cap that you can't get from the UK' (p. 447). Barber (2014) contends that this description turns the stereotype of the 'silent' or 'invisible' Oriental into something that commands attention and envy. On the other hand, other Vietnamese men framed such style choices as means to embrace and even exaggerate their Oriental identities in ways that challenged negative stereotypes. For example, hairstyles such as the 'Manga-style' served as a strategic tool to project a 'cool' and desirable image. As one of the participants put it, 'This is Manga-style, I love it! This is a style I have cultivated myself. . . . But you'll only see this style on Oriental people, and people can't always tell if you are Vietnamese, Korean or Japanese'. This extract also shows how hairstyling was framed in ways that

enabled Vietnamese men to navigate a broader range of Oriental masculinities allowing them to escape the most pernicious stereotypes and claim more positive masculinities, those associated with neighbouring groups such as the Japanese, Thai, Korean or the new, more contemporary 'Oriental' style.

Barber (2014: 449)

Barber's (2014) study thus shows how men from minority ethnic and cultural backgrounds can navigate their identities and resist marginalisation through everyday acts of performativity and self-presentation.

Masculinities, social class and work

As the intersectional studies described previously indicate, social class can be an important variable in constructions and representations of masculinity.

Economic independence and success are often central to hegemonic masculine ideals. Men who are unemployed or working class may therefore find themselves marginalised if they cannot achieve (or perform) the kind of financial success that is expected of them. For example, Baker and Levon's (2016) study of representations of different types of men in UK newspapers found that middle-class men were frequently associated with political and corporate privilege and depicted as dominating political and corporate life. One word that tended to be used in descriptions of them was *well*, which described them in terms like *well-known*, *well-fed*, *well-educated* and *well-dressed*. Such expressions tended to be used to emphasise the men's privilege. However, these expressions also appeared to be agentless – in other words, middle-class men are the recipient of various benefits, but it is not clear who caused them to be well-educated or well-fed. Working-class men did not feature as prominently as the other social class groups in the news. When they were mentioned, they were represented in ways that highlighted a mix of pride and struggle. Rather than *well*, a frequent word in descriptions of them was *self* – they were portrayed as *self-made*, *self-educated*, *self-confident*, *self-improving*, *self-employed*, etc. This represented them as resilient, hard-working and straightforward. However, the word *self* also makes it clear who or what is responsible for this state – themselves – as opposed to having it given to them by some unnamed outside agent. The media also frequently depicted working-class men as facing systemic disadvantages, such as job losses and lower life expectancy. In this way, working-class men's lives were presented, on the one hand, as fraught with challenges yet, on the other, as being underpinned by a strong sense of identity and community values. Subtly, then, through the implications of *well* and *self*, the news articles explained how social class impacted on the context of masculine success.

The intersection of social class with race was also at the core of Levon et al.'s (2017) study of representations of men in South African newspapers, as in this context the men were discursively placed within a hierarchical structure influenced significantly by race and social class. In particular, higher social classes, which were often depicted as being occupied by White men, were associated with positive attributes and social power. By contrast, lower social classes were frequently associated with Black men, who were attributed with negatively evaluated traits and behaviours, for example, relating to violence and criminality. In terms of the intersections between social class and race, Levon et al. (2017) found that White men from the upper and middle classes were primarily situated within contexts of authority and normativity, while Black men were often reported on within contexts of marginalisation and deviance, regardless of their social class. Levon et al. (2017) also describe a middle-class ambivalence; specifically, middle-class Black men, although part of a rising economic demographic, were simultaneously lauded for their economic successes but also criticised for their perceived materialism and

detachment from the kinds of socio-political issues affecting Black communities more broadly.

The various representations of different class-based masculinities identified within these studies can be linked to hegemonic masculinity. For instance, in the UK print media, Baker and Levon's (2016) analysis showed how middle-class White men epitomise this hegemony through associations with economic success, education and power, while the depictions of working-class and upper-class men introduce complexities. Working-class men both embody traditional masculine virtues, such as toughness and self-reliance, yet are also framed as victims of disenfranchisement, challenging the link between masculinity and control. Similarly, in South Africa, Levon et al.'s (2017) analysis demonstrated how Black middle class men could be depicted not only as reinforcing dominant social norms, such as consumerism, but also as challenging traditional power structures. In this way, such studies illustrate the capacity for mediated depictions of masculinity to simultaneously support and question hegemonic ideals.

This duality in the relationship between working-class men and masculinities is also reflected in studies exploring how such men use language themselves. An example of such a study was carried out by Lawson (2015), who analysed the language of urban working-class male adolescents in Glasgow, Scotland. Lawson's analysis, which combined sociolinguistics with ethnography, looked at how the adolescents used language to construct and negotiate their masculinities, focussing in particular on the linguistic expression of 'tough' masculinities through certain speech patterns and the telling of narratives of violence. Lawson (2015) observed how the use of non-standard linguistic features associated with working-class speech often carried covert prestige in this context, here symbolising hegemonic masculine ideals such as toughness. For instance, one of the participants described an instance of violence using distinctly non-standard forms: 'Wance I goat jumped aff a big group of boays I- I turnt aroon and smacked wan of them wi' a pole and then put it doon then just walked away, right?' ('Once I got jumped by a big group of boys I turned around and smacked one of them with a pole and then put it down then just walked away, right?'). Lawson (2015) argued that the telling of this narrative not only evidences the use of local (Glaswegian) dialect but also reflects the performance of masculinity through the recounting of violent acts. Such fight narratives serve as important sites for asserting and contesting masculinity; Lawson (2015) demonstrates how they can be used to perform toughness, gain peer respect and negotiate social standing. For example, another participant described his potential for violence in a way that reinforced his tough masculine identity: 'Cause if I fight then I'm mair liable tae kill some cunt' ('Because if I fight than I'm more liable to kill some cunt'). Yet, some of Lawson's (2015) participants contested normative expectations of toughness and violence. For instance, one participant

expressed a divergent stance on engaging in fights when they described how they'd 'probably run away'. Such an admission explicitly challenges hegemonic norms of masculinity which equate toughness with physical aggression. Lawson (2015) thus argues that hegemonic masculinity, which often valorises toughness and aggression, is both reinforced and challenged through the linguistic performances in his data. While some participants embrace these norms, others redefine toughness by rejecting violence, in the process actively contesting dominant forms of masculinity.

Social class is closely related to, though not dependent entirely upon, work. According to hegemonic frameworks, ideal men are, as we have seen, professionally successful and, because of this, they accumulate wealth and are able to perform the role of 'bread winner' (Kendall 2007). Circumstances such as unemployment, then, which limit the possibilities for men to fulfil this role, are likely to pose challenges for the performance of a gender identity that meets the hegemonic masculine standard. Studies looking at the language of men in such circumstances suggest that they, too, engage with hegemonic norms in complex ways.

Legarreta-Iza and Sagastizabal (2023) examined the practices and discourses of Spanish fathers experiencing periods of unemployment, focussing in particular on the impacts that these experiences had on the men's fatherhood practices and gender identities. They qualitatively analysed in-depth interviews with 15 heterosexual couples in Spain. Each of the couples had children under the age of 12, and the fathers had experienced at least six months of unemployment. The interviews aimed to capture both the fathers' perspectives and those of their partners. Three types of fatherhood emerged from the interview data, all of which related in some way to caregiving roles. One was the construction of the fathers as the primary caregivers who, during unemployment, took on substantial childcare and domestic responsibilities. For example, one father described his involvement with his daughter as a way to structure his time and provide care:

In spite of how bad it is to be unemployed, I have to admit that my daughter Nagore is the best thing in the world. She keeps me calm so I'm not always mulling over the same thing in my head; she shows me affection, keeps me busy and breaks the monotony.

The second category was described as 'helper fathers', and this was the identity of those men who assisted in childcare and household tasks but did not take on the primary caregiver role. These fathers often engaged in more enjoyable activities with their children rather than routine care tasks. Then, finally, there was the identity of 'breadwinner fathers'. These men maintained a focus on employment and job searching, with minimal involvement in caregiving or domestic work. Their identity and discourse remained

centred on being the primary economic provider. Across the participants in this study, then, traditional and emerging masculine identities interacted and were negotiated in complex ways. While some of the fathers embraced more involved caregiving roles, others retained strong ties to traditional breadwinner identities. Experiences like unemployment can thus both challenge and reinforce traditional gender roles. Yet while unemployment disrupts traditional employment-based (hegemonic) masculine roles, it does not necessarily lead to a fundamental redefinition of masculine identities.

The neighbour's daughter is catching my eyes

In Egypt, a kind of marginalised masculinity associated with young working-class men is expressed through a genre of music known as *mahraganat*. The genre fuses popular Egyptian folk (in Arabic, *sha'bi*), hip hop and electronic dance music, and the lyrics are 'cheeky, and even profane, and often speak about social issues facing young men in low-income neighbourhoods' (Pratt and Rezk 2020: online). Mahraganat music emerged from low-income, marginalised neighbourhoods, and both musicians and fans of the genre use it as a means of expressing their rebellious status, not only through the lyrics but also through their distinctive appearance and by playing the music loudly from moving vehicles. In this way, Pratt and Rezk (2020: online) observe how 'creating and consuming mahraganat challenges dominant notions of masculinity – such as, being hard-working, family-oriented and modest – which may be unachievable, or undesirable to [listeners / musicians], because of their marginalized status' (see also: Benchouia 2015).

To consider how mahraganat music might challenge traditional, dominant notions of masculinity while promoting more marginalised and attainable ones, it is useful to take a closer look at the lyrics of a song belonging to this genre. We can take as an example a 2019 song called *Bint el-Geran* (*The Neighbour's Daughter*) by Hassan Shakosh and Omar Kamal. The song is sung from the perspective of a man who, due to his working-class background, will not be able to gain the affections of his neighbour's daughter (whom he desires). So, the lyrics tell us how the man admires the woman from afar: 'bint al-giran shughlana aania' ('The neighbour's daughter is catching my eyes'). There is also a sense in which the man observes the woman secretly; the song frequently references the man not wanting others to notice him admiring the woman, as well as the fact that their bond is unspoken. One lyric suggests that he observes her through an open window: 'sybi shbakik maftou7 lih lih taqfili' ('keep your window open, why do you close it?'). If the woman denies him the opportunity to look at her, he threatens to engage in destructive behaviours, including substance abuse: 'hatot w msh hala2ini washrab kamur w hashish' ('I'll drown my sorrows in alcohol and smoke hashish').

This final line, about drinking alcohol and smoking hashish, caused controversy in Egypt, as the government expressed the view that this song promoted immoral behaviour, and one member of parliament declared mahraganat music to be ‘more dangerous than coronavirus’ (Youssef 2021). The scandal surrounding this particular song meant that mahraganat singers were banned from performing in various public venues but were nevertheless able to reach audiences through social media (Pratt and Rezk 2020).

This case demonstrates how music and other art forms can be used to reject traditional and dominant forms of masculinity while expressing more marginalised ones. The men who perform this music and who express their masculinities through it acknowledge their lower status and the constraints this places on them in society. Yet, they embrace – and perhaps even celebrate – this through a kind of rebellious masculinity. With this in mind, we can question whether the admonishment of this genre will indeed suppress such gender expressions or, rather, serve to inadvertently reaffirm the marginal status of this genre, which made it so popular in the first place.

Illness and medicalised masculinities

At this point, we turn our attention to the masculinities broadly associated with experiences of ill-health. Biological sex has been recognised as an influential factor underpinning health, with women typically outliving men, while women and men are each predisposed to certain illnesses. Concurrently, extensive research has been conducted on gender as a social determinant of health, including the adverse impacts of patriarchal systems on women’s health (Annandale and Hunt 2000). In line with the perspective that experiences of health and illness are influenced by societal and cultural perceptions of gender, Courtenay (2000: 1385) notes that ‘health-related beliefs and behaviours . . . are utilized to express femininities and masculinities’. In expressing masculine identities, hegemonic ideals entail that ‘real men’ are expected – indeed, encouraged – to perform their gender in ways that are often harmful to their health. This includes behaviours such as drinking, smoking, fighting, consuming unhealthy food and participating in extreme sports. Courtenay (2000) identifies these behaviours, along with others in a list of more than 30 behaviours in total, as ones that men are more likely to engage in than women, many of which significantly increase their risk of injury, illness or death (see also Gough 2006; Garfield et al. 2008; Men’s Health Forum 2017).

The performance of masculinity, and particularly hegemonic masculinity, can therefore be hazardous to men’s health. Yet, at the same time, the kinds of ill-health that can result from such performances can create vulnerability, or a perception of vulnerability, which runs contrary to hegemonic notions of what constitutes a ‘real man’ (Gough and Robertson 2009). Indeed,

Galasiński (2008: 9) points out that ‘a healthy male identity equals a strong one’, while Lupton (2012: 26) observes how ‘dominant assumptions about masculinity have tended to represent men as inherently stronger and less susceptible to ills than women’. Courtenay (2000) articulates a similar point but makes the connection between such behaviours and hegemonic masculinity even more explicit:

In exhibiting or enacting hegemonic ideals with health behaviour, men reinforce strongly held cultural beliefs that men are more powerful and less vulnerable than women; that men’s bodies are structurally more efficient than and superior to women’s bodies; that asking for health and caring for one’s health are feminine; and that most powerful men amongst men are those for whom health and safety are irrelevant.

Courtenay (2000: 1389)

Illness, then, can present a threat to the construction of a masculine image that is consistent with hegemonic norms. Research on masculinities and health has demonstrated how men attempt to discursively negotiate their identities in the face of illness (see: Brookes and Chałupnik 2023a, 2023b). For example, Galasiński’s (2008) study of Polish men’s disclosures of their experiences of depression, which we mentioned in Chapter 2, reveals how such men often articulate their emotional distress through discussions of physical symptoms or by using metaphors of struggle, in this way aligning their subjective experiences with culturally accepted expressions of (hegemonic) masculinity, which avoid direct admissions of vulnerability. Galasiński (2008) described how the men strived to maintain an image of independence, strength and control – highlighting a tension between their actual experiences of depression and societal (gendered) expectations of them to be empowered, strong and stoic. Galasiński (2008) also highlights how the very pressure to conform to hegemonic ideals can itself lead to significant psychological distress, as the conflict between experiencing depression and needing to appear as strong or in control can intensify feelings of inadequacy and isolation. On this basis, Galasiński (2008) argues that the stigma associated with mental health issues is likely to be exacerbated by hegemonic masculinity, as not only can it contribute to the development of depression in the first place but also, once mental illness ensues, it can stifle men’s scope for expressing their emotional distress, including deterring them from accessing mental health services due to perceptions that they are weak.

As Galasiński’s (2008) work alludes, in the interests of preserving a masculine image, it is often not easy for men to openly admit to being ill, or to seek support for their health problems. In particular, men’s hesitation to seek help for health issues is often attributed to a wider reluctance to engage in behaviours that might expose vulnerability or illness, as this could undermine

their identities as stoic and self-reliant – qualities valorised by hegemonic masculine norms. Relatedly, Lupton points out how

Hegemonic masculinities have emphasised the importance of men displaying little concern about the state of their health or appearance of their bodies and exerting the power of rational thought over the weaknesses of the body. Indeed, illness is linked so strongly to femininity rather than masculinity that the notion of a man as a passive, weakened patient under the care of a doctor – relinquishing control of his body to another – challenges these dominant norms of masculinity.

Lupton (2012: 26)

This is a theme that also emerged in our own work (Brookes and Baker 2021) examining representations of obesity in the UK press. The cultural ideal for the male body heavily emphasises toned muscularity, starkly contrasting with how obese male bodies are typically portrayed. Indeed, male bodies classified as obese, which are neither muscular nor slim, are often depicted as ‘soft, flabby, lacking the muscularity and strength of the “normal” idealised male body’ and are thus considered to be much closer to the ‘stereotypical feminine body in terms of their softness, roundness and fleshiness’ (Lupton 2017: 66).

Comparing tabloid weight loss narratives about men and women, Brookes and Baker (2021) found that representations of women often emphasise the emotional dimensions of their experiences with weight, portraying obesity as a source of shame and sometimes depression. Women’s weight loss journeys were depicted as arduous and filled with desperation, while successful weight loss was linked to increased self-confidence and other positive emotions. By contrast, portrayals of men in the weight loss narratives de-emphasised their emotional experiences. Instead, their motivations for weight loss were presented as rational and crucial for survival, driven by the threat of illness or death due to obesity. These portrayals align with what Charteris-Black and Seale (2010: 120–121) identify as the ‘fundamental dichotomy between masculinity, rationality and science, which connotes control and domination over the material world and femininity, emotionality and governance of the private, domestic sphere’. The notion that men only attempt to lose weight under severe or exceptional circumstances was underscored by how their weight loss methods were described in the media, especially in articles featuring weight loss stories. Although the term *diet* was prominent in these narratives, the men’s activities were often not labelled as diets but were instead described as ‘experiments’. When men *did* engage in diets, these were portrayed as extraordinary and typically allowed for the consumption of items emblematic of hegemonic masculinity, such as alcohol and red meat. This analysis supports Gough’s (2006) observations regarding the enduring

nature of hegemonic masculinity, as men participating in traditionally feminised activities such as dieting are shown doing so under unusual conditions, with linguistic strategies that distance their actions from such feminised and unmasculine practices.

In addition to hegemonic masculinity, other frameworks of masculinity have also been found to significantly influence men's health behaviours and outcomes. For example, the concept of the 'new man', discussed further in Chapter 7 on healthy masculinity, presents a markedly different script from that of hegemonic masculinity (Gill 2003). The 'new man' identity, primarily recognisable in the Global North, is shaped by consumerism and neoliberalism, where masculinity is intertwined with self-scrutiny, self-objectification and personal responsibility (Harvey 2005). Contrary to hegemonic masculinity, the 'new man' framework allows for the expression of vulnerability, and those who adopt this identity are often seen as more aesthetic- and health-conscious, perpetually striving to enhance their appearance and health. The rise of such alternative masculinities as the 'new man' has been theorised to potentially lead to the formation of specific masculine ontologies about what it means to be a 'healthy man' (Whitehead 2002). However, research on 'new man' discourses in health-related contexts has revealed that hegemonic notions of masculinity still remain prevalent in such texts.

Putland et al. (2023b) report a multimodal critical discourse analysis of the website of a men's pharmaceutical company, *Numan*, and its linguistic and visual marketing of products intended to remedy hair loss and erectile dysfunction. They find that, despite the visible concern with appearance and health that pervades the site, which might be viewed as characteristic of a 'new man' philosophy, traditional, hegemonic notions of masculinity are nevertheless reinforced on the website. For example, men are depicted as taking decisive, informed actions to combat or manage health problems, embodying the masculine ideals of autonomy and control. The website promotes proactive health management to prevent issue escalation, consistent with the hegemonic notion that men should be strong and self-reliant. This is emphasised through direct, action-oriented language use in product descriptions and user testimonials, which underscore men taking control over their health dilemmas. Simultaneously, the 'new man' is catered to through the promotion of self-care products that encourage active engagement with health and appearance, reflecting a shift towards a consumer-oriented masculinity. In alignment with cultural shifts wherein men's grooming and health maintenance are becoming more socially acceptable (and even expected), the discourse around the products advertised on the website was also found to often extend beyond treating specific ailments to enhancing overall lifestyle and self-image. For example, product use was presented as improving men's confidence, lifestyle satisfaction and social success, framing health

management as integral to personal and professional success. The discourse of the website thus resonates with neoliberal values of self-improvement and personal responsibility, encouraging men to see their health as a key area of life where they can assert control and achieve success. This joint focus on traditional and consumerist masculinities suggests a dual identity for contemporary men, as they are encouraged to adopt a proactive approach to health management while maintaining rugged individualism and strength – qualities that are revered in traditional (hegemonic) masculine scripts. Putland et al. (2023b) argue that this complex set of representations reflects broader societal shifts whereby men are increasingly expected to balance traditional masculine qualities with modern consumerist and health-conscious behaviours.

One of the findings from Putland et al.'s (2023b) study was that processes associated with men's ageing bodies were transformed, through discourse, into medical problems that could then be solved through the consumption of pharmaceutical products. This is known as 'medicalisation' and is defined by Conrad (1992: 209) as the 'process by which nonmedical problems become defined and treated as medical problems, usually in terms of illnesses or disorders'. Discourse-based research has shown how aspects of men's bodies – and especially men's ageing bodies – can be framed as medical problems. Such representations, which are often commercially motivated (i.e., utilised to sell pharmaceutical solutions), are also deeply intertwined with gendered discourses in presenting the men experiencing such issues as failing to live up to (hegemonic) standards of masculinity. For example, Harvey's (2013) critical multimodal discourse analysis of commercial websites promoting pharmaceutical treatments for male hair loss identified four primary discursive strategies these websites employ: (1) representing the balding man as a type and an outcast; (2) promoting the attractiveness and self-assurance of men with hair; (3) framing male hair loss within a scientific discourse; and (4) encouraging self-evaluation of hair loss. In constructing male-pattern baldness as a significant medical issue, these websites could serve to exacerbate men's anxieties about their appearance to promote pharmaceutical interventions. Visually, for example, balding men were depicted as isolated or reduced to mere representations of hair loss severity, contrasting with images of hirsute men who were shown as attractive, confident and socially engaged. Harvey's (2013) analysis thus highlights the relationship between such promotional strategies and hegemonic masculinity; specifically, the websites capitalise on cultural expectations of male appearance, linking hair loss with diminished masculinity and waning social appeal. Such texts not only reflect but also reinforce hegemonic masculinity by stressing the importance of maintaining youthful traits and conforming to idealised male images, thereby driving men towards pharmaceutical solutions to preserve or enhance their perceived virility and social worth.

