

**Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse and Hegemonic Masculinity: Insights into  
Discourses of Gender and Violence**

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**We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard:**

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### ABSTRACT

This thesis reports on a discourse analysis of thirteen qualitative interviews with male survivors of sexual abuse. My analysis focuses on participants' changing experiences and understandings of what it means to be 'masculine', and how they saw these having been influenced by the experience of being abused. An important finding was that many participants expressed concern regarding their invisibility as male survivors, noting that contemporary discourses on violence typically position men as its perpetrators, rather than its victims. I analyze the significance of the absence of a discourse of male victimization in terms both of its practical implications for male survivors and its theoretical implications for critical work on hegemonic masculinity. Based on the premise that hegemonic masculinity is a cornerstone of patriarchal systems, I conclude by using the experiences of my participants as a means of exploring the potential for men to experience 'oppression' under patriarchy.

**Examiners:**

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## Introduction

My interest in the experiences of men came from a number of sources, one of which was a feminist theory course that I took in the fourth year of my undergraduate degree. Over the course of the term, I became very interested in dichotomies – in the way that, over and over again, our understanding of the social world seemed to polarize into binary categories that were oppositional and mutually exclusive: self/other, good/bad, male/female, and so forth. I was intrigued by the way in which subjective or interpretive binaries, such as good/bad, came to be associated with particular identity binaries, such as male/female. In particular, the dichotomy that was most problematic for me at the time was that of perpetrator/victim, insofar as this presupposes that the former are necessarily male, the latter female.

Feminism has made great strides in connecting the experiences of female victims of violence perpetrated by men to larger social theories of patriarchy, which explain gender relations in terms of men's power over women (Lenton, 1995). Male violence has been interpreted sociologically as a vehicle of social control, enabling men to keep women 'in their place' when self-regulatory methods such as gender norms and social pressure are not enough. Indeed, theorists who look at violence note that even the threat of violence is often enough to ensure that women comply with the feminine role to some extent – that they exert themselves in trying to please men, for example, or that they take on passive roles in relationships – in order to prevent violence from occurring (Adams, 1994).

The work that has come out of feminist approaches to victimization has allowed women to recognize that their individual experiences are part of a broader social pattern, which has meaning not only in terms of explaining why the violence occurs, but also in terms of taking the problem out of the realm of the personal, where individual women struggle with private troubles, and placing it in the realm of the social, where it is conceptualized as a public issue requiring a public response. It was this shift in understanding violence against women that led to the development of women's centres and safe houses, trauma support programs for survivors of sexual abuse and assault, and

ultimately, legislative changes<sup>1</sup> (Chasteen, 2001).

However, at the same time, the focus on female victims and male perpetrators has created a discourse about gender and violence that considers only one possibility – the dichotomy of perpetrator/victim corresponding to men’s and women’s roles respectively. This may be the dominant interaction in terms of incidence; however, as a *discourse* it has potentially negative effects for those whose experiences do not fit.

Discourses can be understood as ways of thinking and talking about everyday experiences and observations that construct ‘reality’ in certain ways (more will be said on this in the next section). Discourses are imbued with a certain power in our society; by virtue of their accessibility and dominance, they teach us what is ‘true’ (Canham, 1999). When the focus of discourses of violence is almost universally on men as perpetrators and women as victims, these images are reinforced in our minds as being the ‘truth’ about the gendered nature of violence in a patriarchal society. The complexities of the phenomenon, which includes men who are perpetrators and victims, and women who are both as well, are lost. Given this, it is no wonder that only 30 years ago, prominent experts on child abuse were adamant about the fact that sexual victimization simply did not happen to boys (Mendel, 1995).

The power of the male perpetrator/female victim discourse is beginning to erode as both female perpetrators and male victims move into public view. Nonetheless, there is still a disproportionate silence about these types of victims and perpetrators that prevents us from expanding our theories of patriarchy so that they are able to explain more accurately the relationship between gender and violence. One way to address this gap in our awareness is simply to ensure that research focuses on groups that have been hitherto neglected. One such group is male survivors of childhood abuse.

The need for attention to this particular group was made clear to me through my own experiences, as I was once the partner of a male survivor of childhood sexual abuse. While I was learning theories about masculinity that supported the idea of the male perpetrator (i.e., that boys were taught to be aggressive and unemotional, that they were taught to objectify women as sexual objects and as ‘property’, and that they learned that being masculine entailed exerting dominance over others), I was living with a man whose experiences were the antithesis of all that. He had been the recipient of another man’s

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<sup>1</sup> for instance, the amendment of the law regarding sexual assault in 1983 that made it a crime for a husband to rape his wife.

aggression, had struggled with deep feelings of fear, shame, powerlessness, and sadness, and had been dominated by others. This experience simply didn't fit with what I'd learned in my university courses.

I began to think that male survivors of sexual abuse might have a story to tell about the kind of 'masculinity' that was being used as both evidence and explanation of men's role as perpetrator (i.e. an understanding of masculinity as aggressive and potentially violent). Even more so than male victims of other kinds of abuse, survivors of sexual abuse might have something to say about the way in which masculinity is constructed in our society. Sexual prowess and sexual aggression – explicitly heterosexual – are highly valued characteristics of *hegemonic masculinity* – the legitimized and valued form(s) of masculinity in our society today (Connell, 1995)<sup>2</sup>. Male survivors of childhood sexual abuse seemed to be in a unique position to comment on these characteristics, and on the way in which masculinity in its hegemonic forms might affect men's understandings of themselves as gendered individuals.

It was important to me that I be able to connect men's personal understandings of hegemonic masculinity, their thoughts on what gender meant to them personally, and their experiences as male victims with a larger sociological picture. I wanted to work from their experiences to create better theories about gender and violence, opening up a space for male survivors to have a legitimate voice in discussions about abuse.

As a result, this thesis has three aims. First, I want to identify the ways in which male survivors understand their own sense of gender, especially in relation to hegemonic notions of masculinity. Secondly, I want to explore the intersection of masculinity and sexual victimization, examining the ways in which hegemonic masculinity presents difficulties to male survivors in understanding and healing from their traumas. Finally, it is important that this work contribute significantly to sociological theories about gender and violence. To that end, I explore different discourses about masculinity and try to identify some ways in which a re-theorizing of masculinity can take place in order to better acknowledge men's potential to be victims in a patriarchal system.

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<sup>2</sup>Connell later modified his theory insofar as he began to refer to hegemonic masculinities (e.g. see Connell, 1996). However, the criteria that are necessary for the designation of a particular set of characteristics as one 'masculinity' instead of another are a subject of some debate (e.g. see Clatterbaugh, 1998). This debate is beyond my scope. For the purposes of this thesis, I will refer to hegemonic masculinity in the singular, with the understanding that an hegemonic form of masculinity is one among a plurality of potential masculinities – albeit, the one that is dominant in a given society.

Parker (1992) notes that “discourses provide frameworks for debating the value of one way of talking about reality over other ways” (p. 5); this valuation has tangible implications. For instance, discourses about violence that speak exclusively about female victims may lead to legislative and funding decisions that favour services for women over men, if they are valued over other discourses (Wright, 2001). By addressing this issue at the level of discourse, therefore, I believe that the potential is created to address it on a more concrete level as well. Thus, I hope that through my research, I can also make a contribution to the lives of male survivors by creating a space where their voices can be heard, and by developing the potential for greater resources to be directed to them in the future.

## Chapter One: Literature Review

My project began with my recognition that the education I had received up until that point had taught me little about masculinity, and even less about male victims. It was therefore essential for me to conduct a thorough review of the literature available in both of these areas. I did this by using a number of sources, including online library databases (such as Sociological Abstracts), recommendations from professors, committee members and colleagues, and suggestions from counselors who worked with male survivors of sexual abuse. The group of people – male survivors of sexual abuse – had been the starting point of my interest in this topic, so it was a logical starting point for my exploration of the literature. I read a number of books and articles pertaining to male survivors, particularly looking at those studies that presented information with regard to male survivors' perception of or feelings towards ideas about masculinity.