I have no masculinity left

Sexual prowess is a critical component of hegemonic masculinity. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) describe how men's sexual prowess can be interpreted as a domain for expressing dominance, thereby reinforcing gender hierarchies and substantiating male power. Sexual prowess can also be viewed as a measure of 'true' masculinity, where, according to Kimmel (1994), men's ability to attract and satisfy (ideally, female) sexual partners becomes something of a benchmark for hegemonic masculinity. Additionally, sexual prowess in men is also symbolically associated with youthfulness, health and vigour – values that are central to hegemonic masculine ideals and heavily drawn upon within media and advertising texts which present or try to 'sell' such ideals to men (e.g., Mullany 2004; Putland et al. 2023b).

Such emphasis on men's sexual capabilities can significantly impact their emotional health and relationships, with pressures to meet these standards being shown to lead to anxiety (Courtenay 2000). When men cannot meet such standards, there is evidence that this can adversely affect their sense of self-worth and interpersonal relationships (Courtenay 2000). In the following excerpt, we consider how men's failure to meet the expectations around sexual prowess can adversely affect their perceptions of themselves and their masculinity. This interview is with an 80-year-old man from the UK and is about the erectile problems he experienced as a result of treatment he received for prostate cancer.³ In the interview, the man discusses quite explicitly the impacts that this has had on his masculinity. The speech of both the interviewer (I) and the patient (P) is shown.

- (1) I: And the side effects of the injections, can you tell me a bit about that now?
- (2) P: Well, this again it's not easy for me to talk about but I mean of course I am totally impotent and I'm even worse than that in that I am disgusted by anything sort of sexual.
- (3) I: Right.
- (4) P: If I see and you can't avoid it on television, not explicit sex but very nearly, I'm disgusted. . . . I think being impotent is a, you don't know it but I think it's psychologically affects you. I mean it's really got now that I am disgusted by anything at all of that nature.
- (5) I: How does that make you feel, would you prefer that things were different?
- (6) P: Yes, yes I mean I feel that I've lost all masculinity, I'm not a man any more. I mean I'm just not. I mean if I were walking along with my wife, very slowly these days and somebody accosted her I would sort of run away. I have no masculinity left.

- (7) I: How does that make you feel?
- (8) P: Awful, I think that really, that is the worst side effect by far.
- (9) I: I think it's important that other men know how you feel about that.
- (10) P: Yes I think that is the most important thing, side effect of these injections which are always delivered well, competently, local hospital you know.
- (11) I: How does that make your wife feel, does it affect your relationship?
- (12) P: Well, I wouldn't know. It's very funny women don't talk about things like that you know, I'd never ask her for fear of her, she's taken it magnificently but that worries me of course it does. . . .
- (13) I: Yes, I can see that it must be very distressing.
- (14) P: No that worries me very much that you see I no longer fulfil my function as a husband, you know?
- (15) I: I'm sure you satisfy her in lots of other ways though.
- (16) P: I, well she said, "somebody is coming, you must Hoover the hall", I've done that while she was out.

The man's responses can be viewed as attesting to some of the impacts that erectile dysfunction can have on men. This man describes how his impotence is difficult for him to talk about (2), attesting to the stigma that surrounds the topic. He also refers explicitly to the psychological affects this has caused (4). In line 2, the man refers to experiencing 'disgust' at 'anything sort of sexual' and describes how this is 'even worse' than impotence. In this way, this man could be suggesting that, viewed through the lens of hegemonic masculinity, losing his sex drive is worse for him than actually experiencing impotence.

The effects of this on the man's masculinity are described quite explicitly. In 6, he metaphorically reifies his masculinity almost as a commodity and something that can be – and which in his case, has been – lost. For example, he describes how he feels that he's 'lost all masculinity' and how he '[has] no masculinity left'. He then constructs the result of this as a loss not only of his masculinity but actually of his manhood as well, when he declares that he is 'not a man anymore' – something that he then reiterates when stating, 'I mean I'm just not'. These linguistic choices imply an equivalence between masculinity and manhood, then, which accordingly equates his sense of loss of the former to his loss of the latter. The consequence of this is then attested through the narration of a hypothetical scenario in which this man's loss of masculinity (and manhood) means that he would feel unable to protect his wife: 'I mean if I were walking along with my wife . . . and somebody accosted her I would sort of run away'. Tellingly, this scenario paints a picture of this man as being unable to fulfil the role of protector, which is, as we have seen in previous chapters, ascribed to men through hegemonic masculinity. To reduce this scenario to the instinctive responses it would evoke, this

man attests that rather than 'fight', he would take 'flight'. His description of this as being 'the worst side effect by far' (8) not only returns to a more medicalised frame but also suggests a sense of shame at not feeling able to live up to the hegemonic standard.

In the final section of the interview, the man boils his role as a husband down to his sexual prowess. Following a passage in which he expresses anxiety about being able to sexually satisfy his wife (12), the man states, 'that worries me very much that you see I no longer fulfil my function as a husband, you know?' (14). When the interviewer responds with, 'I'm sure you satisfy her in lots of other ways though', the man then describes how he satisfies her by performing domestic duties: 'I, well she said, "somebody is coming, you must Hoover the hall", I've done that while she was out' (16). This response serves to underscore his feeling that he has lost his masculinity, as he positions himself as undertaking a more traditionally feminised domestic role as the only way he can now satisfy his wife.

Overall, then, the way this man constructs his identity – and as part of that, his masculinity – demonstrates the kinds of adverse impacts that erectile problems can have on men's perceptions of themselves as men and husbands. At the core of this man's discourse is the (broader) discursive equation of sexual prowess with masculinity, which can render erectile problems as more significant than being mere physiological defects, potentially leaving such men feeling, in the words of this interviewee, like they are not men anymore.

Conclusion

Our exploration of subordinated and marginalised masculinities in this chapter has shed light on some of the ways in which language and discourse shape and enforce, but also challenge, potentially harmful masculine norms. The linguistic subordination and marginalisation of certain groups, including groups of men associated with particular masculinities, serves to reinforce hegemonic masculinity by devaluing and othering such alternative forms of masculine expression. Importantly, as noted, despite such challenges, men from subordinated and marginalised groups can also use language creatively to resist and renegotiate their positions relative to hegemonic norms. However, this resistance often involves a complex negotiation with these norms, sometimes reinforcing them even in acts of resistance. Such frequent alignment with hegemonic norms by men from marginalised groups highlights a significant challenge in the struggle for gender equity. This alignment is likely to represent, for many, a pragmatic strategy by which such subordinated and marginalised men can navigate a world dominated by these norms. In this context, such strategic alignment could be viewed as a means for such men, and others, to reduce the stigma that accompanies such subordinated and marginalised masculine identities, or to otherwise gain social mobility

in contexts that are governed by hegemonic norms and in which hegemonic masculinity has significant currency.

These points notwithstanding, this alignment perpetuates a limited understanding of masculinity, restricting the space for diverse expressions of experiences and understandings of gender. In turn, this can hinder efforts to foster a more inclusive society that genuinely values different masculine identities equally. In this way, whatever might motivate such strategic alignment, this tendency could be said to represent something of a missed opportunity, namely, to challenge and dismantle such harmful norms, for example, by redefining what masculinity means or through defiantly expressing non-normative masculine identities. Of course, such redefinition and expression can and does occur, though our impression from the literature is that such moments are relatively rare, at least in comparison to the tendency for those in oppressed groups to try to align themselves with the very same harmful norms that have contributed to their subordinated or marginalised positions in the first place. In the following chapter, we turn to an arguably even darker perspective on masculinity to consider uses of language that are seen as toxic.

Notes

- 1 Recently, there has been disagreement over whether to use initial-letter capitals with the words *black* and *white* when referring to ethnicity or race. John Danielewski, writing for the Associated Press (2020), advocates capitalising only *Black* as ‘most Black people have strong historical and cultural commonalities’, while ‘White people generally do not share the same history and culture, or the experience of being discriminated against because of skin color’. However, Ann Thúy Nguyễn and Maya Pendleton, writing for the Centre for Study of Social Policy (2020), suggest capitalising both terms, quoting Robin DiAngelo (2018), who points out that White people just get to be people without having their race named. The Centre argues that capitalising White draws attention to how White as a race functions in political institutions and communities. However, Minna Salami, writing in *The Guardian* (2021), argues that capitalising the ‘b’ is a stylistic change that shows how conversations about race are circular and repetitive. She also notes how discussion has been hotly debated in the US but not the UK, as ‘is often the case, the American experience is simply cut and pasted’. We have taken the decision to capitalise both terms, while acknowledging the complexities around this debate and the impossibility of finding an approach which is deemed acceptable by all.
- 2 https://notaphase.org/trans-voice-academy/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCCQjwtsy1BhD7ARIsAHOi4xZlqfzC12pb6nBIXdPHDOW-aaWZp_AdK897eiqEqBwTc3iuZjc1XOQaAnM4EALw_wcB
- 3 This interview was taken from the website healthtalk.org.

6

TOXIC MASCULINITY

Introduction

In recent years, the term *toxic masculinity* has emerged as a label to describe particular behaviours and performances of masculinity that are perceived to cause harm, both to men themselves and to others around them. In this chapter, we explore the kinds of language use that surround toxic masculinity and which constitute performances of masculinity that have been interpreted as ‘toxic’. Typical examples of such performances can be found in videos posted online by the social media personality, businessman and professional kickboxer Andrew Tate. In one video, Tate says the following:

If you’re my friend, you just can’t be a pussy. ‘Well, I had a heart attack’, get the fuck up. Fuck’s wrong with you? Go to the hospital later. Have a drink, cigarette, cup of coffee, back in the game. Fucking having heart attacks near me, you little pussy. So none of my friends would even have those kinds of problems cos I don’t roll with fucking little bitches.¹

In Tate’s speech, there are aspects of language use that tend to be stereotypically associated with male speech patterns – which we have already encountered in Chapter 2 – such as use of swearing and non-standard language. These attributes alone do not make something an example of toxic masculinity, though. Instead, it is in Tate’s dismissive attitude towards a hypothetical man who has a heart attack. Tate exaggerates the lack of concern about pain that he expects his male friends to display. This is coupled with insulting language which notably uses derogatory terms that refer to women (*pussy*, *bitches*). Insulting a man with a female term implies that women are inferior

to men. So, by using these terms, the insults demean women as well as any men who do not conform to Tate's expectations.

We begin this chapter by considering the origin and evolution of the term toxic masculinity before exploring the discourses that surround it today. The rest of the chapter is devoted to considering the discourses through which toxic masculinity is performed and justified. This portion of the chapter is divided according to different kinds of 'harms' that can arise from toxically masculine performances, namely, misogyny, homophobia, right-wing extremism and domination of animals and the natural world.

The origin and evolution of *toxic masculinity*

According to Harrington (2021), the roots of toxic masculinity can be traced to the mythopoetic men's movement of the 1980s.² The term *toxic masculinity* was coined by Shepherd Bliss, who used it to characterise a specific form of militarised and authoritarian masculinity that was embodied by his father (2021). Over the two decades that followed, the term moved beyond men's movements and into self-help, academic and policy literature. A significant claim was that distant father-son relationships bred 'toxically' masculine men. Pittman's (1993) argument that men without adequate fathering chase unrealistic masculinity ideals reflects this sentiment, which received further validation from therapists such as Biddulph (1997), who emphasised the need for a strong father figure in a boy's life. These early writings framed toxic masculinity as a 'condition' that was curable through enhanced engagement with fatherhood. This perspective gained traction in policy discussions around the turn of the century, notably through Don Eberly's writing and advocacy, which linked lack of fatherly engagement to societal issues such as youth violence. This included citing lack of fatherly engagement as a factor in specific incidents of violence, such as the Columbine school shooting in the US (Eberly 1999).

The narrative of engaged fatherhood as a remedy for toxic masculinity can be viewed as aligning with 21st-century advocacy for the heteronormative family structure amid a context of neoliberal globalisation (Harrington 2021). In this context, toxic masculinity 'provided a discourse for diagnosing men's problems in the face of the gendered fall-out from deindustrialisation, during which well-paid jobs in "masculine" occupational sectors disappeared while feminised service sector occupations expanded' (Harrington 2021: 348). Around this time, prominent organisations and policy analyses recommended solutions such as shared parenting and increased maternal employment as ways of mitigating these perceived gender imbalances, implying that a male 'wildness' (Ferguson and Hogan 2004: 8) could be tamed by a stable (heteronormative) family environment (Randles 2013).

A criticism of the label ‘toxic masculinity’ at this time was that it was often used to target men from marginalised groups, portraying them as inherently aggressive and criminal. It was argued that such uses of ‘toxic masculinity’ ended up essentialising certain behaviours in disadvantaged groups, for example, Black men and economically disadvantaged men, rather than addressing broader socio-economic imbalances. For example, Kupers (2005: 715) defined toxic masculinity within the context of prison as ‘the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence’. Critics contended that the discourse around toxic masculinity at this time, while seemingly concerned with men’s welfare, served to subtly reinforce conservative and patriarchal values by advocating for traditional family roles as a means of social control. As Harrington (2021: 348) argues,

Used in the aforementioned ways, toxic masculinity provided a framework that essentialized marginalized men as aggressive and criminal, discursively packaged in a way that it was presented as concern for men’s well-being. The idea of toxic masculinity harmonized with conservative political agendas concerned with the social control of low-income, under-employed men, and with patriarchal family values. Reliance on toxic masculinity, thus, did not reject the gender hierarchy or a binary gender order as anti-feminists often assume. Instead, therapeutic discourses on toxic masculinity typically invoked notions of ‘natural’ male dispositions.

If we fast-forward 20 or so years, the term ‘toxic masculinity’ occupies an increasingly central role in contemporary debates concerning what it means to ‘be a man’. Figure 6.1 displays the number of hits for the term on Google Books Ngram Viewer, charting its frequency in English books between

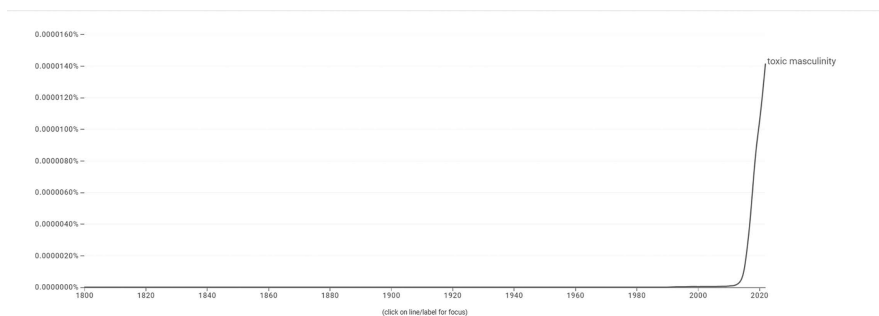


FIGURE 6.1 Google Books Ngram Viewer result for the term *toxic masculinity*.

Source: Google Books Ngram viewer. books.google.com/ngrams.

1800 and 2019. While the line does indeed begin to creep up around the mid-1990s, indicating a growing use, there is a pronounced and continuing spike in frequency occurring from around 2013 onwards.

The increase in the use of the term ‘toxic masculinity’ likely results from a corresponding increase in focus within public discourse generally on the meanings and roles of masculinity within contemporary society. The spike we see towards the end of this period could also be linked to a particular event which some have described as a new ‘feminist moment’ (Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer 2017: 885). This ‘moment’, as Harrington (2021: 346) describes,

intensif[ied] after 2014 . . . with Beyoncé’s MTV Video Music Awards performance in front of a giant, glowing sign reading, ‘FEMINIST.’ This performance prompted Jessica Valenti (2014) to write that today’s ‘zeitgeist is irrefutably feminist: its name literally in bright lights’.

Harrington (2021) highlights how the concept of toxic masculinity has been embraced by some feminists to critique expressions of homophobia, misogyny and violence perpetrated by men. The term gained media prominence around 2016, particularly in reporting around the conduct of US President Trump and more widely around the #MeToo movement (Loney-Howes et al. 2021). In such contexts, the term was used to call out the detrimental actions of affluent White men – therefore marking a shift from its previous uses which had focussed on disadvantaged groups. Yet the term has since been applied in feminist analyses of other events preceding this, such as the aforementioned Gamergate controversy, which began in 2014 and concerned widespread harassment campaigns against women working within the gaming industry. Feminist activism around this time, which has focussed on women’s empowerment, the internet and issues around intersectionality, is sometimes referred to as ‘fourth wave feminism’ (Cochrane 2013). The Gamergate attacks were justified by perpetrators as a defence of gaming culture against perceived outside influences. However, the nature of the harassment, which involved threats of violence, sexual assault and leaks of private information, highlighted the prevalence of sexism and misogyny within the industry, as well as wider gaming culture (Salter 2018).

Feminist academics have also found the notion of toxic masculinity to be a valuable tool for addressing the rise of masculinist ideologies and movements on the political right. This adoption ties into the broader critique of what has been termed *networked misogyny* – a pervasive form of online (and sometimes offline) aggression towards women. Through this lens, toxic masculinity encapsulates the aggressive behaviours and attitudes that contribute to such a hostile environment, as identified by Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer (2017).

In line with the more general growing use of the term, Harrington (2021) observes a significant rise in academic engagement with the concept of toxic masculinity, especially following its recent surge in public discourse. She observes how the expression is employed across various disciplines but often in vague and underdeveloped terms, for example, noting how more than half of the most cited works on this topic do not define the term explicitly. She also notes how the term is often used in a descriptive manner which lacks theoretical depth or any practical application, though it does often appear alongside other critical descriptors. When definitions of toxic masculinity *are* provided, these typically encompass themes of ‘violence, dominance, aggression, misogyny, and homophobia’ (2021: 349). McGlashan and Mercer (2023) contend that the recent increase in the use of *toxic masculinity* is at least partly to do with precisely the kind of definitional fuzziness described by Harrington, which they re-term more positively as its ‘elasticity’. Noting toxic masculinity’s ‘evocative metaphor of toxicity and its applicability and adaptability in a range of contexts’, McGlashan and Mercer describe how

[t]he very elasticity of the term means that it has been used to describe (and account for) examples of sexism, racism and homophobia that are associated with a disparate group ranging from politicians and industrialists to religious fundamentalists, alt-right extremists and incels.

(2023: 1)

The notion of toxic masculinity has also been criticised by some for failing to adequately situate harmful expressions of masculinity within the wider societies of which they are constitutive and by which they are constituted. De Boise (2019: 149), for example, argues that ‘unlike structural concepts like hegemonic masculinity, [toxic and traditional masculinity] instead pathologise a cluster of behaviours under a decontextualised, ahistorical label’, simultaneously ‘reducing systemic problems to decontextualised, interpersonal acts’. Another criticism of the concept of toxic masculinity, as it is used today, is that it is not sufficiently distinct from existing concepts in the critique of socialised male behaviour (e.g., Waling 2019), foremost among these being hegemonic masculinity (see Chapter 4).

While this critique is a valid one, the term ‘toxic masculinity’ might be useful in certain contexts. For instance, it could be particularly helpful when describing the costs and consequences of performance of hegemonic masculinity. Toxic masculinity, in this case, can be understood as an evaluative term, allowing us to emphasise the problematic nature of practices (including discourses) which perpetuate hegemonic masculinity and uphold the gender order. From this view, the notions of hegemonic masculinity and toxic masculinity might be considered as mutually complementary but not overlapping. Using these terms in tandem in this way might allow for the description and

critique of specific and localised (masculine) practices, but also of their broader social embeddings. While the term *hegemonic masculinity* can help us to describe specific social practices that are imbued with cultural capital – the repetition of which stabilises unequal power relations – the notion of *toxic masculinity* can also help to emphasise more explicitly the problematic nature of such fashioning of a hierarchy, according to which the entitlements of one eclipse the rights of others.

Discourses around toxic masculinity

We begin our exploration of the language associated with toxic masculinity by considering the discourses that surround it. McGlashan and Clarke (2023) carried out a study in which they used a corpus-assisted approach to discourse analysis in order to interrogate recurrent linguistic patterns in social media posts mentioning *toxic masculinity*. Since, as noted, there is no clear definition of the term, these authors contend that a usage-based exploration of words collocating within the terms *toxic* and *masculinity* can shed light on the meanings that people attach to toxic masculinity when discussing it online. They found that toxic masculinity was the subject of a complex network of understandings, which could be organised into themes of gender, elaboration and contestation.

Regarding the first theme, the discourse around toxic masculinity was heavily intertwined with gender, particularly through connections with feminism and the notion of patriarchy. Social media users were found to be often not only concerned with the impacts of toxic masculinity on men, but also criticised the term as an attack on men that was spearheaded by feminists, with some posts accusing feminists of using the term ‘toxic masculinity’ to maintain gender grievances and conflict. Likewise, other posts offered criticisms of the term as an unfair generalisation of all men. A similar discourse was identified by Jones et al. (2022), whose analysis of social media posts containing the hashtag #NotAllMen in the wake of the murder of Sarah Everard by a male police officer in the UK found that a considerable number of users sought to reject what was perceived to be the unfair generalisation of all men, defending ‘some’ or ‘most’ men as non-violent (Jones et al. 2022).

In terms of the theme of elaboration, McGlashan and Clarke (2023) found that many social media users sought to define and elaborate on what constitutes toxic masculinity. They did this by classifying and identifying toxic masculinity and, in this way, frequently differentiated it from masculinity ‘at-large’. Many of the posts emphasised that the term ‘toxic masculinity’ does not mean that masculinity is inherently toxic, arguing instead that it points to specific toxic behaviours or ideals related to masculinity. These kinds of posts often outlined specific behaviours and traits considered to be toxic, such as the suppression of emotion, ‘uber-machoness’, hyper-aggressiveness and the

expectation that men should be the sole breadwinners. Some posts provided real-world examples of toxic masculinity, which included suppressing emotions and promoting violence, misogyny and homophobia, while others highlighted its effects, connecting it to depression, suicide, stress, substance abuse and even higher death rates from illnesses like cancer.