However, much of this work on male survivors of sexual abuse was psychological in nature. While this provided me with insight into the effects of sexual victimization on men as individuals, the literature was not focused on connecting these experiences to broader social phenomenon. It was important to me to connect my research with sociological work on masculinity, patriarchal power, and discourses of violence. I thus turned my attention to sociological works on masculinity. Using the techniques described above, I was able to identify a number of key texts. Of particular usefulness was Connell's (1995) book, *Masculinities*, in which his conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity is explored. Others included works by Hearn (for instance, see Hearn, 1987), Humphries (see Metcalf & Humphries, 1985), Stoltenberg (see Stoltenberg, 1990, 1999, & 2000) and others who explored the idea of masculinity from a critically reflective (and often self-reflective) stance. Working from these sources, I was able to refine my search to explore other facets of the academic work that has been done on masculinity, consulting new sources as I identified areas in which I needed to know more. This chapter represents a culmination of the knowledge that I gained through this process.

My theoretical approach to the research questions is also important to explicate, as it influenced the areas of literature that I chose to review, and the way in which I have

used this literature. I am approaching my research from a specific set of assumptions, namely, those of social constructionism<sup>3</sup>.

Burr (1995) identifies a number of key concepts that differentiate social constructionism from other theoretical paradigms. These include an acknowledgement of the historical and cultural specificity of any phenomenon, the idea that knowledge is sustained by social processes and is inextricably connected to social action, an emphasis on language and discourse as a primary means of shaping everyday understandings of reality and, relatedly, a focus on social interaction and the process of creating and maintaining discourses. According to this perspective, it is “neither in the individual psyche nor in the social structures” that explanations for phenomena are to be found (Burr, 1995, pp. 7-8). Rather, social constructionism inquires into the interactions in which people engage, because “it is through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated” (Burr, 1995, p. 4).

The assumption that there is no one objective ‘reality’, but rather any number of subjectively experienced, contextual realities, thus informs my research. Similarly, I approach ‘masculinity’ with the understanding that what I – and my participants – currently understand the word to mean is both historically and culturally bounded. Culture in this instance can be understood as a system that connects individuals historically, religiously, geographically, politically, linguistically and/or philosophically through the communication, exchange and perpetuation of cognitive elements, comprising the knowledge and beliefs of a people, symbolic elements that encompass verbal and non-verbal forms of communication, and normative elements, which are the behavioral expectations of a people, as well as material artifacts (Naiman, 1997). It is a fluid and changing system, “not only created by humans but... in the continuous process of being recreated by them” (Naiman, 1997, p. 50).

Similarly, ideas within a culture – such as what ‘masculinity’ is, are defined and redefined in this process of reproducing culture. Thus, masculinity is not an unchanging natural state, but a collection of ideas, images, and behaviors that have come to be associated with the category ‘men’ through a number of means, including being passed

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<sup>3</sup> Several other researchers have approached their exploration of masculinity from a social constructionist perspective as well (for instance, see Connell, 1995; Horwood, 2000; and Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Undoubtedly their work has influenced my choice in theoretical approach.

down through families; education; the orientation of government, business, and other ‘formal’ institutions regarding men’s roles in these institutions; images and ideas of ‘the masculine’ that are presented through cultural artifacts such as television, books, or leisure activities targeted specifically towards men (among other things); and interpersonal relationships with peers, romantic partners, authorities, and others.

These collections of ideas, images, and behaviors can be understood as discourses about masculinity. I use discourse here in the Foucauldian sense, to mean that such collections are presented as “specific form[s] of extortion of truth, appearing historically and in specific places” (Foucault, 1978, p. 97). In a sense, then, discourses can be likened to what I call ‘packages of knowing’ – they provide specific ways of talking about a phenomenon that individuals can then ‘pick up’ in their own conceptualization of that phenomenon, and in their discussions of it with others. This process involves the exercise of power; that is to say, discourses can be mobilized strategically to support political and ideological positions on a given issue. Because of this, Foucault (1978) points out that:

We must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable... but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies.... Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy (pp. 100-101).

To say something is discursively produced, then, is to say that these elements have been mobilized in a particular situation for a particular purpose, whether or not the person mobilizing them is cognizant of their effects. It is thus important to understand the ways in which discourse about gender “transmits and produces” power (Foucault, 1978, p. 101), a strategy that Connell (1995) attempts to describe through his conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity.

## ***1. Theorizing Masculinity and Hegemony***

Over the past two decades, there has been an increasing focus on the social construction of masculinity in contemporary society. Rather than viewing masculinity as

some sort of essential characteristic, which every individual born male can exhibit, masculinity theorists have emphasized the ways in which social structures, including public discourse, shape our construction of the masculine. As Connell (1995) explained:

Definitions of masculinity are deeply enmeshed in the history of institutions and of economic structures. Masculinity is not just an idea in the head, or a personal identity. It is also extended in the world, merged in organized social relations (p. 29).

There exist a number of ways of constructing gender, some of which are accorded more esteem and privilege in a given society than others. According to Connell (1996), “the form of masculinity that is culturally dominant in a given setting is called *hegemonic masculinity*” (p. 209, emphasis in original). Such a form of masculinity exists in “a position of cultural authority and leadership,” in which it is highly visible and sought-after by men (Connell, 1996, p. 209).

It is important to note, however, that hegemonic does not mean uncontested; indeed, one feature of Connell’s work on masculinity is the way in which relations between different forms of masculinity are constructed. He explains that “hegemony... does not mean total control. It is not automatic and may be disrupted – or even disrupt itself” (1995, p. 37). Popular culture, social structures, and individual behaviors all play their part in reinforcing hegemony, and each of these can also be used to resist it. Important to this understanding is the way in which masculinities are enacted:

Masculinities do not exist prior to social behavior, either as bodily states or as fixed personalities. Rather, masculinities come into existence as people act. They are accomplished in everyday conduct or organizational life, as configurations of social practice (Connell, 1996, p. 210).

It is through such interactions that masculinities become embedded in institutional practices, which serve to maintain them. For Connell (1995), then, the “processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives” are of significance (p. 71). Others, however, have argued for a stronger recognition of the role that discourses might have to play in the maintenance of gender forms. After all, as Wetherell and Edley (1999) note, “people are, at the same time, both the products and the producers” of social discourse (p.338). That is to say, while Connell’s (1995) work on

masculinity served to illuminate the way in which different social constructions are mobilized to reinforce each other, and the ways in which men comply with or resist hegemonic ideals, he does not explain in any detail where these ideals developed in the first place. Wetherell and Edley (1999) argue that the characteristics that Connell attributes to hegemonic masculinity are, in fact, discursive practices:

Hegemony is a version of the world which is reality defining. Such versions are plural, inconsistent, achieved through discursive work, constantly needing to be brought into being over and over again. That is the chief character of hegemony rather than its definition as an already known and fixed set of ruling ideas. It is a relative position in a struggle for taken-for-grantedness (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 352).

Discursively produced versions of the world also provide people with accounts that they can mobilize in order to develop an understanding of their own identities. In order to comprehend the way in which men take on masculine identities, then, we need to have a sense of the discourses available to them about masculinity, and the relative values of these in relation to each other. Viewing masculinities as discursive practices is helpful, especially in light of the fact that “hegemony invokes power by consent rather than coercion” (Speer, 2001, p. 108). When men ‘buy into’ hegemonic masculinity, its power is reinforced. At the same time, discursive strategies that appeal to essentialist definitions of gender (i.e. that a certain form of masculinity is ‘natural’, while others are not) serve to erase these acts of social construction, making it seem as though hegemonic masculinity is the only way in which to construct men’s gender identities. In other words, defining a certain form of masculinity as one which arises ‘naturally’ from being male renders invisible the fact that this form was, in fact, discursively produced. It appears as simply the way in which men are – and thereby suggests that if it is essential to maleness, then it cannot have been socially created in any way.

This is not to say that hegemonic discursive practices are deterministic: individual men *can* choose to find new ways to understand themselves and speak of themselves as men. However, the naturalizing and normalizing effects of hegemonic discourses severely limit the conceptualizations of masculinity that are easily accessible in our society, as our ability to articulate ideas outside of available discourses is restricted. This makes it difficult for men to find alternative expressions of gender identity that are socially validated.

One way of exploring the way in which ideas about gender are discursively produced is to use discourse analysis, which focuses on deconstructing the ‘packages’ that discourses make available for us. A useful feature of discourse analysis is that it allows us to identify different ‘strands’ of discourse on masculinity, so that their particular effects can be delineated. Clatterbaugh (1998) suggests that “polarities play an important discursive role [in which] masculinity is constantly contrasted with what is not masculine” (p.35). Gender socialization – the process by which boys learn what kinds of characteristics are considered appropriate for them to exhibit - teaches men that being viewed as feminine is damaging, if not downright dangerous: through teasing, ‘tough love’, bullying, and so forth, men learn that they must not exhibit characteristics that are discursively associated with women. Thus, ‘masculinity’ is often defined not by a set of characteristics that essentially ‘belong’, but by laying out what does not belong (i.e. feminine characteristics) and extrapolating those traits that must therefore be masculine from this because they are not feminine (Frosh, 1993). Defining masculinity, then, relies on the discursive practice of dichotomizing – associating one side of a binary with one gender, and the opposite side with the other. Where femininity is defined as passive, for instance, masculinity will be defined as active, and so forth.