Finally, posts characterising the theme of contention were those that involved some denial of the existence of toxic masculinity. Such posts often polarised toxic masculinity against other behaviours – notably, toxic femininity – and blamed specific groups (i.e., women, feminists and people on ‘the left’) for its perpetuation. Another way that users delegitimated the concept of toxic masculinity was by disentangling it from gender, specifically by presenting behaviours labelled as ‘toxic’ as not being specific to men. Other users acknowledged the existence of toxic masculinity but blamed women and feminists for the behaviours associated with it, or for creating a term that was seen as divisive.

McGlashan and Clarke’s (2023) analysis illustrates the contentious nature of toxic masculinity as a concept, in this case in online contexts. These authors argue that the divisive nature of the discourses that surround this concept online, especially those that assigned blame for men’s ills to women and feminists, points to a need for clearer definitions and understandings of toxic masculinity. They also argue that the surge in the use of the term fills a terminological gap, offering a contemporary way of labelling and discussing negative behaviours related to masculinity. In this way, the contestation surrounding toxic masculinity in online spaces can be likened to that which, as we have seen, characterises academic debates around this issue. McGlashan and Clarke (2023) suggest that greater definitional clarity, in both academic contexts and online spaces, could therefore support efforts to move conversations around toxic masculinity beyond conflict and towards more productive dialogue focussed on ways of dismantling harmful gender norms whilst promoting gender equality.

When Chad met Stacy

As we noted at the start of this chapter, the concept of toxic masculinity has been interrogated in relation to the expression of misogynistic attitudes, including through language use but also physical violence against women and girls. *Misogyny* can be defined as ‘the dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women’ (Duggan and Mason-Bish 2021: 19). Misogyny is expressed in various forms, ranging from overt discrimination and hostility through to more subtle forms of bias and exclusion. It can manifest in attitudes, behaviours and institutional practices that perpetuate women’s inferiority and objectification. Importantly, Manne (2017) reminds us, misogyny shouldn’t be viewed merely as an individual’s hatred or dislike of women;

rather, it should be understood as a societal mechanism that punishes women who challenge or fail to conform to patriarchal norms and expectations. For Manne (2017), misogyny is therefore about control and maintaining traditional gender roles, rather than just being about personal animosity. In this respect, misogyny both reflects and reinforces wider power imbalances between men and women.

As with other forms of discrimination, language plays a significant role in the expression of misogyny, including through the expression of attitudes, through particular linguistic behaviours and through the discursive creation and maintenance of misogynistic institutional practices (Mills 2008; Mullany and Trickett 2020). A considerable body of linguistic research has identified the kinds of language use that characterise expressions of misogyny (see Mills and Mullany 2011 and Cameron 2024 for a discussion). Much of this work has focussed in recent years on the so-called *manosphere*. The *manosphere* can be broadly understood to be an umbrella term that covers a number of interconnected misogynistic communities (see Ging 2019). The *manosphere* has emerged as an important conceptual site for research seeking to understand and critique discourses of toxic masculinity. As McGlashan and Mercer (2023: 4) put it, the *manosphere* is ‘a virtual space that might be understood as the theatre of toxic masculinity’. An example of a linguistic study looking at the *manosphere* is Fowler’s (2021) discourse analysis of prominent incel forums. Mentioned briefly in Chapter 1, incels are ‘typically heterosexual young men who wish to, but do not, have sexual and romantic relationships with women’ (Bogetić et al. 2023: 178). Fowler’s analysis unearthed a specialised lexicon used within incel forums, through which members articulated their self-perceptions and constructed a hierarchical social structure (which encapsulated both members of the forums and people within society more broadly). This hierarchical social structure included a spectrum of relational male identities bound by a complex stratification system.

At the top of this hierarchy are ‘Chads’ – a form of genericisation of the proper noun *Chad*, turned into a common noun label which is applied to men who are depicted in the forums as epitomising desirable masculinity. ‘Chads’ possess traits that incels believe grant them unfettered access to sexual relationships and, by extension, societal power. An incel might lament, reflecting envy and resentment, how the universe appears to cater to Chads. For example, one of the forum users in Fowler’s study is quoted as saying,

They don’t want to hear me complain about my problems. They want me to be quiet and work until I die. Chad, who was born and raised in a loving family gets everything I want and struggle for handed to him, as if this universe was created solely to please him. It’s all a joke, isn’t it? Except, there is no punchline or an unexpected, joyful twist. There is only Chad

and Stacy having a blast on stage while I sit in the audience. It can't keep going on like this.

Women are divided into various categories too, including Stacy – a promiscuous female counterpart to Chad, and Becky – an undesirable and 'average' woman who is often a feminist.

Positioned below Chads are 'Pickup Artists', or PUAs. This label is applied to men who are understood to employ particular techniques in order to attract women. While not innately privileged like Chads, PUAs are recognised for their efforts to navigate the social landscape to achieve sexual success. For example, one of the forum users in Fowler's study wrote,

There was a PUA artist . . . who most people would look at and say 'shit, what an ugly douchbag.' But he could engage women in a relaxed way, and it worked. . . . I was intrigued by what he was doing to get the female's attention.

However, Fowler also demonstrated how some of the incels expressed scepticism in their posts about how authentic and long-lasting the PUAs' successes were likely to be, in that way questioning the superficiality of their attested interactions with women.

Fowler (2021) describes how the categories of 'Redpillers' and 'Blackpillers' represent the ideological core of the incel community. 'Redpillers' (a term derived from the 1999 science fiction film *The Matrix*) are men who adopt the incel worldview and seek to expose feminism's 'true nature' as 'oppressive to men'. They also seek to help men reclaim their 'rightful place' in society (Dignam and Rohlinger 2019: online). 'Blackpillers', on the other hand, embrace a more nihilistic perspective, viewing men's situation as immutable and beyond redemption. For example, one of the forum users in Fowler's study wrote,

Normies call it an echo chamber, true to some degree but at least you don't get the absolute worst bullshit advice like 'keep trying', 'get a haircut', 'buy a nice outfit'. It takes someone to have the same experiences in life to truly understand your situation.

Within the forum, the transition from 'redpilled' to 'blackpilled' is presented as marking a deepening of despair and disenchantment with possibilities for societal change. Another forum user is quoted as saying,

I am blackpilled and incel. It's not a cope. Its literally saying fuck you to women and doing what I want. I know they don't want me. I lie down

and rot because that's all my body permits me to do. Not because I'm sad about Stacy. I don't care that Stacy doesn't want to fuck me anymore. I've seen Stacy's true nature and don't want anything to do with her anymore. Fuck all stacys and beckys. I'll go my own way. If my dick finds its way into one of them (only overseas because I can't get it in my own county [*sic*]) fine. But I'm no longer actively pursuing [sex] nor care. Sex drive zero.

Fowler's analysis sheds light on how incels navigate the spectrum of male identities that is constructed in this context. For example, one of the discussions Fowler analysed evolved from criticising PUAs' tactics as futile efforts to emulate Chads into a more resigned conversation among Blackpillers about the futility of any attempt to alter their social standing or challenge the societal norms they believe oppress them. The incels' hierarchical self-perceptions and broader ideological stances are argued to constitute manifestations of misogyny and toxic masculinity. In particular, the incels' discourse is steeped in a toxic narrative that glorifies dominance, entitlement to women's bodies and hostility towards those who do not conform to their rigid gender norms. This discourse is redolent of those identified in Krendel's (2020) analysis of the representations of the lemmas WOMAN, GIRL, MAN AND GUY in three manosphere sub-communities on *Reddit*. Importantly, such discourses not only reflect internalised toxic masculinity but also serve as mechanisms through which misogyny is perpetuated and normalised within these sorts of online contexts (see also: Krendel et al. 2022; Price 2023). The incels' fixation on sexual success as a determinant of worth and social power, meanwhile, demonstrates a quite profound entanglement of misogyny with toxic masculinity. Specifically, the incels' vilification of women, whom they blame for their celibacy, coupled with the idolisation of Chads, is argued to underscore a toxic view of masculinity that equates male value with sexual conquest and dominance, all the while fostering a culture of misogyny within the community (Fowler 2021).

A study exploring the discourse of one of the groups mentioned in Fowler's data, PUAs, was carried out by Wright (2020). This analysis examined the representation of women's resistance to sexual advances within an online PUA forum. Focussing on the community-specific term 'LMR' (i.e., 'Last Minute Resistance'), Wright's analysis showed how resistance to sex was represented in this context in ways that espoused certain ideologies regarding consent and gender. Wright described three recurring patterns in the forum interactions. The first was the representation of resistance to sexual advances as something to be overcome. For example, forum members discussed LMR as a hurdle to be defeated or bypassed, including by means of aggressive and coercive strategies, using phrases such as 'push through alot of LMR' [*sic*] and 'plow through and fuck the shit out of her'. Another representation was

of resistance as insincere. In this case, LMR was portrayed as being tokenistic or inauthentic, suggesting women's resistance to be a façade to avoid appearing promiscuous. This view was reinforced by the linguistic framing of resistance as part of a 'shit test' or an 'anti-slut defense' that the men had to find a way of overcoming. The third representation identified by Wright was of resistance as remarkable. When forum members encountered persistent resistance that they couldn't overcome, this was often described in terms of surprise or confusion, suggesting an expectation that resistance should ultimately be surmountable, and that persistent resistance is anomalous. In such cases, persistent resistance was attributed to flaws in the women themselves or their circumstances, rather than having anything to do with the men contributing the forum posts.

Wright's analysis demonstrates how the portrayal of LMR reinforces harmful stereotypes about gender and sexuality, contributing to a culture that devalues women's autonomy while at the same time legitimating coercive behaviour. The discourse around LMR trivialises women's resistance, perpetuates a dangerous misunderstanding of consent and normalises sexual aggression. Several notable campaigns have sought to challenge such discourses and the attitudes towards women and sexual consent that they espouse. One such campaign is *No Means No*.³ This is a prominent sexual assault prevention initiative that aims to highlight the importance of consent in sexual encounters. The phrase 'no means no' asserts that if a person says no to a sexual advance, that refusal should be respected immediately, without exception. This campaign, and others like it, have emerged as part of broader efforts to eradicate sexual violence by promoting clear and effective communication and understanding of consent.

While a considerable body of work has focussed on the manosphere as a key site in contemporary articulations of toxic masculinity, such language use is not found only online. For example, Mullany and Trickett (2020) present an analysis of linguistic accounts of street-level misogyny. But as well as manifesting in everyday (linguistic) practices, misogyny can, as noted, also be imbued in more institutionalised forms of language use. In the next section, we consider a notorious example of misogynistic discourse in a televised news interview.

Who'd wanna shag that?

During a live broadcast of GB News on 26 September 2023, actor-turned-politician Laurence Fox made disparaging comments about the appearance and desirability of political journalist Ava Evans. At the time, Evans had recently suggested that government proposals to create a Minister for Men might exacerbate a 'culture war' in the UK, rather than address issues underlying the mental health difficulties faced by everyone (including men). Fox,

reacting the next day on GB News, responded to Evans's comments (see the following box) but, in doing so, shifted focus away from the comments on mental health, and towards a personal attack.

We're past the watershed so I can say this: show me a single self-respecting man that would like to climb into bed with that woman, ever, who wasn't an incel? Who wasn't a cucked little Incel? That little woman has been fed, spoon-fed oppression day after day after day after day, starting with the lie of the gender wage gap, and she's sat there and I'm going, if I met you in a bar and that was like sentence three, chances of me just walking away are just huge. We need powerful, strong amazing women who make great points for themselves. We don't need these, sort of, feminist 4.0. They're pathetic and embarrassing. Who'd wanna shag that?

In rhetorical analysis, this kind of response is seen as a fallacious argumentative strategy described as *ad hominem*, and it involves directing an argument against a person as opposed to the position they are maintaining. Fox's remarks generated significant backlash, being widely criticised as misogynistic (among other things). If we consider some of Fox's lexical choices, we find examples of the kinds of representations of women that have been identified as hallmarks of the expression of misogyny. In asking 'Who'd wanna shag that?', Fox objectifies Evans – she is referred to with a dehumanising non-gendered determiner *that* as opposed to the pronoun *her*. The rhetorical question symbolically reduces Evans to a sexualised body and, in that process, she is evaluated in terms of her attractiveness and sexual worth, to heterosexual men specifically.

Fox also opens his monologue by asking, 'Show me a single self-respecting man that would like to climb into bed with that woman, ever, who wasn't an Incel? Who wasn't a cucked little incel?'. The word *cucked* is a modern-day verb variant of the historical noun form *cuckold*, which referred to a man whose female partner (usually wife) was sexually unfaithful (Kimmel 1986). In its contemporary use, the word has evolved into a modern slang term used disparagingly to describe someone, typically a man, who is perceived as weak or overly submissive. This contemporary usage, popular in certain online and right-wing political subcultures, tends to be used to criticise individuals (typically men) for perceived subservience to political correctness or opposing interests, in this way accusing them of being complicit in a broader assault on masculinity and as betraying their own principles and, indeed, their own maleness (Ogilvie 2023). In asking this question, then, Fox also invokes the notion that masculinities sit within a hierarchy, where 'cucked little incels'

are positioned beneath men (presumably, men like Laurence Fox himself) as they are desperate for a mate and so have undiscerning sexual preferences. Although Fox ostensibly took objection to Evans's arguments, there is also a notable lack of focus on what Evans actually said. Instead, Evans is passivised in terms of her actions; rather than being presented as an actor who does or says things, she is instead presented as the recipient of others' actions, including being 'spoon fed' oppression. The 'oppression' that Fox describes includes arguments in favour of equal gender pay, which are discredited as a 'lie'. This comment keys into a broader, negative stance towards feminism, which Fox later reinforces by evaluating fourth wave feminism ('feminism 4.0') as 'pathetic' and 'embarrassing'. The feminist position attributed to Evans by Fox is also further discredited through the infantilisation of Evans, when she is described as 'that little woman', which represents another common form of misogynistic expression (Sidani 2023).

Fox's comments were, as noted, widely criticised as being misogynistic. In the aftermath of the event, both Fox and the show's host, Dan Wootton, were suspended from the channel. GB News also issued an apology, stating that Fox's comments were unacceptable and did not reflect the channel's values. Despite initially defending his comments as 'free speech', Fox eventually conceded that his language was inappropriate and demeaning. The effect of language use such as this is not just the expression of sexist stances but also the silencing and exclusion of women from public discourse. Sadly, such cases are not particularly exceptional but represent wider patterns of language use that can be associated with toxic masculinity in the sense that they serve to maintain traditional (gendered) power dynamics by excluding women's voices from public spaces (Galpin and Vernon 2023).

Chanting from the sidelines

At this point, we turn our focus to another form of discrimination which has been associated with toxic masculinity – homophobia. The expression of homophobia, within the framework of toxic masculinity, can be understood as the enforcement of rigid, heteronormative gender roles culturally associated with 'masculine' behaviour. Toxic masculinity prescribes strict adherence to these roles, which often leads to the subordination, marginalisation or even demonisation of those who do not conform. This stems from a perceived threat that other gender identities and sexualities pose to traditional masculine dominance, where the derogation of behaviours viewed as 'feminine' or non-heterosexual functions as a method to reinforce (heterosexual) male power structures (Kimmel 1994). Thus, homophobia serves not only as a mechanism of social control by suppressing or socially sanctioning deviations from established gender norms, but it also functions as a strategy for maintaining heterosexual male dominance.

While homophobic language use has been examined widely (e.g., Baker 2005), it has not been so well studied through the (explicit) lens of toxic masculinity. A couple of notable exceptions come from studies of homophobic language use in the context of sport, and particularly football (or soccer). These studies are based on survey and interview data rather than first-hand instances of homophobic language use. Nevertheless, this work has revealed a prevalence of such language in this context. For example, Cleland et al. (2023) analysed the intersection between ‘homosexually themed language’ and broader societal attitudes within UK football fandom through the lens of toxic masculinity. Based on an online survey of 2,663 football fans conducted in 2020, Cleland and colleagues reported that although 95% of respondents expressed support for gay players, 41% reported hearing language they perceived to be homophobic at matches. This was juxtaposed against 37% of the respondents, who perceived similar language as benign banter, reflecting a cultural dissonance within the community. Cleland et al. (2023) argued that this dissonance highlights a cultural lag, whereby progressive attitudes coexist with regressive behaviours that are rooted in traditional notions of masculinity which equate toughness and heterosexuality with authentic fan identity.

In an interview study, Kuczyński (2023) examined the role of homophobia in the identity and political engagements of Polish football fan groups, situating these within broader far-right and nationalist ideologies. Analysing qualitative interviews, Kuczyński employed anthropological concepts such as ‘rites of passage’ and ‘liminality’ in order to understand the fans’ transformations into political actors. Homophobia emerged as not just a sideline issue but one that was central to the fan groups’ construction of their collective identity and actions. In this way, the expression of homophobic sentiment served as a potent symbol of masculinity, as well as a means for excluding LGBTQ+ groups. The fans also expressed their disdain for homosexuality by linking it to national and cultural decay, suggesting embracing traditional masculine roles and rejecting LGBTQ+ individuals to be intrinsic to national identity. During national events such as Polish Independence Day marches, such expressions of homophobia become intertwined with overtly nationalistic displays, positioning anti-LGBTQ+ stances as patriotic. Kuczyński’s analysis also highlights how the fans aligned themselves with political entities that propagate similar discriminatory stances, thereby normalising their prejudices. Specifically, the fan groups attested to not only supporting but actively campaigning for political measures to undermine LGBTQ+ rights, expressing the view that such policies are essential for preserving the nation’s moral and cultural fabric. In the interviews, the fans also articulated clear opposition to same-sex marriages and adoptions – opposition that they justified as protecting traditional family structures and values, which they claimed are under threat from liberal policies promoting LGBTQ+ rights.

News reporting around homophobic football chanting reveals a common thread of male players being equated to male sex workers. A recurring example of this in the UK is the chant ‘rent boy’, which is the British slang term for a young male sex worker. The use of the term in football matches is intended to demean opposition players by implying their involvement in prostitution, which is then used to question their sexuality (and by dint of the compulsory heterosexuality of hegemonic masculinity, their masculinity as well). It is telling that such labels are employed, as they are implied to be the ‘worst’ thing that a man can be. Their incorporation into football chants can be traced back several decades, reflecting a period when homophobic speech was more tolerated in public, both within and beyond sports settings (Cleland 2018). However, the chant is still in use today, with instances making news headlines as recently as 2023 (Leeks 2023).

Another high-profile example is the ‘puto’ chant, commonly heard at football matches in Latin America, and especially among Mexican fans. *Puto* is a Spanish term that broadly translates to ‘male sex worker’ and which has evolved in colloquial use to take on various derogatory meanings, often insinuating cowardice or homosexuality. Like the ‘rent boy’ chant heard in the UK, the ‘puto’ chant is targeted by fans towards opposition players, with the intention of ridiculing them by questioning their sexuality and, by extension, their masculinity. The chant is reported as being widely used throughout Latin America, and in 2024 its use by Mexican fans caused an international fixture between Mexico and the US to be stopped twice (Church 2024).

Chants such as ‘rent boy’ and ‘puto’ inherently promote homophobic attitudes, inasmuch as they insinuate that sex work – or, by erroneous equivalence, homosexuality – is shameful. As Magrath and Anderson (2016) point out, this perpetuates stigma not only against homosexuality but also against those perceived as not conforming to traditional gender and sexuality norms. In the context of a men’s football match, which can be viewed as a hyper-masculinised space, homophobic chants constitute a form of toxic masculinity, in that the use of such chants seeks to exclude those who do not fit into specific masculine ideals. Homophobic football chants are also likely to create a sense of unity among chanting fans by targeting and excluding those perceived as outsiders, thus reinforcing in-group and out-group dynamics (Magrath and Anderson 2016). Cashmore and Cleland (2014) point out that homophobic chants, such as ‘rent boy’ and ‘puto’, contribute to an exclusionary and hostile sports environment, particularly for LGBTQ+ fans and players, at the same time sustaining a culture where discrimination and verbal abuse based on sexuality are viewed as acceptable aspects of fan behaviour.

The presence of homophobic chanting at football matches to this day underscores the persistence of toxic masculinity within the culture of the sport. Whether intended as hostile or just as ‘banter’, homophobic language

continues to reinforce exclusionary and harmful norms in this context. As such, although there is significant support for inclusivity in football (see, for example, Cleland et al. 2023), persistent homophobic chanting perpetuates an environment that can feel hostile to the LGBTQ+ community. Ongoing educational and cultural intervention is needed, then, to align fan behaviour with football's professed attitudes of support and inclusivity.

Playing the Trump card

At this point, we turn our attention to the connection between toxic masculinity and right-wing extremism. Right-wing extremism is a complex ideology characterised by an interplay between nationalism, nativism, authoritarianism and a pronounced scepticism towards democracy. It can manifest in the expression of hostile attitudes towards values such as equality and diversity. This form of extremism advocates for an exclusionary state that is 'purified' of non-native elements and is in that way rooted in xenophobic, nationalistic and ethno-centric nativism (Mudde 2007). Right-wing extremism also justifies the use of violence as a tool to maintain or restore perceived national or racial purity (Koehler 2016). In this way, it is an ideology marked by racist, anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant sentiments, and can entail the promotion of the exclusion and suppression of groups considered inferior or dangerous to the interests of imagined national and ethnicity groups (Perry 2001). Links have been drawn between the values and ideologies underpinning right-wing extremism and those that characterise toxic masculinity (Pearson 2019). Studies of discourses at the interface of right-wing extremism and toxic masculinity have highlighted the centrality of shared values such as authoritarianism and dominance. Indeed, Kimmel (2013) argues that such traits define both extremist and toxically masculine ideologies, where leadership, for example, is often characterised by an aggressive and uncompromising style. The authoritarian instinct of right-wing extremists has been observed to lead to the glorification of the kind of 'strongman' leadership styles that are embodied by populist politicians across the globe. As McGlashan and Mercer (2023: 1) point out, '[w]orld politics has produced figures ranging from Donald Trump to Jair Bolsonaro and Viktor Orban who have been held up as notorious embodiments of toxic masculinity in action, linking the phenomenon to the rise of nationalism and reactionary populism'.