There are any number of configurations of characteristics that can be combined into a form of masculinity that meets this ‘not-feminine’ criterion; thus, to attempt to describe ‘a’ hegemonic masculinity would necessarily be reductionist. Nonetheless, it is important to have some description of the discourse in question, since there is a meaningful collection of ideas about what is masculine that men engage with in trying to form their own identities. Entire works can and have been written about the basic tenets of hegemonic masculinity (e.g., see Connell, 1995). I will restrict myself to describing those characteristics that are particularly significant for men who are also survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

Hegemonic masculinity emphasizes autonomy (Frosh, 1993); ‘real men’ are able to take care of themselves. Related to this is the concept of invulnerability; because men are able to take care of themselves, it follows that they are not in need of protection from

others. They are not vulnerable to exploitation; a hegemonically masculine man can be expected never to be a victim of abuse<sup>4</sup>.

In fact, quite the opposite is the case, as the discourse goes. Hegemonic masculinity relies on the notion of the male as warrior, whether it is in sports, in business, or in personal relationships (Connell, 1996). Hegemonic discourses of masculinity position men as aggressive and competitive, often to the point of ruthlessness. In this context, violence is often seen as an inevitable part of masculinity. The extent to which violence is condoned varies in different discourses, but most discourses of hegemonic masculinity suggest that it is natural for men to react violently toward others. As a result, the seriousness of some violent acts is often underplayed, appealing to 'boys will be boys' discourses to excuse aggression rather than address it.

This accepted aggression finds expression in masculine sexuality as well. The way that "our society... eroticizes domination and power conflicts" leads to discourses of men's sexuality in which men are portrayed as sexually aggressive, constantly pursuing sexual relations (Hunter, 1993, p. 160). They are supposed to take the initiative and reap the rewards of sexual encounters. Related to this, and perhaps as a result, men are also expected to be always ready and willing to have sex (Nelson & Oliver, 1998; see also Hollway, 1984). Their role as pursuer requires them to always be pursuing, and when they encounter a woman who wants to have sex with them, they are never supposed to say no (Grubman-Black, 1990).

That sex is to take place with women is not merely a coincidence. Hegemonic discourses of masculine sexuality position it as specifically heterosexual – women are the appropriate objects of men's sexual desires, and not other men. Again, discourses of masculine sexuality normalize this form of relating: "that men would want to prey upon women is assumed to be part of male nature" (Hunter, 1993, p. 157). At the same time, this pathologizes other forms of sexual relation, such as homosexuality.

Indeed, homophobia is a significant element in hegemonic discourses of masculinity. Hunter (1993) argues that, just as masculinity is defined in opposition to

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<sup>4</sup>Indeed, being vanquished in any way is considered a blow to a man's 'masculinity' – for instance, being defeated, whether in war or sports, is considered humiliating to men precisely because it violates the expectation that hegemonically masculine men are invulnerable. There are, of course, some ways to reclaim 'masculinity' in these instances (for instance, by being "a good sport"). However, in situations of exploitation or more severe power imbalances, such as instances of abuse, there do not exist similar ways of recouping.

femininity, heterosexuality is defined against homosexuality; these oppositions are important in the construction of masculinity:

The idea of gay men seems so important for the institution of heterosexuality that I think that if there were no gay men they would have been invented as mythical creatures. There needs to be something that boys are afraid of becoming if they don't embrace the actively dominant, anti-woman attitudes of [hegemonic] masculinity (p. 159).