In expressing their masculine identities, populist politicians can employ certain forms of 'impolite' language (Culpeper 2011), which intersect with expressions of gender identity (Chałupnik et al. 2017). For example, during his initial run for the US presidency, an audio recording emerged capturing Donald Trump referring to women's bodies in objectifying terms and seemingly describing abusing his celebrity status in order to grope and make sexual contact with women (which is recounted in explicit and aggressive

language). For example, Trump discloses ‘moving on’ women and ‘tr[ying] to fuck’ them, and describes how ‘When you’re a star they let you do it. You can do anything. . . . Grab them by the pussy. You can do anything’ (for the full transcript, see: Revesz 2016). When questioned on the recording, Trump (and many of his supporters) attempted to excuse the language used as ‘banter’ and ‘locker-room talk’. The recording attracted widespread criticism, and although Trump received 2.86 million fewer votes than his opponent Hillary Clinton, due to the peculiarities of the US electoral system he still won the election. In fact, it is possible that such language use, by being framed in this way by Trump and his supporters, contributed to his appeal as an ‘everyman’, in which case this episode might have even helped to firm up his support with some sections of the electorate.

As well as addressing the toxically masculine nature of Donald Trump’s language use, a considerable amount has also been written about his paralinguistic communication, with particular focus on his handshakes. Trump’s handshakes are often forceful, prolonged and sometimes convert into an embrace which Trump himself initiates. Such physical gestures have been interpreted as being symbolic of particular relationships of power and control, used by Trump with female and male political leaders alike as a means to assert his dominance. Freedland (2017: online) characterises such handshakes as an ‘attempt to demonstrate ownership’ and recounts an occasion on which FBI Director James Comey hid away in the curtains as a way of avoiding being ‘subject to such a display’. Freedland (2017) describes how French President Emmanuel Macron seemed to take a different approach, as Macron openly admitted that his intense handshake with Trump, in which both men seemed to compete in strength until Trump relented, was deliberate and meaningful.

Such actions mark a significant departure from previous political norms where the focus was merely on whether or not a handshake would occur. In response to Trump’s style, world leaders such as the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau have adapted, pre-emptively managing Trump’s handshake to prevent his use of dominant gestures. Freedland (2017) argues that these practices are reflective of a new era in which handshakes have become a subtle battleground for the performance of influence and power among political leaders, indicating a shift whereby this gesture has developed from being one of mere courtesy to a form of (masculine) posturing.

While we might expect lewd language use and dominant – even aggressive – gestures to be a vote-loser, it is also the case, as we alluded earlier, that precisely these kinds of gender performances can be appealing to large sections of the electorate. As Wodak et al. (2021: 387) point out regarding Trump and former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi,

[Their] success lies in being able to convey to certain parts of the Italian and U.S. electorate that they are ‘authentic’, ‘real, honest and genuine’

(Cameron 2020: 161). They are both admired and respected as mavericks, successful business men and alpha-males. Indeed, many voters admire and identify with such personas and do not seem to mind the continuous transgression of taboos and conventions.

Cameron's (2020) analysis of the language of Trump's sexist 'banter' demonstrates how, rather than being unconventional, such language use is, in fact, reflective of the way in which Trump treats and talks about women in a more general sense. Examining this kind of 'banter', which in this context occurred among men discussing sex, Cameron argues that such (linguistic) activities can be viewed as a form of ritualised social practice which sustains and reinforces a 'fratriarchal' (i.e., fraternal + patriarchal) structure of male dominance. Cameron (2020) writes,

Though in many respects it would be fair to describe Donald Trump as an unconventional president, in one respect he has been anything but unconventional: His administration epitomises the values and practices of traditional fraternal patriarchy. In Trump's White House, as in the locker-room, women continue to be excluded from conversations in which men discuss their bodies and make decisions about their lives.

Cameron (2020: 166)

Cameron concluded, on the basis of her analysis of the recordings of Trump's 'banter', that such gender expressions contribute to the perception of Trump's communication style and public persona, particularly regarding his social class and masculinity, as he uses vulgarity and 'lewdness' as linguistic tools to appeal to less privileged Americans, particularly disaffected White, working-class men, by portraying himself as a 'man of the people'.

This interpretation has been supported by empirical research exploring the language that populist politicians' supporters use to evaluate them. Dignam et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative analysis of the ways in which Donald Trump's supporters constructed a 'gendered self' for the politician in interviews. These supporters valorised Trump's 'masculine self', as they emphasised his 'capacity to exert control over or resist being controlled by others' (Dignam et al. 2021: 367; see also: Johnson 2005). The supporters also praised Trump for resisting the constraints of 'political correctness', which they believed allowed him to address taboo subjects and convey an image of strength and authenticity. One of the respondents is quoted as saying,

I think he doesn't hold anything back . . . he says it how it is, and if that offends people . . . he seems to be okay with saying that, even if people have a problem with it. His personality does seem abrasive and not always

the best way to go about things . . . but I felt like he was saying a lot of stuff upfront that needed to be said that nobody would say.

In this way, Trump's masculinity was seen as rejecting conventional political discourse, aligning instead with cultural codes of masculinity that emphasise control and resistance to control, while rejecting 'political correctness'.

Trump was also valorised as a successful businessman, with his professional achievements being offered as evidence of his capability and independence. For example, one respondent described Trump as 'a businessman who has obtained over a billion dollars'. He continued, 'You don't get rich by magic, luck, or inheriting your father's worth. He got there by building a company over the past 40 years and I believe that he can do that with this country'. Such constructions were linked by Dignam et al. (2021) to a masculine archetype that values autonomy, assertiveness and economic success.

Finally, the supporters also praised Trump's combative and confrontational style and discursively equated this to toughness and resilience. This combative quality could be invoked in evaluations of Trump's rhetorical style; 'when people attacked him, he either gave the same back to them or doubled down to show that he wasn't there to be pushed around and he had a goal to accomplish'. This combative style was also connected to the prospect of America having an increased capacity to enter into combat with other nations, having a military that is 'stronger and has not been emasculated', with this in turn being valorised as leading to Trump being a leader to be feared and facilitating a 'new nationalism' built on American exceptionalism:

I think if Trump wins I think we're going to have a return to patriotism on the national stage, a return to championing American exceptionalism. We're gonna have a military that is stronger and that has not been emasculated. I see us having a leader that other countries will respect and that our enemies will fear. I think it would be Reagan-esque, it would be sort of a new nationalism, and it would be like America returning to prominence.

Dignam et al. (2021) point out how associating Trump with Reagan – another tough-talking, pro-business masculine icon who had previously been an actor in war and western movies – marked another way in which Trump's supporters valorised his masculinity. Indeed, Trump evoked 'Reagan-esque' rhetoric about US dominance in describing perceived threats such as those posed by North Korea and China. In this instance, Trump's supporters constructed his robust leadership style as a means through which the US could assert power globally, enhancing the country's international standing through fear.

Dignam et al.'s (2021) analysis demonstrates how Trump's supporters played an important role in shaping his (masculine) identity by associating

him with culturally esteemed masculine traits such as control and resistance, which they believed underscored his presidential capabilities. Although the interviews did not explicitly focus on Trump's masculinity, the underlying appreciation reflected a broader discourse that equated these traits with manhood. Such constructions align with the previous observation that Trump's appeal is in no small part rooted in his perceived manliness (e.g., Pascoe 2017). This valorisation of Trump's masculinity – and by extension, the broader cultural notions of 'manhood' that he is viewed as embodying – not only justifies the perpetuation of male-dominated power structures, often at the expense of (possibly more qualified) female candidates, but also helps supporters to overlook unethical behaviours and systemic inequalities based on race, gender, social class, sexuality, nationality, ability and so on.

War never changes

The discourse of the interviewees in Dignam and colleagues' study taps into other shared features of toxic masculinity and right-wing extremism. This includes an orientation towards nativism and exclusion, and the preservation of a 'pure' national or ethnic identity. This perspective, in turn, promotes a protective aggression, with men being positioned as the 'defenders' of their group and being assigned responsibility for combatting perceived external threats (Nagel 1998). In this context, violence can be, as we have seen, normalised and even glorified as a means to assert and maintain power. Indeed, violence is often rationalised by right-wing actors as necessary to protect the nation or uphold a 'natural' order, mirroring toxic masculinity's endorsement of violence as an expression of strength and legitimate response to challenges (as seen in Dignam et al.'s study; see also: Blee and Creasap 2010). For these reasons, the notion of toxic masculinity has been invoked in explanations of violence perpetrated by men, including domestic and sexual violence (McGlashan and Mercer 2023) but also more extreme cases such as mass shootings (Silva et al. 2021) and war. Indeed, as McGlashan and Mercer (2023: 1) contend, 'it's easy to argue that the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in Ukraine can be attributed as a direct consequence of the exercise of gendered power and brittle, toxic egotism of Putin'. In the case study that follows, we consider how toxically masculine discourses can be drawn upon in the promotion of war, focussing here on a Russian military recruitment advert.

You're a real man. Be one.

In February 2022, the Russian army invaded Ukraine. The invasion represented the latest stage in long-standing tensions in the region relating to

Ukraine's increasing ties with Western countries and its aspirations to join NATO, which Russia opposes. The invasion, which is ongoing as we write this book, has been widely condemned internationally, leading to severe economic sanctions against Russia and significant military and humanitarian support for Ukraine from Western nations. In April 2022, as part of a recruitment campaign, the Russian Ministry of Defence issued an advert, online and on television, which sought to boost military enlistment by appealing to traditional masculine ideals.⁴

The advertisement unfolds through scenes depicting men in everyday civilian jobs: a supermarket security guard, a fitness trainer and a taxi driver. Each man is questioned about his career choices, suggesting dissatisfaction with the men's civilian roles, with the following questions displayed on-screen:

РАЗВЕ ТАКИМ ЗАЩ ЗАЩИТНИКОМ ТЫ МЕЧТАЛ СТАТЬ?
 РАЗВЕ ВЗТОМ ТВОЯ СИЛА?
 РАЗВЕ ТАКОЙ ПУТЬ ТЫ ХОТЕЛ ВЫБРАТЬ?

Is this the kind of defender you wanted to be?
 Is this all there is to your strength?
 Is this really the road you wanted to take?

As the dramatic music intensifies, the men are depicted as envisioning themselves as soldiers in uniform, complete with the Z symbol (which represents Russian military involvement in Ukraine). At this point, the scenes transition to these men, now in military attire, marching through a misty battlefield. The advert then concludes with the following call to action:

ТЫ ЖЕ МУЖИК. БУДЬ ИМ.
 СЛУЖИ ПО КОНТРАКТУ!
 ЕЖЕМЕСЯЧНЫЕ ВЫПЛАТЫ
 ОТ 204 000 Р

You are a real man. Be one.
 Serve under contract!
 Monthly payments from 204,000 Rubles.

This imploration is presented on-screen alongside the enticing offer of a significant monthly salary and the promise of upward social mobility, suggesting that enlisting is not only a path to proving one's masculinity but also to financial improvement.

The advert clearly invokes notions of masculinity in its appeal to Russian men. The use of the second-person pronouns *ТЫ* (*you*) and *ТВОЯ* (*your*) throughout the advert addresses audience members directly with questions and the imploration to ‘be a real man’. In this way, viewers are invited to view themselves as the kinds of men depicted in the advert – the security guard, the fitness trainer and the taxi driver – and are encouraged to view their ordinary jobs and roles as civilians as dissatisfying. The questions key into prominent aspects of hegemonic masculinity – in particular, the idea that men should be defenders, strong and autonomous/self-determining (i.e., taking your own ‘road’). The advert can be considered to espouse a particularly toxic form of masculinity, when we consider that its premise is to engender, in its audience, a dissatisfaction in their own lives and life choices. Then the imploration to be a ‘real man’, which taps into a discourse of ‘authentic masculinity’ (Messer-schmidt 2000), in being presented as a solution to the dissatisfaction presents a regular life as one that is incompatible with being a ‘real man’. By equating military service with ‘real’ manhood in this way, the advert reinforces a hierarchy that values physical strength and bravery over other virtues, potentially encouraging a dismissive attitude towards peace and diplomacy and promoting an acceptance of violence as a means of conflict resolution. Ultimately, then, the advert uses a fear of emasculation to compel men to enlist and then inflict violence (and potentially, murder) on others while also risking their own lives (Eichler 2012). At the time of writing, around 70,000 Russian soldiers are reported to have died fighting in Ukraine, although actual numbers are believed to be much higher (BBC 2024a).

Meat heads

Up to this point in the chapter, we have focussed on the harms that toxic masculinity can cause to people of all sex identities, including men themselves. We now broaden our focus further and consider the harms that toxic masculinity can cause to the natural world and, with that, to *all* life on earth. Gender, as Lockwood (2023: online) argues, ‘is the largest determinant – beyond race, class, geography, or any other attribute – in how much humans harm animals’. Carol J. Adams’s seminal book *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990) examines the interconnected oppressions of sexism and speciesism. Adams asserts that patriarchal values are upheld by both the objectification of women and the consumption of animals. Adams exemplifies this by drawing on various examples, including advertisements that depict women and meat in similar ways. She illustrates how both women and animals are commodified and devalued, often being framed as existing only to be dominated and consumed by men.

Gender, then, can significantly influence human–animal interactions, with masculinity closely linked to meat consumption, thereby posing a major challenge for animal rights efforts (and by extension, for efforts to preserve the natural world). Indeed, as Luke (2007) demonstrates, men are the primary

beneficiaries of industries such as mining, oil extraction and logging, all of which can lead to significant environmental harm, including deforestation, water pollution, soil erosion and habitat loss for wildlife (see also: Voyles 2021). It is also men who are predominantly engaged in activities that directly threaten animal life, such as hunting, fishing and rodeos (Voyles 2021). The predominance of men in these roles extends, notably, to the meat industry (Fitzgerald and Taylor 2014). Men eat around 57% more meat than women globally (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture 2015). Men also predominately take on the most violent roles in slaughterhouses, with Eisnitz (1997) attesting how the so-called ‘kill floors’ of slaughterhouses are filled almost entirely with male workers. According to Luke (2007), this gender-based disparity arises because men (and especially ‘masculine’ men) continue to be the primary – and in some cases, only – beneficiaries of animal exploitation. Practices such as hunting, fishing and consuming meat can afford to men a social identity that is symbolic of hyper-masculine traits, namely, having power, domination and control over others. As Lockwood (2023) points out, such traits have come to be recognisable as ‘masculine’, not because they actually define who or what men actually are but, rather, because they have been marketed in this way, and through receiving such messages men have become socialised into these roles.

Messages that link animal consumption to masculinity, crafted by advertisers and others, are mediated primarily through discourse. Discourse-based research in this area has focussed in particular on the discourses through which meat products are marketed to male consumers. Eating is, as Lupton (1996) observes, a decidedly gendered social practice. Adams (2020), focussing on meat consumption in particular, argues that this can be understood as a form of ‘hegemonic control’ and ‘primitivism’ (2020: 39), while for Klainberger (2020), meat consumption is a performative act through which men can reinforce and perform ‘real’ masculinity (2020: 133). Meat consumption emerged as a prominent theme in Islentyeva and Zimmerman’s (2023) analysis of the discursive representation of masculinity in contemporary food and beverage print advertisements. A recurring feature of the fast-food advertisements they analysed was the representation of meat consumption as a ‘manly activity’. For example, one of the posters they analysed, from Burger King, contained the tagline ‘Are you man enough?’, which was positioned beside the image of a burger containing four meat steaks. Another poster, produced by McDonald’s, described its Irish beef burgers as ‘Serious man food’. Islentyeva and Zimmerman (2023: 275) also note how both female models and (living) animals ‘are either absent from the advertisements or are objectified’, which they argue ‘implies male visibility and dominance, and female subordination’. To explore what this looks like, we can take a closer look at one of the adverts in Islentyeva and Zimmerman’s (2023) data (see Figure 6.2, which reproduces the advert as a line drawing).

The advert, which was released in Singapore in 2009, attracted widespread criticism, with online campaigns calling for its removal, using the hashtags



FIGURE 6.2 Burger King advert from 2009.

#FaceRape and #BoycottBK, while the model used in the advert said that Burger King had not asked for her consent to use the image of her face. This advert demonstrates a couple of the recurring features of the adverts described by Islentyeva and Zimmerman (2023). For example, there is a discursive equivalence between the meat product and masculinity, as this burger is offered as a symbolic phallus. Its name – the ‘Super Seven Incher’ – foregrounds the length of the burger which is, perhaps not coincidentally, approximately the same length as what men perceive to be the average length of an erect penis (King et al. 2019). The advert also objectifies and dehumanises women; the woman shown is depicted as a disembodied face (we do not see any other part of her body, nor even her entire head). Rather than being shown from a frontal angle, from which we could visually engage with this woman and establish eye contact with her, she is instead shown in profile, in what Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 119) describe as an ‘offer’ image. This is a relatively objectifying angle from which to visually depict social actors, as rather than engage with them as individuals, they are instead ‘offered for our contemplation, like specimens in a display case’ (1996: 119). Moreover, this woman resembles a sex doll. This is a culmination of various features of her appearance: her pale skin, smoky eye make-up, short blonde hair, red

lipstick and wide-open mouth and eyes (which look emotionless and straight ahead, rather than focussing on the object in front of her). Thus, this woman is offered as a relatively passive object for sexual gratification – a view that is further re-enforced by the fact that she does not actually hold the burger (i.e., the symbolic phallus). Instead, it is implied that what we are witnessing is not the consumption of a burger but, rather, something more like the performance of oral sex. This interpretation is anchored in various lexical choices in the advert, too. For instance, in the phrase ‘It’ll blow your mind away’, the word ‘blow’, which is a euphemism for oral sex performed on a penis, is printed in enlarged font, while the text at the bottom of the poster encourages viewers to ‘Fill your desire for something long [and] juicy’ and ‘Yearn for more’, and describes the sauce on the burger as ‘Thick and hearty’. Looking closely at this one text, then, we can see how such advertising can draw on discourses that equate meat to masculinity by construing meat products as the most potent symbol of masculinity – the phallus – while casting women, in objective and passivising terms, as being there for men’s sexual gratification.

Dude food

In 2016, along with words such as ‘Brexit’ and ‘Trumpism’, the term ‘dude food’ was shortlisted in Collins’s *Word of the Year* competition. Eventually, the term lost to ‘Brexit’ in this competition, but it did enter dictionaries, with the definition offered by Collins English Dictionary given in the following excerpt.

dude food

In British English

NOUN

informal

Food such as hot dogs, burgers, etc, considered particularly appealing to men

A couple of interesting things are happening with this concept and its definition. First, it implies that there is such a thing as sex-based food preferences (i.e., that there can be certain kinds of foods that are, in this case, ‘particularly appealing to men’). Secondly, the use of ‘such as’ preceding ‘hot dogs’ and ‘burgers’ suggests that these foods are examples of a particular category of food. Meanwhile, the ‘etc’ that follows suggests there are other types of foods within this category that readers will perhaps intuitively be aware of. Of course, what hot dogs and burgers have in common is that they are both meat-based products. So, we could take this to mean that dude food

is, essentially, meat. Such a view would be consistent with what we have seen about meat and masculinity already in this section. However, the dictionary does not quite state this, and so it's likely that dude food possesses other qualities, and these could reveal even more about the gendered associations that are attached to such food.

To investigate this further, we searched for uses of the term *dude food* in the News on the Web (NOW) corpus. At the time of writing, this corpus contains 18.9 billion words of data from web-based English-language newspapers and magazines, published from 2010 to the present. *Dude food* occurs 78 times in this corpus. Looking at how the term is used across the English-language publications in this corpus, which include texts from the UK, the US, Australia, Ireland, Canada and Singapore, among other countries, we can see how the concept of dude food is elaborated on when it is mentioned.

Uses of *dude food* on NOW indicate that, perhaps unsurprisingly, it does indeed seem to involve meat. This includes hot dogs and burgers but also 'beef', 'ribs', 'chicken wings', 'hot wings' and 'kangaroo tail'. Importantly, dude food often entails eating not just meat but amounts of meat that are marked by their vast size, with the label being applied, for example, to 'piles of smoked meat', 'big cuts of meat' and 'smoked meat feasts'.

As well as involving (lots of) meat, dude food is also defined in terms of what it is not. It is not gluten free and it is not suitable for vegetarians ('with a few riffs of dude food as well as a healthy number of gluten free (GFO) and vegetarian options'). Significantly, dude food is also not healthy. For example, one journalist describes a restaurant's offering as 'dude food to the core, with taste being the deciding factor, not health'. In other cases, dude food is listed alongside, but as separate to, healthy food: 'dude food and superfoods can both enjoy immense popularity at the same time'; 'There's a strange mix between perceived health foods and over the top dude food'. In the single instance that dude food *is* described as being healthy, this is presented as an exceptional case where the norm is implied to be that it is unhealthy: 'the first thing she did was drop the restaurant brief, which she describes as "dude food but with a healthy twist"'.

Dude food is also linked to certain hyper-masculinised activities. This includes preparing meat in masculinised ways, such as barbequing, which is a potent symbol of masculinity in the global West (Neuhaus 2003). One article describes a 'Dude Food stage' which features 'a series of free lessons in grilling, smoking and searing'. Dude food is also reported on in contexts of other masculinised activities, such as drinking beer and watching sport ('I couldn't help but notice the proliferation of dude food on social media since the start of the American baseball season a few weeks').

The definition we saw earlier told us that *dude food* is food that is particularly appealing to men. This, of course, does not preclude others from eating or even enjoying it. However, within the articles, there is the implication

that female social actors do not enjoy dude food in the same way. For example, a mother of two male restaurant owners is described as having ‘put her foot down and refused to let them name the restaurant “Dude Food”’. The mother’s objection is not explained and so is likely assumed to be understood by readers, who are taken to have a shared understanding of the term that presumably involves it excluding or otherwise being unpalatable to women.