This notion of fear is central to the way in which hegemonic masculinity is maintained. Homosexuality is viewed as unmasculine because it positions men as the objects of male sexual desire, which is in direct contradiction to discourses of men as pursuers of sex who objectify others (Metcalf, 1985). Homophobic discourses reinforce the fear that men feel about becoming objects by equating gay men with women and defining both as distinctly unmasculine. Stoltenberg (1990) clarifies the importance of homophobic discourses in the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity:

Cultural homophobia keeps men's sexual aggression directed toward women. Homophobia keeps men acting in concert as male supremacists so that they won't be perceived as an appropriate target for male supremacist sexual treatment. Male supremacy requires homophobia in order to keep men safe from the sexual aggression of men (p. 131).

In other words, men comply with homophobic discourses in order to avoid being seen as the potential sexual 'prey' of other men, as well as to illustrate that they are qualified to participate in hegemonic masculine sexuality.

Hegemonic discourses also define masculine emotionality – or, more accurately speaking, the lack of it. Connell (1995) describes the rise of the 'rational man' in hegemonic discourse. This man is unemotional; he is able to make decisions purely out of logic, and this allows him to enjoy economic and social success, and intellectual superiority over anyone whose emotions are more clearly expressed. Indeed, the value of emotional expression is lessened through its association with femininity; boys are taught that only sissies (read 'girls') cry when they're scared or hurt. From this, the implication is that boys should not really feel scared or hurt. In fact, one of the only emotions allowed to men is anger. It is acceptable for a man to get angry and shout, hit, or break things, but 'big boys don't cry' (Gartner, 1999).

It is easy to see how these dictates of hegemonic masculinity fit together: the recognition of anger as a legitimate emotional expression feeds into the way in which violence and aggression are condoned as a natural part of masculinity. The sanctions against emotional expression have implications for masculine sexuality:

It would appear from the imagery that all heterosexual possibilities must involve the domination of someone... and that the possibilities for men's domination lie mostly in short-lived, superficial encounters (Hunter, 1993, p. 161).

Long-term relationships require intimacy, which is developed through emotional expression, but which is forbidden by the tenets of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonically masculine sexuality, then, must necessarily be superficial.

Further, cultural norms encourage men to use their sexuality as a "primary component of self identity"; thus, when a man suffers from impaired sexual functioning (as many male survivors do), he may also struggle with "an impaired sense of self" (Crowder, 1993, p. 33). In this way, the connection between any one element of the discourse and men's understanding of their masculinity as a whole can be illustrated. Generally, deviation from the tenets of hegemonic masculinity results in men's qualifications for being masculine being called into question, both by themselves and by other men.

## ***2. The Implications of Hegemonic Masculinity for Men's Everyday Lives***

Recent work on masculinity has begun to explore the implications of hegemonic discourses for men's everyday lives (see for example Connell, 1995; Mac an Ghail, 1996, and Stoltenberg, 2000). Connell (1995) notes that the ideals of hegemonic masculinity are just that: ideals, images that do not exist perfectly and without contestation in men's everyday lives. Nonetheless, these images are the norms that men are expected to hold themselves against. The result is that men fear that they will not measure up, which has serious implications for their self-identities:

[The admission of feeling pain] inspires fear for it means not being a man, which means, in a society that confuses gender and sex, not being male. This means losing power and ungluing the basic building blocks

of our personalities. This fear must... be suppressed for it is inconsistent with dominant masculinities (Kaufman, 1999, p. 83).

For many men, then, self-identity is fraught with doubt about whether they do, in fact, qualify as masculine. As Thomas (1987) explains, this confusion is usually understood to be an individual problem, rather than a social one:

The majority of... accounts reporting a lack of congruence with cultural definitions of maleness appear to see in this their own personal failure or deficiency, rather than expressing criticism of society's rigid gender expectations. This clearly reflects the prevailing cultural emphasis on the individual's own capacity (or responsibility) for self improvement, rather than on society's role in shaping and constraining individual lives (p. 469).

Since the whole process of constructing masculinity is rendered invisible, men are led to believe that their perceived inadequacy in relation to hegemonic masculinity is their fault, because they accept the idea that masculinity a set of traits that exists within them, rather than something that is socially constructed around them. Fear and self-doubt seem to be important facets of men's response to hegemonic discourses of masculinity.

Compounding this is the fact that men's gender socialization leaves them inhibited about expressing their emotions, with the exception of anger. Moreover, men are encouraged not to ask others for help. The result is that men live without access to social support networks that could be invaluable to their mental, emotional, and even physical health and wellbeing (Wright, 2000). Similarly, the idea that men should be successful, "cool" and invulnerable leads many men to act in unhealthy ways, ranging from workaholism to taking risks with their lives (e.g. through speeding, taking drugs, engaging in high-risk leisure activities, and so forth) to 'prove' their masculinity (Napier-Hemy, 1996).

Thus, discourses of masculinity not only have a psychological effect, in that men interpret them and use them to define their sense of self, but can also find tangible expression in everyday action, when men engage in behaviors that are consistent with their self perceived masculinity, or when the results of these behaviors and beliefs have consequences in men's lives. Finally, men themselves perpetuate these discourses amongst each other, with the effect of policing their own and others' behaviors.

Discourses of hegemonic masculinity affect how men interact with other people in other ways as well. For example, Conway's (2000) study of masculinity and emotional awareness found that subscribing to hegemonic beliefs about masculinity was associated with lower levels of emotional awareness. This creates an "absence of a more complex representation of [the men] themselves and of others," which is problematic since "the ability to represent people's emotional experience in a more complex manner seems an asset for effective social interaction" (p. 696).

The tenets of hegemonic masculinity suggest that men's lives should be concerned with power and dominance over each other, and indeed, over women as well. Bullying and school fights are an accepted part of growing up male, teaching boys to use physical violence to ensure that their masculinity is respected (Weinburg, 1999). Name-calling, using epithets such as 'sissy' or 'wimp', teaches boys not to let their guard down – they must enact masculinity in all their relations with others, or risk having someone question their right to lay claim to it (Weinburg, 2000). The result is that boys grow up feeling insecure about their masculinity, thinking that they need to protect it from others, and secretly fearing that they will never be adequate. Copenhaver, Lash, and Eisler (2000) use the phrase "masculine gender role stress" to describe the anxiety that exists when men subscribe to hegemonic understandings of gender and experience perceived threats to their sense of masculinity (p. 406). They implicate this stress as a contributory factor in a number of health problems, ranging from heart disease to substance abuse.

Subscribing to hegemonic discourses of masculinity is related to violence and aggression in other ways as well. For instance, their restricted ability to express emotions often means that men have difficulty responding to others' emotions as well. Thus, men are less able "to respond empathetically to others, which in turn increases the likelihood of aggressive behavior" as a reaction to the distress they feel when another person is upset (Lisak, Hopper & Song, 1996). Ironically, many men feel the need to police the very qualities within themselves that would allow them to respond empathetically, such as compassion and tenderness, in order to distance themselves from traits that are defined as feminine (Baxter, 2003, p. 13).

The research on masculinity makes it clear that hegemonic discourses of gender have implications that are detrimental for men's health and wellbeing. This is particularly the case for men who, for some reason, do not meet the criteria for

hegemonic masculinity. Hunter (1993), for example, describes the way in which being a 'heterosexual sissy' can disqualify a man from hegemonic masculinity. Research on minorities, gay men, and other marginalized groups has also shown that the rigid definitions of hegemonic gender norms serve to disqualify some men from the category of 'masculine' (for example, see Humphries, 1985).

### ***3. Male Survivors and Masculinity***

Literature on male survivors of childhood sexual abuse confirms this. Gill and Tutty's (1997) study, for instance, revealed that many male survivors felt that their childhood experiences had somehow excluded them from the category of 'masculine' and that because they had been sexually abused, they were somehow not quite men. The basic tenets of hegemonic discourses of masculinity are breached in male survivors' realities: they were unable to stop the abuse; they were the object of someone else's sexualized violence; and they feel fear, hurt, shame, and powerlessness because of it (Mendel, 1995). Male survivors often assume that their abuse, therefore, has led them to being unmasculine:

Our culture encourages males to believe they should be in charge of every aspect of their lives, so when boys are abused, they often think they should have been able to stop their abusers. Later, as adults, they blame themselves for having allowed the offender to have power over them (Napier-Hemy, 1994, p. 2).

It is not difficult to see how a man whose experiences do not fit with hegemonically masculine ideals might wonder if he was masculine at all.