At other points, dude food is linked to men in more explicit ways. In an article describing how a pair of chefs moved location within London, dude food is metaphorically personified as a man: ‘they’ve just left Soho and made the trek east, to the City, where the dude food has shaved its stubble, tidied its hair and swapped trainers and T-shirt for Trickers and tweed’. Tellingly, the man that *dude food* embodies is not just any man, but he arguably represents a particular kind of working-class masculinity; he has (unshaven) stubble, untidy hair and wears trainers and a t-shirt. The new restaurant in the review, which is contrasted against the *dude food* of the old one, is metaphorically depicted as being clean shaven, having tidy hair and as wearing smart boots and tweed clothing. This metaphorical man arguably represents a higher social class kind of masculinity associated with wealth and sophistication; indeed, the article goes on to describe that next restaurant as one that ‘takes reservations, has a proper wine list, linen napkins and is large enough to swing a pair of sows’. The expression ‘swing a pair of sows’ is a corruption of the expression ‘swing a cat’, where the modification is used to emphasise the size of the new restaurant. Tellingly, the substitution of a cat for ‘two sows’ (i.e., female pigs) in this expression places focus back on an animal (and a female one at that) that is consumed as a meat product.

How, then, does the concept of dude food relate to toxic masculinity? It could be argued that the notion is just ‘tongue-in-cheek’, and perhaps its uses are. However, there are patterns in how the term is used, at least in the online data we have looked at, that indicate a wider set of gendered discourses which could be harmful (not least to men themselves). First and foremost, dude food is heavily associated with the consumption of large quantities of meat. Since, as we have seen, men consume much more meat than anyone else, but also are the most susceptible to health conditions that have been associated with high meat consumption, we might question whether this explicit deepening of the association between men and meat consumption might be harmful for men’s health. In addition, as we have seen, aside from the harm that this involves inflicting on the animals themselves, meat consumption also depends on an industry that operates in a way that has been likened to the oppression of women. Dude food can also be exclusionary; the practice of consuming it is likely to exclude women and almost certainly excludes men (and others) who follow feminised practices such as vegetarianism (Rosenfeld 2020). Another feminised practice that dude food is distanced from is eating healthily. In this sense, dude food can be viewed as being

harmful – to animals, to the planet and to the people (men) who consume it – as it is celebrated for not being healthy. Indeed, consciously eating healthily is widely regarded as a feminine practice, and so as one that men should not participate in (Brookes and Baker 2021). The concept of dude food might help to reinforce this potentially harmful discourse.

Conclusion

Our exploration of toxic masculinity in this chapter has revealed the discriminatory and exclusionary effects of particular (often institutionalised) performances of masculine identities. Such effects include the glorification of dominance and the objectification of women, as well as the stigmatisation of identities and gender performances that are deemed to be deviations from traditional (hegemonic) masculine norms. Yet also, as we have seen towards the end of the chapter, toxic masculinity's impacts also extend to environmental degradation, through the promotion of a hyper-masculine consumer culture which drives ecological harm and speciesism, as seen in the gendered promotion of meat consumption. Overall, then, toxically masculine discourses can perpetuate cycles of discrimination, oppression and environmental disregard.

At this point, it's important to bear in mind some of the criticisms that have been directed at the concept of toxic masculinity. Perhaps most notably, Harrington (2021) discourages feminists from employing the concept in their analyses, contending that its therapeutic roots (described at the beginning of this chapter) are liable to result in the discourse around toxic masculinity becoming an individualising one, shifting the blame for gender violence and inequality onto specific types of 'bad' men, and thereby diverting attention away from the structural and societal factors that perpetuate such issues. Harrington (2021) also problematises the term's aforementioned lack of conceptual clarity, suggesting that resultant inconsistency in how it is used might undermine its effectiveness as an analytical tool. Harrington (2021) is also critical of the binary framing of 'toxic' versus 'healthy' masculinity, which could lead to posited solutions to gender oppression merely involving the adoption of 'healthy' masculinities (see Chapter 7) rather than entailing a more holistic challenging of the broader gender hierarchy. Harrington (2021) points out how such reduction of gender oppression to isolated instances of 'toxic' behaviour has enabled some elite men to position themselves as progressive, merely by denouncing such isolated acts, in the process solidifying their own power while avoiding accountability for their own role in upholding systemic forms of inequality. On the other side of the coin, in promoting 'healthy' masculinities, Harrington (2021) observes how this can involve the promotion of heteronormative values and institutions (such as fatherhood and the 'nuclear' family).

With all of this mind, Harrington (2021) advises feminists to utilise the concept of toxic masculinity as a window into contemporary gender politics

rather than as an analytical tool. In particular, Harrington (2021) suggests focussing on the political effects of condemning certain masculinities, and on understanding how these condemnations might reinforce or challenge existing power structures. For those interested in language, this certainly seems like a promising avenue for research. Indeed, although research has explored the sites within which such toxicity might be said to manifest, considerably less attention (if any at all) has been paid to *who* is constructed as toxically masculine and how such constructions might reflect and perpetuate established power structures. Ultimately, whether or not language researchers employ toxic masculinity as an analytical lens is up to them. For those who do find such a framework helpful, there is, as Harrington (2021) makes clear, considerable scope for theoretical development. For linguists and other language researchers in particular, what is required is the development of more detailed frameworks through which manifestations of toxic masculinity can be identified and studied in discourse. Such developments could enrich our understanding of this concept and, importantly, lead to a firmer, empirically driven grasp of how it relates to hegemonic masculinity.

However we decide to conceptualise and theorise about the harms that can arise from performances of masculinity, addressing such harms is likely to require us, as a society, to challenge and reshape the discourses that equate masculinity to values of dominance and aggression. Critical examination of the discourses through which masculinities are performed, constructed and represented can support such efforts. Such analyses could help us not only to understand problematic discourses but also support the identification – and promotion – of discourses through which more positive masculinities might be articulated and valorised. It is to such discourses that we turn in the next chapter.

Notes

- 1 www.youtube.com/watch?v=iC7atOycg-Y
- 2 Originating in the early 1980s and stretching through the 1990s in the US, the men's mythopoetic movement, coined by Shepherd Bliss and drawing on Jungian psychology, was a self-help and therapeutic initiative that sought to explore the challenges facing men through the lens of myths and fairy tales. This movement, led by figures like Robert Bly and Sam Keen, aimed to foster personal growth and a deeper understanding of masculine identity without engaging in political advocacy, focussing instead on workshops and retreats that utilised rituals such as drumming and sweat lodges. Men, feeling constrained by the demands of corporate and suburban life and perceiving themselves as lacking passion and purpose, turned to this movement to rediscover a sense of authentic masculinity. By gathering in natural settings for retreats, participants aimed to reconnect with the 'wild man' archetype, seeking liberation from the constraints of modern society and a revival of their intrinsic masculine essence (see Bly 1990).
- 3 The *No Means No* website: www.nomeansnoworldwide.org.
- 4 The advert can be viewed here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_tm6_-mOy8.

7

HEALTHY MASCULINITY

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we considered the relationship between toxic masculinity and language, painting a rather depressing picture of the ways in which men can use language to demean and diminish others and of how, ultimately, toxic masculinity harms men, too. We are making our way towards the final pages of the book now, and we want to end on a more hopeful and positive note by considering a topic that is related to and arguably just as important as toxic masculinity but is perhaps not as widely commented on – healthy masculinity. A search of the news database *Nexis* across the year 2023 found 5,053 references to *toxic masculinity* but only 1,217 references to *healthy masculinity*. A similar term, *positive masculinity*, occurred 289 times that year. It seems, then, that there is rather a lot more discussion about problems than solutions.

So, in this chapter, we want to consider how healthy masculinity relates to language use, considering how more recent types of men, like *metrosexual* and *soft jock*, offer possible alternatives to toxic masculinity. We also examine a corpus of news articles about healthy masculinity to identify how the term has been defined – what features characterise it, and is there agreement on what these features are? We also consider language use in contexts that might involve healthier forms of masculinity, such as nursing and veganism, and we also look at some of the ways that healthy masculinity has been encouraged through language, such as by calling out toxic forms, for example, through coinages like *mansplaining*, the notion of being an ally and rewriting narratives. We end by considering the extent to which healthy masculinity might represent a disavowal of masculinity, per

se, and what the over-arching consequences of the term might be for how we conceive of gender.

New Man and his mates

In recent decades, there have been numerous attempts to 'rebrand' masculinity. In 1982, Margaret Atwood wrote that men felt threatened by women laughing at them, whereas women were afraid that men would kill them – a statement that encapsulated a growing acknowledgement of traditional masculinity's problematic nature. Perhaps it was a coincidence, but in the same year, an article in the *Washington Post* used the term 'New Man' when writing about the comedy film *Tootsie*, in which a character played by Dustin Hoffman cross-dresses in order to secure an acting role on a soap opera: 'It has enough rowdy, inconsequential fun in it to take the curse off Hoffman's sentimentalized notion of The New Man, but it's also in the nature of a lucky tightwire act that comes close to tripping him up'.

The New Man was more marketing concept than real identity. Gill (2003: 37) describes him as 'sensitive, emotionally aware, respectful of women, and egalitarian in outlook and, in some accounts, as narcissistic and highly invested in his physical appearance. He is as likely to be gay as straight'. To an extent, the New Man was a consequence of a number of movements that became popular in the late 1960s: feminism, anti-racism, anti-war and gay liberation. In the ensuing years, there were critiques of traditional masculinity, which was viewed as uncommunicative, unemotional and distant, and was held responsible for violent acts such as rape and nuclear war (Chapman 1988). However, the persona of the New Man was also created with a particularly commercial function in mind: it was an answer to the problem of getting affluent male readers to buy lifestyle magazines and all the products advertised in them – a hitherto untapped market (see also Chapter 3). *The Face*, launched by Nick Logan in 1982, was one of the first magazines of this type, using a 'laddish' tone that emphasised the heterosexuality of its readers, juxtaposed with homoerotic photographs. The New Man might suggest a movement towards gender equity, but Beynon (2002: 99) positions him at the intersection of 'nurturer' and 'narcissist'. By the 1990s, the New Man had given way, to a large extent, to the noisier concept of the New Lad – a more ironic identity: 'hedonistic, post (if not anti) feminist, and pre-eminently concerned with beer, football and "shagging" women. His outlook on life could be characterized as anti-aspirational and owes a lot to a particular classed articulation of masculinity' (Gill 2003: 37). The New Lad identity was cultivated by magazines such as *Loaded* (launched in 1994), known as 'Lads' mags'. Rather than one archetype eclipsing the other, both kinds of masculinity co-exist – as far as we can tell, to this day – spanning a range of age

groups, familial setups and socio-economic divisions in (particularly British) conceptualizations of masculinity (Wetherell and Edley 1999).

Another term, *metrosexual*, was coined by Mark Simpson, also in 1994, in an article for *The Independent*:

Metrosexual man, the single young man with a high disposable income, living or working in the city (because that's where all the best shops are), is perhaps the most promising consumer market of the decade. In the Eighties he was only to be found inside fashion magazines such as *GQ*. In the Nineties, he's everywhere and he's going shopping.

Magazines like *Men's Health*, *Men's Fitness* and *Inside Fitness* (see Figure 7.1) place a focus on diet and exercise, while the front covers – which feature attractive and sculpted male bodies – imply that the benefits are as much about aesthetics as they are about health.

The metrosexual was seen as a modern-day version of the late 18th- and early 19th-century dandy, with the British footballer David Beckham viewed as the archetype. While metrosexual men embraced traditionally feminine behaviours, such as elaborate personal grooming routines, they were not viewed as particularly pro-feminist or even political. In fact, their object of focus was themselves.



FIGURE 7.1 Newsstand in Canada, 2018, selling men's health magazines.

Source: dennizn/Alamy Stock Photo.

On a mission

The following excerpt is taken from an article on face serums from the website of the men's magazine *GQ*.

Heath has taken its time entering the serum sector; on a mission to get it right. Its Repair serum has been designed to help you switch off, rebalance and rejuvenate your skin before you hit the sack. Using the most advanced skincare technologies, the microbiome-friendly formula uses naturally-derived melatonin, to enhance the skin's nightly repair cycle and offer protection from oxidative stress. Niacinamide stimulates ceramide production (lipids that help to reinforce and restore skin's natural barrier), styenol A, an anti-bacterial active fights acne, whilst gin toniq, an ultra-hydrating botanical active offers long-lasting hydration and three times more moisture than glycerin. Lavender-infused to help you drift off into a deep and rewarding sleep.

Excerpt from Adrian Clark (18 March 2024) The best men's face serums for hydrating, brightening and toning, *GQ magazine*.¹

The website has a section called 'Grooming', which contains numerous articles or advertorials describing the use of various products. Unlike what was found in earlier research that has examined how beauty products are marketed to men (e.g., Baker 2008), these articles don't engage in any 'legitimation' work; they don't need to justify men's interest in the products – for the context of *GQ*'s audience, there is no need to do this. However, the advertorial uses a range of interesting linguistic features. First, it makes use of a distinctly informational and technical form of discourse. Terminology like *microbiome*, *melatonin*, *oxidative stress*, *niacinamide*, *ceramide*, *lipids*, *styenol A*, *gin toniq* and *glycerin* give the article a scientific feel, while the phrase 'three times more moisture' uses a quantitative comparison in order to positively evaluate the product. A mixture of personal and impersonal language occurs in the article; there is reference to 'the skin' as a generic noun (as opposed to 'your skin'), as well as nominalisations of verb processes like *hydration*, *production* and *protection*, which obscure agency. However, in other places, the article uses the personal pronoun *you* to directly address the reader and suggest a relationship between reader and author. Other terms echo some of the language use more typical of men which we outlined in Chapter 2 – the use of colloquialisms and phrasing that suggests combat, physical activity or even violence: *on a mission*, *hit the sack*, *switch off*, *fights acne*. The product is claimed to help sleep be *rewarding* – as if it is a prize for some kind of achievement. Even the name of the product, *Repair*, suggests a masculine endeavour – men using their hands and tools to fix something.

The excerpt could be said to employ a number of interdiscursive strategies, whereby different discourse styles viewed to be appropriate for male readers are combined in order to persuade them to purchase *this* particular skin-care product.

On the one hand, these new ‘brands’ for men offer an alternative to traditional masculinity, enabling men to engage in behaviours that would otherwise be seen as threatening. On the other, we have to bear in mind that labels like New Man and metrosexual tend to be linked to marketing campaigns that saw them as a way to target male consumers. They are the result of neo-liberalism as opposed to directly challenging patriarchal structures.

More recently, another term has reconceptualised a different sort of man who is viewed as the opposite of toxic masculinity. In 2024, an article by Samantha Leach in *Bustle* magazine² defined the term *soft jock*: ‘athletes (or athletic-looking men) who choose to forgo alpha-maledom and instead embrace sensibilities their teammates might once have described as “beta”’. Such men are described as listening to Disney soundtracks, taking anti-depressants and making friendship bracelets. However, the article also notes that these men are held up as great examples of challenging gender norms because they have psychosexual capital. Olympic medallist Jason Rogers is quoted as saying,

It’s also a bit of a status flex, like “I’m so off-the-charts masculine in certain ways that I can depart from the masculine archetype without any fear of judgment. In fact, I can accumulate more social capital for doing so”.

In other words, this is having your hegemonic cake and eating it – as with the Instagramming bodybuilders in Chapter 4, feminine behaviour in men is celebrated only if the man is able to demonstrate hyper-masculinity in other areas.

Competing definitions

What, exactly, is healthy masculinity? As we noted earlier, it isn’t talked about as much as toxic masculinity, but there were more than 1,000 mentions of it in news articles across the year 2023 on *Nexis* – so there is no shortage of data to consider. We returned to *Nexis* to collect a small corpus of all the articles referring to *healthy masculinity* that we could find, using English-speaking news sources from around the world. In total, we located 1,339 articles, the majority of which were published between 2015 and 2024, although a few dated back to the 1990s. We examined citations of *healthy masculinity* in their contexts, in order to identify cases where the term was defined, and we grouped similar cases together. So, what did we find?

First, *healthy masculinity* is often defined in terms of what it is not. Therefore, it is often described in opposition to toxic masculinity. “The goal here

was to just educate all the people who came to the event and to invite them to understand the idea of healthy masculinity versus toxic masculinity,” O’Connor said.’ (*University Wire*, 10 April 2018).

Within the academic literature on masculinity, Newman et al. (2022: 856) also make the distinction between the two forms of masculinity: ‘healthy (i.e., positive) masculinity is recognized as the ability to resist hegemonic, toxic masculine norms while acknowledging the role(s) of gender-based power imbalances’. How does this definition of healthy masculinity specifically relate to language use, though? Articles in our news corpus referred to men avoiding sexist, discriminatory or disrespectful language. Definitions based simply on *not* doing or saying something can only take us so far though, so what other kinds of attributes are linked to healthy masculinity?

The most common definition in the newspaper corpus was one which viewed healthy masculinity as men taking on traits that are traditionally associated with femininity. These included references to softness; being vulnerable, emotionally expressive, kind and passive; seeking help; crying; and doing housework. A selection of examples from the corpus are shown here.

It’s OK for me to show my emotions and cry. There is nothing wrong with showing your soft side.

Huffington Post, 22 February 2019

“healthy masculinity” encourages men to seek help when needed and be emotionally vulnerable.

Cavalier Daily, 14 April 2021

Healthy masculinity is ‘Look at that beautiful wahine [Marori or Polynesian woman], I can’t wait to get home and see my wife, I might cook tea for my wife tonight’ – those types of things.

The News Alexandra, 24 November 2022

‘We have to redefine healthy masculinity for our boys to include empathy, emotion, care and compassion,’ she said.

CNN Wire, 31 October 2014

This view of healthy masculinity is one that is also reported in academic literature. For example, Kraemer (2023: 722) notes that a ‘prominent feature of masculinity is the suppression of vulnerability. Signs of weakness are shameful to many boys and men, from which follows a reluctance to seek help and contempt for frailty in others’. Similarly, Trail et al. (2021: 8) write that ‘framing vulnerability as strength might help men to feel more comfortable in standing up and seeking help, if as a result they are viewed as courageous by their peers and community’.

Get out of your head

Stas et al. (2023) report on a Flanders (the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium) online suicide prevention campaign that was aimed at tackling stigma around men talking about their mental health and seeking help. Globally, men have a higher suicide rate than women (although women have higher rates of non-fatal suicidal behaviour and suicidal thoughts (WHO 2021)). In Flanders, almost three in four suicides are committed by men. An excerpt from the front page of the campaign's website (which we have translated into English) follows.³

Ontdek de Kom Uit Je Kop-campagne

Ook mannen staan vaak voor mentale uitdagingen zoals stresserende levensgebeurtenissen of psychische problemen. Het stereotype beeld dat je als man 'sterk moet zijn' helpt mannen niet vooruit. Ook mannen hebben baat bij een betere bespreekbaarheid van stress en psychische problemen en behoefte aan een meer ondersteunende omgeving. Met 'Kom Uit Je Kop' willen we mannen en hun omgeving aanmoedigen om open te spreken over mentale moeilijkheden en sneller de stap naar hulp te zetten.

Translation**Discover the Get Out of Your Head campaign**

Men also often face mental challenges such as stressful life events or psychological problems. The stereotypical image that as a man you 'have to be strong' does not help men. Men also benefit from better discussion of stress and psychological problems and the need for a more supportive environment. With 'Get Out of Your Head' we want to encourage men and those around them to speak openly about mental difficulties and to take the step for help more quickly.

The excerpt argues that the traditional image of the 'strong' man is not helpful and, instead, encourages discussing problems and taking up help-seeking behaviours. The excerpt does not use a direct address (e.g., it avoids use of second-person pronouns) but refers to *mannen* (men) in the third person, who are most likely to be the target audience. Therefore, men who initially engage with the website will not necessarily feel that they are being addressed as someone who has mental health challenges, although as they continue reading the site, the form of address switches to a direct one, using second-person pronouns.

The site contains videos of men talking about their own experiences of difficulties, as well as advice on how to recognise signs that men might be having suicidal thoughts, with suggestions on how to talk to them. Elsewhere on the site, it is noted that few films or series show men who are vulnerable or who express their feelings and that men are taught to suppress emotions like sadness, instead converting these into anger and isolating themselves.

Two-hundred-and-fifty Dutch-speaking men were recruited to access the website, filling in questionnaires before and afterwards. After engaging with the site, there was a small but significant increase in help-seeking intention while experiencing suicidal thoughts, compared to the baseline. Across the whole group, there were no significant differences in terms of self-reliance, hopelessness or openness to emotions, although for men who were experiencing mental health problems, there were also increases in communicating emotions. The majority of the participants (71.3%) said they found the campaign appealing.

Notably, behaviours like expressing emotions and seeking help were not directly labelled on the website as being associated more with women, although it could be implied that if these are behaviours that men don't do very much, then someone else must be doing them more – and an obvious comparator group would be women. The site appears to have been designed to be appealing to its target audience; it uses sober colours, for example, with dark green and dark blue for headings and black on a light grey background for the text (similar colours are often used with men's clothing). There are images of a range of men of different ages and ethnic backgrounds, several of whom are shown from behind and/or situated in outdoors environments (which are often situated as masculine spaces; e.g., Kling et al. 2018). These images create a representation of an ideal male reader who is interested in nature and physical activity, possibly braving the elements. Language use is plain and direct, focussing on practical advice which tends to appear in short, instructional lists. The site thus carefully navigates a path in order to engage with men around a taboo and dangerously gendered subject, without mentioning women at all.

In other quarters, the view that men should adopt traits and behaviours more typically associated with women has been criticised. For example, Kulick (2003: 229–230) addresses Coates's conclusion in her book *Men Talk*:

women's talk, which often highlights feelings, is better – more satisfying and more well-adjusted than men's less affect-laden talk. In her final chapter, Coates draws on the work of masculinity scholars like Victor Seidler to argue that men's 'avoidance' of talk about feelings is one of the main reasons why masculinity is in crisis. If only men would talk more like women, she seems to suggest, then the world would be a better place. But what is

the evidence for this, other than perhaps a contemporary North American and northern European conviction that it is 'good to talk'?

Similarly, Talbot (2000) notes how an advert for British Telecom promotes 'female ways' of talking, claiming that 'women like to sit down to make phone calls' and that 'they know that getting in touch is more important than what you actually say'. Men, in contrast, are seen as standing up during phone calls, with body language that suggests their 'message will be short, sharp and to the point'. The advert constructs women as better communicators, asking why these 'abrupt' men 'can not share the simple joys of talking'. The advert could be seen as drawing on a form of 'commodity feminism' (see Goldman et al. 1991), whereby stereotypically female traits are lauded, conveniently increasing profits for a company.

In posts to an online forum about anxiety, which we discussed in Chapter 2, we found several cases where 'real men' were characterised as going against the stoical stereotype by seeking help and talking about their feelings. These posts were usually made by forum users who encouraged other men to open up rather than suffer in silence.

yet it takes a bigger man to admit they are struggling & I believe every man will at some stage in his life struggle even though they may not admit it

keep an open mind and allow it to rather than pushing it away which we tend to do because we feel so bad about ourselves It takes a real man to be able to post like you have & open up about how you feel not a coward a coward cannot admit to how they are feeling so I hope you will eventually realize that:-)

There is a paradox here, in that these two forum users, while disavowing the stereotypes of masculinity, use phrases like 'bigger man' and 'real man', which perpetuate the idea of hegemonic masculinity – the idea that masculinity is a hierarchy with some men being higher up the ladder than others. So, the term 'bigger man' implies that there are 'smaller' men in existence, while 'real man' implies that some men are inauthentic. Additionally, the second forum user contrasts a 'real man' against a 'coward' who can't admit how he is feeling. So, being able to open up and seek help is seen as a sign of bravery – which we could view as part of the more traditional toolkit for masculinity. Therefore, although these posts present an alternative view of masculinity in some ways, in others they uphold more established views about what counts as a 'good' man.

An alternative perspective in the corpus of news articles represented healthy masculinity as a celebration of what are seen as traditionally masculine traits

and behaviours, such as being competitive and assertive, taking risks and protecting and rescuing others. A sample of these follow:

With healthy masculinity, young men prove their manhood by growing into responsible human beings, by striving for excellence and, yes, by being competitive and assertive and taking risks.

Salon.com, 9 March 2001

In a patriarchal society, men have an opportunity to use their power to protect.

CNN Wire, 8 September 2022

Many men go into services like the police force or firefighting because they have a deep-seated desire to fight for those who are unable to fight for themselves or rescue those who are unable to save themselves. This is healthy masculinity in one of its finest forms.

The Bison: Harding University, 24 January 2019

This is also a view we can find in the academic literature. For example, Newman et al. (2022) note how sport can be used to promote healthy masculinity, citing its role in enhancing qualities like leadership, respect, confidence and persistence.

This 'leaning in' towards traditional masculinity can be found in a range of contexts that we might associate with healthy masculinity, some which are perhaps more surprising than others. For example, Brookes and Chalupnik (2022b) examined the language use of men in a *Reddit* forum dedicated to the topic of veganism (avoiding animal products from diet and other aspects of life such as clothing). As seen in the previous chapter, meat consumption is normally linked to hegemonic masculinity (Lupton 1996), while Fox (1999: 27) has argued that 'meat is a highly visible reminder and reinforcer of patriarchal control in all of its manifestations'. Choosing to be vegan potentially challenges what is seen as traditionally masculine behaviour (Thomas 2016), and Brookes and Chalupnik (2022b) found that the men on the forum aligned with discourses of masculinity in order to positively represent themselves and negatively represent non-vegan men. Several of these posts are shown here.

As a weight lifting enthusiast I have been able to amass a good amount of muscle, and as a vegan I have been able to become the strongest and best shape of my life.

I've actually become hairier since going vegan. Luckily, my voice didn't get lower, otherwise I would be cracking walls

Yes, it [veganism] is so unmanly it makes you instantly attractive to mountains of sexy, principled and intelligent women. What a disaster.

ED has got to be my favorite irony of the carnist culture. Meat-eating is the cause of so much male frustration. The artery-clogging effects of a lifetime of eating meat causes erectile dysfunction. Yup. Real manly, making your dick not work anymore

Like come on team, I'm here for my own personal logical reasons.

The male forum users extol the physical benefits of not eating animal products, such as increased muscle mass and strength, becoming hairier and having a deeper voice. Additionally, one forum user notes how veganism has enhanced his attractiveness to women. Sarcastic humour is used in several posts to dismiss the view that veganism is unmanly. The forum user who says he is more attractive to women jokes, 'what a disaster'. In the fourth post, in which eating meat is linked to ED (erectile dysfunction), the author notes, 'Yup. Real Manly'. The final forum user writes that his reasons for becoming vegan are 'logical' ones, drawing on a discourse of masculinity as rational. Brookes and Chałupnik (2022b: 9) argue that the discourses taken up represent something of a lost opportunity, as instead of promoting qualities like compassion and empathy, hegemonic norms of masculinity are instead maintained and thus not challenged in this context (these authors also observed similar patterns in moments of discursive struggle around veganism and masculinity on *Twitter* (Brookes and Chałupnik 2025)).

While the two conceptualisations of healthy masculinity considered so far appear to be competing with one another, a third one blends the two, defining it as a mixture of tough and tender.

For Malik, healthy masculinity is the perfect balance of masculine and feminine traits that are found in men and women alike.

Dawn [Pakistan], 8 July 2021

Instead, boys need to learn a healthy masculinity that's rational, patient, caring, courageous, and co-operative, and includes emotional awareness and expressiveness.

North Shore News [British Columbia], 3 May 2006

And healthy masculinity needs to embrace the drives for adventure, for empowerment and for intimate relationship.

Stroud News and Journal, 2 November 2019

This blending definition brings to mind work by Eisen and Yamashita (2019), who carried out interviews with 25 men in the US aged between 18 and

40. The interviews focussed on the men's understandings and constructions of their masculinity, and the researchers found that the men constructed a 'hybrid masculinity by describing themselves as caring or being in touch with their feminine side to create social distance between themselves and men who adhere to traditional representations of masculinity' (2019: 801). These men were critical of frat boys and football players, who were viewed as having an immature form of masculinity. However, the men also referred to their male friends as 'bros', and they had a personalised version of a 'bro code' which was based on looking out for friends, crafting their identities around emotional connection and protecting one another from women's control. One interviewee stated the following:

Women are intelligent. They're intelligent and conniving and deceitful people. And we love it. We love that about them. And we can't get enough of it. But sometimes that comes back and slaps us in the face. So, we need to acknowledge [this] as bros and protect each other from these things.

Similar to the posts on anxiety and veganism we considered earlier, this statement strongly orients to hegemonic masculinity even while appearing to demonstrate a softer, more supportive male persona. Additionally, the interviewee's generalising view of women is extremely ambivalent ('conniving and deceitful', 'we love it'). This tension came across in other interviews, too. For example, another interviewee described buying dinner for a friend who was experiencing economic hardship but also trying to enforce their friends' autonomy by pushing him to 'step up' and take care of himself. Additionally, the men talked about how they were able to express emotions more freely within their close circle of friends: 'Seeing men shedding, whether it's happy tears, sad tears, grateful tears – it's tears. . . . I love it. To me that's progress'. This was seen as a privilege that was earned by being emotionally invested in friends, but there was also an implicit understanding that the group could be entrusted with intimate information and that there would be a 'strict code of silence'. The men were able to keep one another's secrets to help maintain one another's reputations. So, in order to construct a more caring and mature form of masculinity, the men had to uphold the dichotomous gender system which views femininity as oppositional and subordinate to masculinity so that they could show that they were 'in touch with their feminine side' (2019: 810). As the authors put it,

by appropriating characteristics that have historically been used to subordinate women and other forms of masculinity, they crafted narratives that elevated them over other men. In doing so, the perception that women are weak for being caring and nurturing is not dispelled; instead, these traits are borrowed by men to demonstrate their maturity and progressive nature, as they are able to adopt traits from both masculinity and femininity.

(Eisen and Yamashita 2019: 816)

Muscular benefits

An example of a profession that is particularly gendered is nursing. Men make up just 11 per cent of the global nursing workforce (WHO 2020). The dominance of women in this profession is also reflected in language use, with studies demonstrating a tendency for references to male nurses to be marked with the adjective ‘male’, indicating an awareness of such cases as exceptional (Baker 2010). Although men historically played a significant role in caring professions (Brown et al. 2000), today the empathic nature required by the role is ostensibly at odds with the gendered role into which men are commonly socialised, which, in line with hegemonic masculinity, usually prizes stoicism and emotional restraint.

Here, we want to consider how men working in nursing discursively negotiate this seeming incongruence between their identities and their feminised profession. To do this, we looked at male nurses’ accounts of their professional experiences, as recounted on a US commercial website that sells work clothing for male nurses: *Murseworld*. The website contains a page called ‘#Murselife’ which is dedicated to telling male nurses’ stories and opens with a passage, framed in the voice of the website, which focusses on this gendered aspect of the role and the challenges this might pose for male nurses:

As a guy in scrubs, it’s easy to feel like it’s a women’s world out there. Whether your female co-workers ask you to kill spiders, or your patients call you doctor, or your family just doesn’t understand, the struggles of male nurses and other medical professionals abound.

The following numbered extracts are from a selection of stories from male nurses on the website told in their own words.

1. Okay, nursing is historically a women’s profession, but Flo & her 21st century colleagues are now sharing duties with Murses. From offering muscular benefits to our pound-generous patients, to adding flavor to lighten the estrogen-laced conversations during midnight chart charts, men offer the right ingredients when it comes impacting the nursing profession.
2. Coming through the ranks of a female dominated profession, I have come to see that, as a male nurse, I bring a perspective that is quite different from my female counterparts. It seems that many have come to the profession out of the maternal instinct, to nurture and to control. As a male, I come from the perspective of fixer, of training, of returning to work and being a good friend; there is no drama and there are no games. Additionally, my heavy manufacturing background has helped me to simplify complicated

health related concepts so that anyone I serve can understand them. . . . My deep voice, my beard, my calm and non-judgmental presentation, all come together to deliver a breath of fresh air in a time when it seems everyone must be mothered and micro-managed and controlled – from education, to government, to healthcare.

3. What I love about being a male nurse is that when we have kids that come in with no family, or maybe abuse cases, I get to be the older brother, the father figure, the cool uncle, a male figure of authority that these kids can trust and even open up to, in a way that they couldn't do with just anyone. That feeling of connecting with these kids, whether it be them telling me about their brothers' weird laugh, or how their auntie makes them wear bow ties to church, or just coming up with a cool handshake to help distract them during procedures; those small moments are what makes my job the best job ever, the reason why I love what I do!

From Murseworld www.murseworld.com/murselife-men-in-scrubs

The stories told on this website reflect, again, a somewhat complex relationship with masculinity. The men talk about how proud they are to be male nurses (or 'murses') and indicate ambivalence about gendered stereotyping in the profession. Yet, as the examples demonstrate, they also foreground some aspects of their role that are valued as (hegemonically) masculine. For example, in Extract 1, one of the nurses acknowledges a historical view of nursing as a 'women's profession' but contrasts this against the present day, where 'Flo [Florence Nightingale] & her 21st century colleagues are now sharing duties with Murses'. The aspects of the role that this nurse then highlights are associated with stereotypically masculine traits, namely, adding physical strength and muscularity ('offering muscular benefits to our pound-generous patients') and bringing hormonal balance (presumably by embodying traits associated with testosterone; 'adding flavor to lighten the estrogen-laced conversations during midnight chart charts [*sic*]').

In Extract 2, a nurse describes how he brings a perspective that is 'quite different from [his] female counterparts'. He then contrasts the motivation of his female colleagues, which he frames in hyper-feminised terms (i.e., 'maternal instinct, to nurture and to control'), against his own, which he frames as being solution-focussed, practical and work-oriented ('I come from the perspective of fixer, of training, of returning to work and being a good friend'). He then foregrounds his experience in a hyper-masculinised profession ('my heavy manufacturing background') in presenting himself as capable at translating complicated health information for patients – a task that involves technical communication as opposed to carrying out emotional labour (Hochschild 1983), such as being a shoulder to cry on or providing

pep talks. It is notable that this nurse presents himself as a friend who is non-judgemental and offers 'no drama . . . no games', in contrast to female nurses who apparently want to mother, micro-manage and control. In this way, the nurse positions himself as existing outside of a rigorous feminine hierarchical structure which is based on dominance, control and emotional manipulation. Here, masculinity is cast, by contrast, as more simple, honest, sympathetic and patient-centred.

In Extract 3, the nurse likens his role to that of a male relative. He describes how when interacting with children at work, he gets to 'be the older brother, the father figure, the cool uncle, a male figure of authority that these kids can trust and even open up to'. In this way, the nurse is, importantly, an authority figure to these children and carries out a protective role. The relationship that he has with the children is then framed in terms of fun; the children tell funny stories about their relatives, the nurse comes up with a 'cool handshake' with the children and he distracts them from their discomfort or pain during unpleasant procedures. In this way, the nurse characterises his role through a discourse of child 'entertainer' – a role that is stereotypically associated with men (Sunderland 2000). However, the nurse also acts as someone who is a confidante to the children, being someone they can open up to. This listening role is one that requires empathy and kindness and is perhaps more in line with stereotypically feminised skills.

As such passages show, through the stories told on the website, the male nurses construct for themselves professional identities ('murses') and roles that are unique and quite distinct from those of female nurses. These constructions are, in this sense, somewhat essentialising; they imply that the different skills that male nurses bring to the role do not merely reflect their own personal skills and attributes but are the kinds of skills and perspectives that only men can bring to the profession. Through such representations, the authors of these stories foreground aspects of their roles that are more stereotypically masculine; among other things, they exert physical strength, solve problems, raise testosterone levels and perform the role of an authoritative but fun father-figure. In this way, the nurses are able to emphasise their (hegemonic) masculinity in the context of a feminised profession. However, there are also references to skills that are perhaps not as traditionally masculine, such as providing an emotional connection to patients, being a friend and being someone to whom the patients can open up about their concerns. Murses, then, offer a definition of healthy masculinity which combines aspects of masculinity and femininity.

Returning to the set of definitions of healthy masculinity from our newspaper corpus, a fourth definition was based on the idea that healthy masculinity was a good thing but, unlike the previous three definitions, didn't provide much detail about what it actually involved. As a result, this definition involved vague-sounding statements such as being a good person,

being yourself or reflecting on your growth, as the following examples indicate:

‘We see healthy masculinity as a form of masculinity where men are able to be themselves 100 percent of the time,’ Horowitz said. ‘Right now there’s so much pressure from society about how a man is supposed to act, how they’re supposed to look, what they’re supposed to say, and it’s very harmful.’

The Pitt News, 21 March 2016

With healthy masculinity in mind, Cornelius said he takes time every night to reflect on his day and his growth as a man. ‘I ask myself, “did I get better today?”’

University Wire, 10 April 2018

‘Healthy masculinity is really about embracing our fullness of self as members of this human experiment,’ Ezzell said. Snowden added that healthy masculinity is about being comfortable with who you are and not harming others.

University Wire, 19 April 2021

‘I think we need to let go of the idea that there is a template of how to be a man, or that there are rules for healthy masculinity,’ she says. ‘Instead let’s focus on what it takes to be a good person.’

The Sunday Star-Times [Auckland], 27 June 2021

Unsurprisingly, then, a fifth definition is based on acknowledging the difficulty of reaching consensus around a definition. This can involve statements like the following:

‘There is no one correct pathway to healthy masculinity,’ he says.

Sunday Mail, 6 February 2000

I alone hardly even know what a healthy masculinity looks like, so a cooperative push for change will ultimately be more effective.

University Wire, 15 February 2000

But maybe we don’t know what healthy masculinity looks like. There’s not much talk about that.

Evening Standard, 5 October 2023

As Morris and Ratajczak (2019: 1987) write, ‘[a]lthough there are many programs that focus on redefining masculinity and promoting a healthy

masculinity, the definitions behind these new constructions are often vague and nonspecific and vary from program to program’.

So, we have to acknowledge the difficulty in defining healthy masculinity due to competing representations, vagueness and even a lack of understanding of the term. As Waling (2019: 368) puts it, ‘there is no consensus as to what a “healthy masculinity” is’. This presents a challenge, in that if we cannot agree upon a definition of what counts as healthy masculinity, then it is difficult to provide examples of people engaging in it. Waling goes further, however, arguing that both the terms *toxic masculinity* and *healthy masculinity* are problematic as they reproduce gender inequalities. The former term creates a kind of abstract enemy or villain – toxic masculinity, which casts men as victims rather than highlighting the role that men play in reproducing masculinity. The latter term, healthy masculinity, implies that the preferable – even, only – way of being a man is through masculinity, thus devaluing femininity and androgyny. Waling (2019: 368–370) goes on to argue that the representations of healthy masculinity as involving a ‘dose of femininity’ (e.g., expressing emotions) are a form of repackaging of masculinity, similar to consumer products which rebrand everyday items as ‘masculine’ so that they will appeal to men. Perhaps we need to acknowledge more that views of men as tough and women as caring are stereotypes, and people are more than stereotypes. If we degender traits like being tough or caring, then such traits will become more available to everyone. Doing this means dismantling the powerful ‘gender differences’ discourse, so it is not an easy task.

While acknowledging the potential problems in defining or advocating for ‘healthy masculinity’, in the remainder of this chapter, we consider some practices relating to language which could be seen as ‘healthier’ forms of masculinity, from certain perspectives.

Calling out

Some gender activists have tried to encourage more healthy forms of masculinity by calling out those they’ve viewed as toxic. For example, the activist group *Right to Be* (previously called *Hollaback*) is a US nonprofit organization that works to end harassment in all its forms through bystander intervention training and grassroots initiatives. The group also has a website which contains a storytelling platform where people can share stories of harassment and offer support to others.

Calling out can also relate to language specifically, resulting in critiques of male language use, as well as new coinages. A relatively recent term, *mansplain*, encapsulates both of these aspects. Bridges (2017) considered discourses around the word *mansplain*, a portmanteau of *man* and *explain* which is used to refer to cases where a man explains something to a woman in a patronising manner, sometimes in cases where the woman has more expertise on the

subject or where the man actually makes errors. The term's popularity can be traced back to 2008, after a viral weblog post by author Rebecca Solnit titled 'Men explain things to me (Facts didn't get in their way)'. Solnit described how a man she had just met told her about a very important book and did not stop explaining until a friend had said 'That's her book' four times (Lewis 2014). Although Solnit did not use the word *mansplain*, her post made people aware of the phenomenon, with first attestations of the word being found in 2009 (Peters 2013), and *mansplain* subsequently entered the Oxford English Dictionary in 2018. The term has also inspired a number of other, related words, such as *maninterrupt* (when men excessively interrupt women), *man-alogue* (when men offer unsolicited, lengthy opinions) and *manspread* (when men spread their legs, taking up a lot of space, particularly on public transport). Bridges (2017) carried out a qualitative analysis of 200 social media posts on *Twitter* and *Facebook* that contained the word *mansplain* and related forms like *mansplained*. The majority of posts were from women who used the word to describe instances they had experienced or witnessed:

Me: (notices arc of sun in yard) Wow, big change from summer, eh? Husband: Well, it's because of the tilt of Earth and . . . #mansplain #smh
Bridges (2017: 97)

The hashtags in this post act as a meta-commentary, pointing to the author's attitude. So, this social media user uses *#mansplain* to label her husband's response as a case of mansplaining, while *#smh* (meaning 'shaking my head') indicates her exasperation at his behaviour. Some users employed sarcasm or irony, describing cases of mansplaining as cute or saying how they loved it when men did it.

Other uses of the word were prospective, acting as a way to regulate possible unwanted responses from men, as in the following case.

Pro tip #directors! If you speak over me or #mansplain a process I understand when discussing a treatment, you lose the job

Bridges (2017) therefore describes the term as a tool that women can use in order to resist linguistic oppression. However, when we look at how men used the term *mansplain*, a different picture emerges. Male users show awareness that mansplain is metalinguistic (i.e., it is language about language), which means that if they talk about mansplaining, they are likely to be accused of mansplaining. This results in double-meta-pragmatic posts, like the following, where a male user imagines a hypothetical social media exchange in which two women accuse a man of mansplaining.

a. [Tweet by male @userA]: I feel like women get a few basic things wrong about mansplaining

- b. [Reply from female @userB]: He's about to mansplain . . . mansplaining?
- c. [Reply from female @userC]: @userB Mansplaining man gonna mansplain.

Some men use the word playfully or sarcastically to indicate that they do not believe they are mansplaining. In the following post, a male user indicates that he is aware of the issue.

Come see me #mansplain my thoughts on women and #publicspeaking.
Who wants to listen to a confident man talking nonsense?

Bridges (2017: 1000) describes the use of 'stake inoculations' – discursive strategies whereby someone attempts to 'minimise the risk of being held accountable for one's actions' (Hall et al. 2013: 213). In the next example, a male user is participating in an online discussion that relates to women and prefaces his contribution with 'not trying to #mansplain'.

Not trying to #mansplain but those [ovaries] are in the wrong place.

Such cases indicate that some men are aware of the negative interpretations of their communication and are orienting to potential accusations of mansplaining, labelling their own language as such before anyone else can. Men's uses of the word also illustrate the potential difficulties that some of them may have in contributing to topics about women (Bridges 2017). Such cases indicate ways in which men have reappropriated the word without contesting its meaning. However, Bridges also found cases of men's uses of the word which were resistant, such as the following case in which a man questions the need for the term:

when will we toss the phrase 'mansplaining' into the shallow grave where it belongs

In other cases, male users argued that women also engage in unnecessary explanations – in the following examples, the author of the first post attempts to degender the concept by referring to it as being pedantic, whereas the author of the second argues that it is something that women do. Both users employ the term *womansplain* as a way of diminishing the function of *mansplain* (Bridges 2017: 101):

I've had man [*sic*] and women mansplain to me it's called being pedantic people #mansplain #womansplain

getting sick and tired of all these feminists womansplaining to me about mansplaining

In terms of encouraging healthy masculinity, the term *mansplaining* appears to have had a range of impacts, echoing our discussion of discourses around toxic masculinity in Chapter 6. It has raised awareness about a form of male behaviour and given women a label with which to call it out, often in a humorous way. Men have also been prompted to orient to the term, with some demonstrating concern that their communication will be labelled in this way, while others have reacted against the term. There is potentially an interpretation of the concept as essentialising – giving patronising explanations is not solely a male activity, nor do all men do it. Hart (2014: online) has warned about overuse of the term: ‘mansplaining has morphed from a useful descriptor of a real problem in contemporary gender dynamics to an increasing catchall expression that seems to be inflaming the Internet gender wars more than clarifying them’. And while awareness of the practice has grown, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not mansplaining has reduced since the term was coined.

On balance, the term has been useful in drawing attention to a form of unwanted linguistic behaviour that does tend to be perceived as more commonly practiced by men than by women. Studies that have examined the prevalence of mansplaining have concluded that it is perceived as a real problem by many women. For example, Smith et al.’s (2022) interview-based research in Canada found that mansplaining was perceived as being pervasive in the workplace, with men being twice as likely to be described as mansplaining than women. Women are also more likely than men to react negatively to having something patronisingly explained to them. A US study by Briggs et al. (2023) found that women tended to experience more negative outcomes than men if they felt they were being mansplained to. They also felt that their competence was being questioned, and they attributed this to gender bias. Writing about the reason behind her coinage of *mansplaining* in 2023, Rebecca Solnit stated that her goal was ‘to advocate for democracy of voice, for equality in who gets to speak, who’s heard, who’s believed and respected when they speak, across all categories’. Although Solnit expresses concern about attempts to make *mansplain* gender-neutral or a lack of acknowledgement of its wider structural context, the term’s widespread uptake indicates its success as an awareness-raising tool.

Rewriting the narrative

Perhaps by the time we are calling out mansplaining, it is too late. Gendered social norms tend to be learnt early, so it could be argued that it is important to try to instil (some form of) healthy masculinity in boys, while encouraging girls to be more confident and resilient. Children’s stories are one way in which sexist narratives can be instilled as ‘common-sense’, with male characters tending to be dominant (Fox 1993) and female characters tending to be

under-represented and stereotyped. For example, Čermáková and Mahlberg 2021) show how female characters in 19th-century children's literature are more likely to be described as emotionally and physically connecting to other characters by 'throwing their arms around' them, whereas male characters are more likely to be described as having their hands in their pockets (see our longer discussion in Chapter 3 for further detail).

A kiss is just a kiss?

Two children's stories that might be seen as particularly problematic are *Snow White and The Seven Dwarves* and *Sleeping Beauty* (see Figure 7.2). Both stories involve a beautiful young woman who is magically put into a comatose state by a witch and is subsequently awakened by a kiss from a handsome prince. As both stories have been retold many times, there is no official version, and descriptions of the kiss can differ. The following text is from an early version of *Sleeping Beauty*, written in 1634 by Giambattista Basile in the Neapolitan language (a Romance language used in most of continental southern Italy), called 'Sun, Moon and Talia'.⁴

All'utemo arrivaie a la cammara dove steva Talia comme 'ncantata, che vista da lo re, credennose che dormesse, la chiammaie; ma, non revenenno pe quanto facesse e gridasse e pigliato de caudo de chelle bellezze, portatola de pesole a no lietto ne couze li frutte d'ammore e, lassatola corcata, se ne tornaie a lo regno suio, dove non se allecordaie pe no piezzo de chesto che l'era socciesso. La quale, dapo' nove mise, scarraicaie na cocchia de criature, uno mascolo e l'autra femmena, che vedive dui vranchiglie de gioie, li quale covernate da doi fate che comparzero a chillo palazzo, le posero a le zizze de la mamma.

Translation

At last he arrived at the chamber where Talia was lying enchanted, as if asleep. Seeing her, the king thought she was just sleeping and called out to her; but no matter what he did or how loudly he shouted, she did not wake up. Overcome by her beauty, he carried her from the fireplace to the bed where he picked the fruit of his love, leaving her still lying there, then returned to his own kingdom, soon forgetting all about what had happened. After nine months, she gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl, who were like two branches of joy. They were cared for by two fairies who appeared at the palace and fed from their mother's breasts.



FIGURE 7.2 Illustration from *Sleeping Beauty* (1882).

Source: Hazel McAllister/Alamy Stock Photo.

In this version of the story, the King rapes and impregnates the princess, resulting in her giving birth while still asleep. The term *frutte d'ammore* translates to 'fruit of his love', which is a euphemistic way of referring to sexual intercourse. To say that this story contains toxic masculinity is something of an understatement!

In a later version of *Sleeping Beauty*, retrieved from Project Gutenberg, the king is instead a prince: 'For a long time the Prince stood and gazed upon her, for never in all his life had he seen a maiden so lovely. Then suddenly he bent down and kissed her lips'. Although in this version the male protagonist kisses rather than rapes the princess, she is still unable to give consent. A similar kiss occurs in the 1959 Walt Disney animated film version, although here the prince already knows the princess, and he is told that in order to break the spell on the princess, he must kiss her. Still, the question of consent remains, and in the animated film of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937), also by Disney, a similar scene occurs, in which a prince kisses Snow White after she has fallen asleep having eaten a poisoned apple.

In 2021, the Disneyland theme park in Anaheim, California (US), came under scrutiny when it revamped its *Snow White's Enchanted Wish* ride but did not remove the kissing scene. An article in *SF* magazine called out the toxic masculinity in the story:

Haven't we already agreed that consent in early Disney movies is a major issue? That teaching kids that kissing, when it has not been established if both parties are willing to engage, is not OK? It's hard to understand why the Disneyland of 2021 would choose to add a scene with such old-fashioned ideas of what a man is allowed to do to a woman.⁵

The complaints prompted an article in the British newspaper *The Daily Mail*, titled 'Will Snow White be cancelled next?' (Griffith 2021). Reader comments on the article mostly displayed incredulity, describing complaints about the ride as ridiculous, woke, communist, prudish, intolerant, Puritanist, BS [i.e., 'bullshit'], and nonsensical. At the time of writing, the ride still features the kiss.

A strategy related to calling out a narrative or representation that involves toxic masculinity is to provide an alternative version. An example of this can be seen in a performance of *Sleeping Beauty* at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre in 2015. The story uses gender-swapping, so the title character is male (Prince Percy), and instead of being woken by a kiss, his girlfriend administers CPR. The new version of the story was described by a Conservative MP Peter Bone as 'political correctness gone mad'. However, in an article in *The Guardian*, columnist Zoe Williams noted that her six-year-old daughter found the pantomime annoying because *Sleeping Beauty* was supposed to be a princess, although her eight-year-old son 'mansplained' that *Sleeping Beauty* had

always been male: ‘Seven hundred years of entrenched laws of gender, ageless constellations of weakness and strength, beauty and valour, victimhood and salvation undone, erased from his memory – in less than an hour’.

The reactions to stories like *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White* and *the Seven Dwarves* show how attempts to challenge toxic narratives and replace them with healthier ones have tended to meet with resistance from conservative commentators. On the one hand, this indicates the importance of making such challenges, as it shows that there are people who want to maintain the status quo. On the other, it suggests that such challenges can also result in some people’s positions only becoming more entrenched. It is important, then, to find ways of promoting healthy masculinity that are likely to be accepted by the majority of people – and rather than presenting healthy masculinity as a zero-sum game (e.g., if women win, then men lose), it is better to conceptualise it as a win-win situation (e.g., everyone benefits from healthy masculinity).

Allies and saviours

Another way to promote more positive forms of masculinity is through the concept of allyship. An ally is a member of a dominant or majority group who works to end oppression of others in their personal and professional life through supporting and advocating for the oppressed population (Washington and Evans 1991: 195). Male allyship would therefore involve challenging sexism, homophobia and transphobia, recognising women’s achievements and advocacy (see Madsen et al. 2020; Warren and Bordoloi 2021). Warren et al. (2021: 724) note that ‘male allyship has the potential to promote both healthy forms of masculinity (McDermott et al. 2019; Seidler et al. 2018) and women’s psychological, social and material well-being’.

I just have to say it and I get applause

What actually counts as allyship can be open to discussion, though. The following excerpt is from a stand-up routine from 2023 by heterosexual Jewish-Italian comic Gianmarco Soresi.

Gianmarco: I’m a trans ally of course. I er-

Audience member: Woooh!

Audience members: [Applause]

Gianmarco: See how easy it is. Like fuck, I just have to say it and I get applause.

Audience members: [Laughter]

Gianmarco: Why write jokes?

Audience members: [Laughter]

Gianmarco: I'm a gay ally too!

Audience members: Ooooooh!

Gianmarco: I love women.

Audience members: Woooo!

Gianmarco: Jeff Bezos has too much money. What do you say?

Audience members: [Laughter and applause]

Gianmarco: [rolls eyes]

Gianmarco's comedy routine mocks what could be seen as a low bar for allyship, where simply stating that one is an ally is seen as enough. To claim to be an ally, one must already know about the concept, so he implies that knowing and using the word itself is enough to represent oneself as the right kind of man. Declaring oneself to be an ally is thus easy, and Gianmarco follows up with a series of other statements that appear to align him to the values of someone who would claim allyship, ending with the claim that Jeff Bezos, founder of the e-commerce and cloud computing company *Amazon*, has too much money. Being an ally is thus criticised as *stating* an identity as opposed to *embodying* it, and Gianmarco acknowledges the hypocrisy of this with an eyeroll at the end of the excerpt. De Vries (2015: 26), who interviewed US executives involved in gender equality programs, also noted this aspect, with one interviewer quoted as saying, 'a lot of the men are speaking the words but they are not doing the action'.

Johnson and Smith (2022) warn that self-congratulatory, shallow or short-sighted male allyship can paradoxically cause harm. They caution against performative allyship – motivated by trying to impress women or improve performance ratings at work. They also note that allyship can be driven by self-interest, such as only wanting to help someone who is known personally, like a daughter or female friend, as opposed to showing awareness of and challenging the systemic oppression of women. Additionally, male allies should not see themselves as saviours, helping damsels in distress, nor should they view their ally status as alleviating them of scrutiny of their own past or current behaviours. Instead, allyship should involve speaking less and letting the spotlight fall in places that it usually misses.

Through her interview-based research, De Vries (2015) identified male allies who were deemed by others to be genuinely committed. One, Andrew, ensured that he attended events related to championing women at work as well as doing the 'behind the scenes work to secure funding' and 'putting pressure on key decision makers'. He emphasised that men needed to 'walk

the walk not just talk the talk’, and he was seen as going beyond what was expected of him (2015: 25). Another ally, Geoff, viewed championing as being a role model to other men, requiring active, sustained attention: ‘otherwise it will just go back to the way it was and you won’t notice it ’til it’s too late’. As men were the dominant group at work, they were the ones who were required to drive the change: ‘with a powerful male champion, you know, there is no argument’ (2015: 27).

Keep calm and carry on

A criticism of terms like *toxic masculinity* is that the concept problematises male traits and behaviours and, consequently, men generally. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, some views of healthy masculinity involve men adopting behaviours and qualities that are typically associated with women, such as more openly expressing emotions or seeking help. While there are clearly cases where such behaviours should be encouraged (see the section on suicide prevention earlier in this chapter), it is perhaps optimistic to hope that all men, or even the majority of men, will be able to fully embrace anything that casts them as behaving in ways that are associated with femininity. Perhaps an alternative perspective on healthy masculinity, then, could be for men to ‘lean into’ qualities or ways of performing gender that are typically seen as both associated with being male *and* which are healthy. This assumes, of course, that such qualities exist.

As an example of what such a gender performance might look like, when performing certain stressful tasks (e.g., arguments, exams), it may be advantageous to approach the situation in a relatively unemotional and logical way, simply focussing on the matter at hand. We cannot avoid having emotions, but we *can* control the extent to which we attend to them. Acknowledging or talking about emotions might be more appropriate either before or after the task is completed. *Stoicism* is a school of Hellenistic philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium around 300 BC and was popular in Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome. *Stoics* believe that happiness can only be achieved through virtuous acts, with four important values being courage, temperance, justice and wisdom. Stoic thought advocates avoidance of what are called passions – seen as disturbing and misleading evaluative judgements – which cover a range of emotions such as envy, grief, fear, anger, hatred, greed, malice and rapture. Instead, a wise person is encouraged to experience ‘good-feelings’, like cheerfulness, goodwill and reverence. Stoical philosophers like Marcus Aurelius, Seneca and Epictetus have written on the importance of qualities such as strength, bravery and endurance. A recurring theme is the view that facing adversity (whether or not you triumph over it) makes one become a better person, as the following quotes illustrate.

‘nihil’ inquit ‘mihi uidetur infelicius eo cui nihil umquam euenit aduersi’.
Non licuit enim illi se experiri.

No man is more unhappy than he who never faces adversity. For he is not permitted to prove himself.

(Seneca Essays Book 2, *On Providence*, v 2.5)

Ignis aurum probat, miseria fortes viros.

Fire is the test of gold; adversity, of strong men.

(Seneca, *De Providentia*, V.9)

ἀποθανεῖν με δεῖ· μή τι οὖν καὶ στένοντα; δεθῆναι· μή τι καὶ θρηνοῦντα;
φυγαδευθῆναι· μή τις οὖν κωλύει γελῶντα καὶ εὐθυμοῦντα καὶ εὐροοῦντα

I must die. Must I then die lamenting? I must be put in chains. Must I then also lament? I must go into exile. Does any man then hinder me from going with smiles and cheerfulness and contentment?

(Epictetus, *The Discourses*, Chapter 1)

Ὅμοιον εἶναι τῇ ἄκρᾳ, ἣ διηνεκῶς τὰ κύματα προσρήσεται ἢ δὲ ἔστηκε καὶ περὶ αὐτὴν κοιμίζεται τὰ φλεγμήναντα τοῦ ὕδατος

Be like the rock that the waves keep crashing over. It stands firm and tames the fury of the water around it.

(Marcus Aurelius., *Meditations*, Book 4)

It is worth noting the analogy in the second quote, wherein strong men are compared to metal (gold), while in the fourth quote, the stoical man is likened to a rock in a raging sea. We should also note the assumption of the male reader – the first three quotes use the words ‘man’ and ‘men’ and the pronoun ‘he’. Although some stoics believed that the philosophy applied to everyone, and there have been female stoics like Porcia Cato, at the time when these books were written, women had fewer rights in comparison to men.

In terms of modern-day language use, stoicism suggests a particular attitude towards, or even a lack of, language. An examination of the word *stoicism* in the English Web 2021 corpus found that it collocates with terms such as *uncomplaining*, *taciturn*, *silent* and *quiet* (echoing the *Bond said nothing* case study in Chapter 4). It also describes body language, in collocates such as *shrug* and *gaze*. In the same corpus, the word *stoic* also collocates with adjectives indicating masculinity: *heroic*, *square-jawed*, *macho*, *gruff*, *steely*, *chiseled*, *spartan*. In some quarters, at least, stoicism is viewed as a positive, masculine attribute, even as rather sexy.

There have been periods where stoicism was degenerated. So during World War II, many British people displayed remarkable stoicism, particularly during a series of nightly bombings called the Blitz. People referred to the air raids as if they were weather, for example, by stating that an evening was ‘very blitzy’ (Mackay 2002: 261), and ‘Business as usual’ signs were placed in front of bombed-out premises (see Figure 7.3). Although claims of British stoicism are likely to have been exaggerated, helping to further a national narrative (Overy 2013), it is certainly the case that the narrative applied to everyone – the ‘stiff upper lip’ was not the province of men.

However, in recent times, stoicism has been viewed as more of a male quality and, subsequently, seen as problematic. In 2018, the American Psychological Association (APA) released a set of guidelines for practice with men and boys. Within this document, stoicism was viewed critically, positioned alongside a range of other behaviours, all of which are implied to be problematic:

Psychologists can discuss with boys and men the messages they have received about withholding affection from other men to help them understand how components of traditional masculinity such as emotional stoicism, homophobia, not showing vulnerability, self-reliance, and competitiveness might deter them from forming close relationships with male peers (Brooks 1998; Smiler 2016).

APA, Boys and Men Guidelines Group (2018: 11)

Additionally, the APA noted that ‘[p]sychologists also strive to reduce mental health stigma for men by acknowledging and challenging socialized messages related to men’s mental health stigma (e.g., male stoicism, self-reliance)’ (APA, Boys and Men Guidelines Group 2018: 18).

One of the psychologists who helped to draft the guidelines is quoted as providing further clarification on the APA’s attitude to stoicism:

In certain circumstances, traits like stoicism and self-sacrifice can be absolutely crucial. . . . But the same tough demeanor that might save a soldier’s life in a war zone can destroy it at home with a romantic partner or child. There are times when you need to be able to power through. . . . But if you only do that, and you believe that if you don’t do that then you’re somehow less worthy as a person, that’s where you have a problem.

Pappas (2019)

Part of the problem with the recent criticisms of stoicism is that a version of it (sometimes called neo-stoicism) has been embraced by some men’s movements and advocates who have, in turn, been criticised for advocating toxic attitudes. Hammo (2023: online) argues that neo-stoicism can be aggressive and militaristic and contends that authors like David Goggins, Jocko Willink, Jordan Peterson and Ryan Holiday have become ensnared in a ‘market logic that prioritises simplistic, arousing, extreme and polarising



FIGURE 7.3 'Business as usual' in London's Blitz.

Source: CBW/Alamy Stock Photo.

content'. Compared to the classical version, neo-stoicism tends to have a stronger focus on success and self-reliance, which Hammo (2023: online) calls a 'warped kind of masculine ideal'. Murti (2020) notes that the Ancient Greek and Roman Stoics 'were strong proponents of facing and working through emotional turmoil rather than ignoring it' and that modern psychotherapy practices like cognitive behavioural therapy and rational emotive behavioural therapy were influenced by Stoic philosophy. LeBon (2020) reports on a study of 2500 people who had taken an online course called *Stoic Resilience and Mindfulness Training*. Participants were given a range of surveys to measure their attitudes, behaviours and emotions before and after taking the course. Comparisons of the two sets of surveys demonstrated average increases of 13% in terms of (self-reported) resilience, 14% for life satisfaction and 11% for positive emotions, as well as a decrease of 15% for negative emotions (LeBon 2020). It appears, then, that stoicism can have some benefits, although it is important to consider the context in which it is applied and to bear in mind that while some conceptualisations of stoicism may foster healthy masculinity, others may be more toxic.

Conclusion

While there seems to be a reasonable amount of agreement regarding what constitutes toxic masculinity, it is notable that definitions of healthy masculinity are more widely contested. It is generally accepted that healthy masculinity is not toxic masculinity, so that means avoiding toxic behaviours, but there is less agreement on what should be done instead. Different accounts claim that healthy masculinity involves the adoption of behaviours that are more feminine, or a judicious selection of the 'better' masculine behaviours or a careful balance between masculine and feminine. Another definition avoids the specifics, simply offering vague entreaties about being a good man without offering much in terms of what this would entail. In terms of how this relates to language use, there is focus on emotional expressivity and sharing feelings (and particularly problems, as the *Get Out of Your Head* campaign indicates). Additionally, terms like *mansplaining* indicate a conceptualisation of healthy masculinity in terms of *not* using language in certain ways. Practices like calling out toxic forms of masculinity and being an ally indicate that language use needs to be considered in terms of intentionality and context – healthy masculinity is not simply a case of saying or not saying certain words but is linked to an understanding of how patriarchal structures ultimately oppress women and men in different ways. However, there is also disagreement regarding which masculine qualities actually count as healthy or toxic, with stoicism being a key site of tension, where it is argued that context is essential. Additionally, there is the post-structuralist view that the

concept of healthy masculinity devalues femininity and removes male agency while upholding gender binaries.

On the one hand, the lack of consensus around healthy masculinity is disheartening – how are men meant to find a route towards healthy masculinity if there are competing definitions? This definitional variability ensures that whatever men do, someone is likely to criticise them. On the other hand, the lack of consensus could be seen as an opportunity for freedom and creativity, allowing individual men to choose from the options on offer, or to reject them all and come up with a different one, even if that means eschewing the concept of masculinity altogether.

We have seen in this chapter that even when trying to avoid toxic masculinity, men can still end up orienting to or even displaying aspects of hegemonic masculinity. The relationship between hegemonic and toxic masculinity is also up for discussion. While the two offer distinct conceptualisations of masculinity, they are sometimes used in the same breath, even synonymously. Is there a way for healthy masculinity to also contain elements of hegemonic masculinity, or should anything that sounds like hegemonic masculinity be challenged? Finally, what do the debates and definitional issues around healthy masculinity mean for the ways that men use language and the ways that language is used about men? If our goal is for a happier, more inclusive society, should we uphold certain role models of masculinity (and if so, which ones)? Just as importantly, how can we ensure that such role models will be followed? With these questions in mind, we turn to our final chapter.

Notes

- 1 www.gq-magazine.co.uk/grooming/gallery/best-face-serum
- 2 www.bustle.com/entertainment/soft-jock-travis-kelce-jimmy-butler-toxic-masculinity
- 3 www.komuitjekop.be/
- 4 From www.alaaddin.it/_TESORO_FIABE/FD_Campania_Sole_Luna_e_Talia.html
- 5 www.sfgate.com/disneyland/article/2021-04-snow-whites-enchanted-wish-changes-witch-16144353.php

8

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we look back and forward. We first consider the key themes and findings that have emerged from our analyses across the book, casting a critical eye over them. Then, we ask whether the language used by men needs to change and, if so, in what ways might that be achieved? Related to this, we also ask, is it enough just to change language? Finally, we end the book by addressing some of the areas for future research that we believe would be fruitful in terms of providing further insights regarding the ways that language is used by and about men and boys, and for exploring what implications such language use might have for society.

Key themes

This book has focussed mostly on men, although in order to define linguistic behaviours that are typically masculine, we have compared language used by men against language used by women, and we have also looked at how men's language has been used to dominate others. A key theme that has emerged in this book is that some forms of masculinity are oppressive and harmful, both to the men who embody these and to everyone else. A potential criticism of this view is that it is overly simplistic and holds only men accountable. The term *toxic femininity* is less common than *toxic masculinity*, and there is less agreement on what it means. It could refer to the role of women in upholding hegemonic masculinity, through being meek, self-sacrificing and overly emotional, or it could refer to women adopting the same kinds of traits and behaviours that are associated with toxic masculinity – being aggressive, competitive and dominating (the term *Karen*, for example, denotes a middle-class, White woman who is seen as weaponising her privilege). It could be argued that terms

like *toxic femininity* are unhelpful as they do not acknowledge the systemic oppression of women, instead trying to create a false equivalence between men's and women's access to power, a bit like the term *womansplaining*, which we discussed in Chapter 7. We take the view that consideration of women's language should play a role in terms of helping us to understand hegemonic or toxic masculinity, particularly considering ways in which some forms of women's language use might result in a complicit stance, while other forms could help to challenge the status quo.

While our research has shown that there are many different masculinities – ergo, many different ways of being a man – the stereotype of the hegemonically masculine man was very difficult to get away from. We found, for example, that the men who were able to deviate from hegemonic masculinity with few consequences tended to be those who were able to most aptly demonstrate it, like the bodybuilders discussed in Chapter 4. And even when people actively tried to encourage men to reject hegemonic masculinity, they would often somehow pivot back round to it. The online forums on anxiety and veganism we examined attest to this. On the anxiety forum, people argued that 'it takes a bigger man' to admit that they're struggling, while vegan men boasted that being vegan made them more masculine than men who ate meat. This kind of legitimisation strategy is one that protects men who go against the norm from gender policing and shaming, although it can likely only take us so far. An alternative approach involves being true to your authentic 'self', making it clear that you're fine with not appearing to be a 'real man'. Such an approach could represent a more far-reaching way of dismantling the hegemonic system, although there may be a higher individual cost.

Hegemonic masculinity sees power as a ladder or a pyramid, with people at fairly fixed positions in a hierarchy, but it perhaps does not recognise that, at times, power can function more like a network or a web. A post-structuralist view would hold that people may be more powerful in some contexts and less powerful in others. Baxter (2003: 10) writes, a 'feminist post-structuralist perspective on discourse suggests that females always adopt multiple subject positions, and that it is far too reductive to constitute women in general, or indeed any individual woman, simply as victims of male oppression'. Viewing power as being both complex and related to numerous, intersecting identities helps to reduce our reliance on rigid gender binaries. This could represent another way of enabling a broader perspective on the boundaries of masculinity.

Surveys and census data indicate that a small number of people, especially younger people, are starting to identify as nonbinary (e.g., 0.26% of people aged 16–24 in the 2021 UK Census),¹ suggesting a slow movement towards rejection of the male/female, man/woman, masculine/feminine binaries. Another means by which we can challenge the harms caused by binary gender ideologies could be through broadening the meanings of terms like *masculinity* and *femininity*, particularly so that the former is not so strongly

associated with hegemony and toxicity. A problem with masculinity is the rigidity of its definition, which, partly through neoliberal advertising campaigns that target male (and female) consumers, has helped to prop up the system. For example, adverts for LEGO in the 1960s–1980s tended to show boys and girls playing together or proudly holding up models of a range of structures they'd made. But by the 2000s, LEGO was marketed in a more gendered way, with boys shown playing with castles, spaceships and racing cars, while girls were directed towards the LEGO Friends series, which was focussed on shopping malls, puppies and makeovers (as demonstrated by studies of toy marketing discourse, discussed in Chapter 3). If definitions of male, female, man and woman become narrower and fixed, it is likely that more and more people will feel that those definitions do not apply to them.

Wiegman (2002: 51) suggests that we should 'de-emphasise the normative relationship between men and masculinity'. When in Chapter 2 we examined the words that were most distinctive of male speech compared to female speech, we found that they all confirmed the expected stereotypes. But the important point to take from that chapter was that these keywords did not indicate *absolute* differences. While those words do tend to be used more by men, their use is certainly not exclusive to men, and overall, there were not very many male keywords. The male keywords we did identify tended to be indexed in masculine gender performances because they are so distinctively associated with male speech. However, most of the words that men use are *not* keywords; most of the words that men use are used about as much by men as they are by women, and that's actually the bigger story. Another story is that there is actually quite a lot of linguistic variation between individual men. But this reality raises the question of how we make people more aware of these kinds of findings, especially when they go against the received wisdom that 'men are from Mars, women are from Venus'?

Time to change

It is difficult enough to challenge the gender differences discourse. A further challenge is convincing large numbers of people that the ways that men use language are sometimes damaging, without putting a burden of guilt and responsibility on individuals who might be in relatively powerless positions themselves for much of the time (and whose capacity to change or challenge such harmful discursive practices is thus limited). Ironically, it can sometimes be those with the least power who are most tied to hegemonic masculinity, because it at least gives them *something*. There are also those who benefit greatly from hegemonic masculinity and see no advantage in changing or challenging it. Negative messaging – e.g., 'men are bad and must change their ways' – runs the risk of backfiring or bringing about a backlash which is both divisive and counter-productive. It might, then, be the case

that messages about hegemonic and toxic masculinity are likely to be more successful in terms of bringing about behaviour change if they avoid shame and blame-based narratives and focus instead on identifying and encouraging positive aspects of masculinity, which could also help to incorporate a sense of pride in being a man. From another perspective, it could be argued that if we broaden our conceptualisation of what it means to be a man, this does not mean that women win and men lose, but that everyone wins. Showing how everyone is damaged by the gender hierarchy, and how everyone plays an often-unconscious role in maintaining it, would be helpful. Campaigns like *Kom Uit Je Kop* (*Get Out of Your Head*), which encourage men to talk about mental health issues, show that alternatives can be offered, in ways that do not seek to harangue or threaten a man's sense of his masculinity. With that said, it is important to aim for a form of gender equality that involves leveling up as opposed to bringing down. In recent decades, men have been subjected to the same kinds of pressures as women to conform to increasingly unrealistic standards of physical beauty, partly due to the kinds of images of men that are sold as aspirational, most notably in advertising. Equality, of a kind, has been achieved, but the real winner has been neoliberalism.

As we pointed out at the end of Chapter 6, while individuals can make choices about the forms of language they use, it is also important to frame change in terms of systems and to consider how political, economic, social and linguistic systems reinforce one another, and how these help to enshrine patriarchy. Our understandings of masculinity are embedded in decades-old, or even centuries-old, institutions: fraternities, industry, men's clubs, religions, political systems, education, medicine and healthcare, law, journalism, marketing, sports, Hollywood, pornography. All of this means that while an individual man might embody toxic masculinity, it is actually these kinds of systems that provide the rules (both formal and informal), as well as role models for such ways of being. Therefore, while it is important to change and challenge harmful performances of masculinity by individuals, greater awareness of these systems and their relationships to one another, and to individuals, is also essential.

As we saw in the previous chapter, terms like *toxic masculinity* and *healthy masculinity* have been criticised for casting men as victims of abstract forces, for maintaining gender binaries and for devaluing femininity (Waling 2019). Simply telling men that having a few feminine traits is a good thing, or repackaging those traits in order to widen our definition of masculinity, risks upholding the current system. An alternative would be to have femininity and androgyny open as valued options for men, without having to repack-age these. Waling advises that we should encourage femininity as a valued expression of gender, regardless of our gender identity and assigned sexed body, rather than fixating men and boys on masculinity. However, Waling acknowledges that this can lead to a further problem – the coupling of certain

traits with male and female, which reinforces gender binaries. Rather than breaking down gender binaries, we therefore become engaged in building up new ones, considering anything non-masculine as lesser. Perhaps, then, we need to consider just how useful concepts like masculinity and femininity actually are.

Waling's recommendations would result in a more radical transformation of society, as opposed to one that simply advocates for 'healthy masculinity', and she recommends that academics reflect on the divergence between academic theory and public discourse, particularly considering how concepts can become simplified, which can have the effect of perpetuating existing values. One way forward would be for post-structuralist critiques to provide alternatives that go beyond theory in order to show what societies that break down gender binaries, and which value femininity, might look like, and to demonstrate how such societies might benefit everyone.

Mind your language?

So where does language come in? We could argue that language is a primary way in which dominance is expressed and cemented, and it is also the main way in which we convey understandings and representations of gender. So, encouraging people to think more carefully about the kinds of language they use and the ways that they internalise the messages they receive through language is essential in terms of creating a more equal and tolerant world. At the same time, it could be argued that language is merely a glaze, and that changing language alone won't really have much impact on people's lives. In other words, a man might take pains to avoid using sexist and homophobic language, but he may still carry out domestic violence or be complicit in the fact that he earns more money than a woman who does the same job as he does. Changing language alone and hoping that wider structural change will follow is perhaps idealistic, although we would argue that it is still important to interrogate the role of language in the maintenance and performance of hegemonic and toxic masculinity.

Even if we *can* convince large numbers of people that the world would benefit from a change when it comes to how we perform and perceive gender, Chapter 7 indicated that there is not a consensus regarding how men ought to change. One view is that men should use language in ways that are more empathic and sensitive (either embracing aspects of femininity or reframing masculinity so that it is broader and encompasses those qualities and behaviours). Another view might advocate celebrating aspects of masculinity that could be seen as non-toxic, perhaps such as being heroic and stoic (but not neo-stoic). In line with the view of masculinities as multiple and complex, we would suggest that there are numerous pathways to healthy masculinity. However, we would also advocate for one aspect of language that tends to be

overlooked – listening. If you are the person in the room who is doing most of the talking, your opportunities for empathy and understanding are likely going to be limited.

At times, our book has painted a bleak picture of the linguistic landscape regarding masculinity. However, we should also point out that, in some contexts, the situation seems to be improving. The Brown family consists of corpora each comprising 1 million words from 500 written texts. The different corpora reflect written language use in 1931, 1961, 1991, 2006 and 2021, and comparisons between them help to provide snapshots of changing uses of English. Baker (2023: 424) shows that at each sampling point, male pronouns are collectively more frequent than female pronouns – this being just one way that sexism flows through language use. However, with each new corpus, the gap narrows. In 1931, there were 16,931 uses of male pronouns and 7,219 uses of female ones. By 2021, the equivalent figures were 12,501 and 8,825, respectively. The difference between male and female pronoun frequency is still statistically significant in 2021, but it has been shrinking, and the trend suggests that in coming decades the frequencies will meet (at least for people who publish British English in the UK).

We also note how terms like *mansplain* and campaigns like #metoo and #heforshe have employed language to raise awareness about forms of toxic masculinity. Marshall et al. (2020: 586), in their study of male bodybuilders on *Instagram*, argue that in recent years there has been an ‘overall softening of masculine ideals’, evidenced by emotional expressivity and self-objectification, although the male social media users in their study still situated themselves within hegemonic masculine norms. Understandings of masculinity are already different (arguably more complex) compared to when Connell conceived the theory of hegemonic masculinity, indicating a changing gender landscape. But we also note the rise of misogynist ideologies, particularly online, as well as the recent growing popularity of right-wing and populist movements in many countries around the world (including in countries that have had long-standing liberal democracies). Such developments advise us to be cautious against taking an overly optimistic view. Change can be slow and sometimes a case of ‘two steps forward, one step back’. Change can also be faster in some parts of the world than others. And in some countries, gender equality movements can be cast in opposition to nationalistic movements, with some political parties priding themselves on being different to countries that advocate for equality. Adherence to masculine stereotypes is an easy way for the leaders of a country that feels threatened to project an image of toughness to outsiders.

In some countries, it is especially difficult to challenge hegemonic or toxic masculinity. In 2023, the Global Expression Report noted that just 13% of the world’s population lives in countries that allow freedom of expression, communication and participation. Meanwhile, 34% of people live in countries where these freedoms are in crisis. In many countries, women do

not have rights and opportunities which are comparable to men. For people living in such countries, there may be severe consequences for expressing ideas and views about gender that question the status quo, or which appear to criticise a nation's government. Yet at the same time, outside voices that are critical in a similar way could be accused of cultural insensitivity and, in some cases, of imposing colonising values. It is important that no country or culture is overlooked, yet research on masculinity and language is likely to continue to be an uneven endeavour, focussed more on regions in which there are fewer consequences for speaking up. A challenge, then, is to encourage and enable research from all parts of the world, and to do so without imposing a unidirectional influence or a 'saviour' perspective – a point we develop further in the next section.

Looking to the future

Although this book has referred to research from a wide range of cultural contexts, and presented case studies in various languages, we are aware of the Anglocentric nature of the field of Language and Masculinities, with many studies either taking place in predominantly English-speaking countries or being published in English-language journals. In 1965, the US government issued a memorandum stating that English had become one of the world's most important languages, and offered to provide assistance to countries that wanted to teach English to their citizens (Bundy 1965). Since then, English has become a *lingua franca* for scientific research. This situation places people who do not have English as a first language at a disadvantage. A journal article published about a language that is not English will likely need to provide translations of examples, as we have done in this book, and give additional cultural context, all of which can have consequences for how much can be conveyed within a journal's word limits. Academics forced to work in this way may not have the full range of English idiomatic expressions open to them, meaning that some reviewers might criticise their work for not sounding 'polished' enough. The edited collection on masculinity and language by Milani (2015) is an exemplary achievement, covering research from Brazil, Israel, Singapore and South Africa, among other countries. We hope to see more work on masculinity and language that goes beyond English-speaking contexts, and we would encourage academics and publishers to consider the points above during commissioning and review processes.

In some cases, it was simply not possible for us to gain access to large corpora in order to make generalisable points about men's and women's language use. Collecting and transcribing the 11 million words of naturally occurring (British English) speech that we used in Chapter 2 is no mean feat. Such an endeavour requires significant time, money, expertise and perseverance. At the time of writing, the team that created this spoken corpus is

working on a US version. We would like to see similar kinds of resources for all of the world's languages. This would enable a much broader range of sociolinguistic analyses, including research focussing on language and masculinity, to be carried out.

The spoken corpus we used in Chapter 2 had been annotated for speakers' sex, age, social class, dialect and education level, allowing researchers to carry out more complex explorations of intersectional identity and language use, which go beyond the research reported in this book (see Baker and Brookes (2021) for a discussion). As noted earlier, an intersectional approach can help us to break out of research that reifies the gender binary, although we would note difficulties in making research *fully* intersectional. There are so many aspects of identity to consider that it becomes extremely difficult to take them all into account. As a result, we might end up focussing on those aspects of identity that are easiest to observe (e.g., because they are visible) or that are easier to ask people about (e.g., because they are less tabooed than others). If we collect enough data, at some point some speakers are likely to orient to (e.g., write or talk about) the less-researched aspects of their identity. Such instances might provide a 'way in' for analysts. However, a challenge remains in determining how we can carry out meaningful intersectional research without overlooking aspects of identity that matter. Further to this, Koller (2015) notes how some forms of language data, such as language use relating to desire, tend to occur in the private sphere and can therefore be difficult or even impossible for researchers to access. Faced with such a methodological challenge, she suggests that 'fiction that anecdotally reflects real-life narratives and experience is the next best choice' (Koller 2015: 169). Online contexts, where anonymity is achieved more easily by communicators, could also be utilised, with due care given to ethical considerations.

Studies adopting an intersectional perspective often consider masculinity within a single context, where certain masculinities are marginalised or subordinated. For example, the intersection of race and gender results in Black men being marginalised in countries like the US and the UK. It would be helpful, then, to see more examination of cultural contexts in which the typical hegemonic subject is not a White, able-bodied, rich, heterosexual, cisgender man (e.g., how do people orient to hegemonic masculinity in places like Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and China?). It is also relevant to consider different cultural contexts more generally. So, how do the dominant political ideologies and religions of a society influence forms of masculinity and language in that context? Much work on masculinity considers democratic, neoliberal and broadly secular societies, but what about societies that operate under political systems that could be classed as socialist, communist, authoritarian, totalitarian or anarchistic? And how do religions like Catholicism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Shinto and Taoism influence linguistic expressions of masculinity? There is also value in tracking the development

of representations and lexical indices of masculinity by looking to the past. We can only really understand where we are, and where we are going, if we have considered where we have come from. With this in mind, we would encourage more diachronic and historical research on language and masculinity, while acknowledging the difficulties in obtaining older forms of data.

Collecting data from online sources is easier than building, say, a large corpus of spoken language, and in this book we also relied on large corpora of patient feedback and online fora, where we had information about the sex identities of those who contributed. We also collected corpora of news articles from an online database, where even though we did not always know the sex of each author, we were nevertheless able to explore the representations of relevant concepts such as ‘healthy masculinity’. Between 2012 and 2019, the average amount of time people spent online increased from 90 to 145 minutes, and this has remained fairly stable since (Dixon 2024). Online platforms offer relatively accessible forms of data for researchers, as well as being reflective of the ways that people use language in contemporary contexts. However, such sources do not come without problems. There can be copyright and ethical issues around downloading large amounts of online data, and many social network providers place limits on what can be collected. Additionally, it can be difficult to know exactly who or what is communicating online, particularly as people can assume alternative personas, and bots can be adept at impersonating humans. Any claims about ‘men’s language’ based on online texts thus need to come with caveats, and such claims should not be interrogated without consideration of their context.

One question we might want to ask is, why has the concept of toxic masculinity become so popular in recent years? Is this actually an encouraging development – the result of increased awareness of age-old misogynistic practices – and a sign of positive change? Or is its increased take-up instead due to a worrying increase in the kinds of problematic expressions of masculinity that the concept aims to describe and challenge? Perhaps it is coincidental that the term has become popular during the same period that has seen the growing centrality of online platforms to the ways we communicate. People communicating online can conceal their (offline) identities, if so desired, and they can also reach enormous audiences, potentially consisting of millions of others. There is a competitive element relating to how people attend to language online which is missing from face-to-face communication. Algorithms (which increase user engagement, enhancing profits for the owners of social media platforms) can create a feedback loop, wherein some messages are prioritised over others. As a result, messages that are shocking, simplistic and short tend to have an advantage in this context. We note, for example, how debates around trans people have become extremely polarised on social media, raising questions about the extent to which such online platforms enable empathy and conflict resolution. Such contexts have also facilitated

the growth of the incel movement and helped to platform men with views that are congruent with toxic masculinity. For example, it has been reported that some algorithms result in violent and misogynistic content being shown to boys, based upon them displaying interest in topics like mixed martial arts (BBC 2024b). It seems likely, to us, that online platforms will remain as key sites of conflict (and polarisation) around issues to do with gender in coming years and will continue to provide spaces on which research can be carried out and through which it can be disseminated.

Another potential area of study concerns the ways in which AI can be used to communicate ideologies around masculinity. This is a subject we considered in Chapter 3, when we asked ChatGPT to tell us what makes a good father and a good mother. As generative AI technology continues to develop, its outputs are likely to become more sophisticated and less easy to distinguish from human communication. Generative AI tools are trained on large language models (and other large textual databases) which draw mostly on online texts. The kinds of ideologies and biases that exist within such online language are likely to be represented within the training data on which such generative AI tools are based, and are thus likely to be reproduced in the output given by such tools (see, for example, Putland et al. 2023a). As generative AI tools are increasingly taken up by creative professionals, there is a risk that such biases and ideologies, including oppressive ideas around masculinities and gender, will be reproduced in texts with a wide reach. Moreover, as AI permeates a wider range of contexts where communication is required (e.g., service encounters, teaching, therapy, even romance), it is likely that our experiences and expectations around masculinity will become increasingly algorithmically shaped. The need to examine such AI-generated outputs critically, and through an intersectional lens, is therefore a pressing one, not least as it is likely that, as such AI-generated discourse will itself inevitably make up an ever larger part of the models on which such AI tools are trained, the biases and ideologies inherent therein will become all the more deeply entrenched and ‘hard-wired’ in AI-generated discourse. In other words, generative AI will increasingly ‘self-cannibalise’, being based on language data that includes text that such tools have, themselves, produced. This has the potential to create cycles in which the ideologies that generative AI tools reproduce become ever more deeply embedded within its outputs over time.

Finally, we would like to encourage more focus on research that considers the ways in which masculinity might be realised positively through language. It is perhaps easier to criticise and point out what should change than it is to identify cases where men are using language well and getting things right (or possibly, such cases are not viewed as being as interesting). However, such research could not only provide descriptions but also explanations, helping to answer questions like, ‘What are these men achieving with language, and why?’ Researchers investigating such topics could also relate their findings

to social conditions – in other words, they could think about how we might encourage more of this sort of language use and the kinds of positive or healthy masculinities that it can engender.

The world has changed a great deal since Johnson and Meinhof published *Language and Masculinity* in 1997. While many of the findings presented in that book remain salient today, masculinity has also become increasingly problematised, with debates around it feeling like they are stronger and more divisive than ever. There is greater awareness around the power of language, in terms of its capacity to shape gendered identities and gendered discourses. To us, performances of masculinity feel both more complex and exaggerated more than they did in 1997. This situation perhaps reflects a world with increasingly polarised viewpoints becoming more fiercely competitive. It is therefore difficult to predict the future, although if current trends continue, we would expect to see a lack of unifying discourses, resulting in a wider range of masculinities amid ideological disparity.

Whatever the future holds, we hope to have shown that there is much value in pursuing the topic of language and masculinities, both as a way of better understanding how people use language to perform and represent masculinities, and as a way of increasing awareness of the ways in which such performances and representations are shaped and constrained by wider social structures.

Note

- 1 www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/genderidentity/articles/genderidentityageandsexenglandandwalescensus2021/2023-01-25

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