Because the experience of being victimized sits in such dramatic opposition to the hegemonic discourses of masculinity, researchers have examined the way in which these two things interact:

Within the context of gender, a mythology that benefits males tends to hold sway. When one looks specifically at abused males, however, the issue becomes much more complicated than this simplistic rendering would indicate. Is a male struggling to overcome the impact of his childhood abuse truly aided by the notion that men are competent, strong, and able to protect themselves? By the belief that men inevitably want sex? Or by the idea that an adolescent boy who interacts sexually with an adult female is to be envied? (Mendel, 1995, pp. 2-3)

The “mythology” referred to by Mendel (1995) can be understood as a hegemonic discourse on masculinity that posits that men are invulnerable, independent, and aggressive. One area in which this is particularly problematic for many male survivors is with regard to masculine sexuality. Male survivors have experienced having sexualized violence done to them, sometimes by other men, and sometimes by women. Having experienced the aggression and violence that is associated with masculine sexuality, many male survivors feel some sense of “gender shame,” wherein they feel ashamed of being men because they identify men as perpetrators of violation (Gill & Tutty, 1997, p. 41). This feeling is complicated by a fear that they are not really masculine, because “to be the helpless object of another person’s sexual gratification is an experience that violates male gender norms” (Lisak, 1994, p. 537).

Fear of homosexuality is also a major concern for many male survivors. Men who have been abused by men may fear that the abuse somehow makes them gay. Homophobic discourses that treat homosexuality as though it were a pathogen, and somehow contagious, create fear and anxiety in male survivors. Hunter (1993) relates this fear: “I was made to be afraid of the idea that homosexuality might be what ‘happens’ to boys like me whether it’s what we want or not” (p. 158).

Men who have been abused by women are not immune from this fear; growing up in a society that teaches men that they should like and welcome the sexual attention of women, these men have been the victims of attention that was unwanted and abusive; they experience feelings quite contrary to what they are ‘supposed’ to. This may lead them, too, to question whether they are, in fact, gay, since they are supposed to like sex with women but didn’t (Wright, 2000).

Either way, a fundamental issue for male survivors is that sexualized violence is often mistaken for “just” sex (Bavelas, 2000). It is understandable, if having sex with men is a definition of homosexuality, and if sexual abuse is understood as sex, that male survivors would fear their experiences have made them gay. Part of the difficulty arises from the fact that discourses about sexualized violence tend to become preoccupied with the sexual aspects of abuse. For instance, in discussing the abuse of men by men, Gonsiorek, Bera and Le Torneau (1994) comment that “there is a distinct tendency for the same-sex aspect of the interaction rather than the exploitative aspect to predominate

in the minds of most observers” (p. 15). As feminists have stressed, it is important to understand that sexualized violence is “a crime of violence, not sex” (Chasteen, 2001). It is about power rather than desire. Unfortunately, hegemonic discourses do not tend to clarify this fact; rather, discourses about male self-reliance, homosexuality-as-contagion, and victimization as feminine combine to obscure the experiences of male survivors:

They are either seen as being like a woman, and therefore feminized, as being powerless and therefore flawed, or as being interested in sex with men and therefore homosexual. None of these interpretations of victimization are useful options for a boy who has been sexually abused and is trying to make sense of the experience (Crowder, 1993, p. 17).<sup>5</sup>

The inevitable conclusion of these discourses is that somehow, the victim brought on the abuse, and is therefore to blame for it. This renders the violence invisible: “questioning the boy-victim’s own sexuality [for example] diverts attention from the issue of criminality” (Grubman-Black, 1990, p. vii).

In many ways, then, the experiences of male survivors of childhood sexual abuse can be understood as illustrating the problems that many men have with hegemonic masculinity. Because their childhood experiences so clearly violate some of the basic principles of hegemonic masculinity, male survivors find themselves occupying a marginalized position in the hierarchies among men. However, this also places them in a unique site from which to explore and resist those hierarchies. Male survivors’ experiences reveal the ways in which masculinity, as it is often constructed, is harmful to men, and actually serves to lock them into patriarchy. Thus, male survivors’ experiences can be articulated to contribute to the refinement of theories of patriarchy in our society.

#### ***4. Masculinity and Patriarchy Theory***

The major contribution to our understanding of patriarchy to date has come from the feminist movement. Feminist writers and researchers have argued that patriarchy is a structure in which women are systematically oppressed, and men are systematically privileged (e.g. see MacKinnon, 1989). Some feminists argue that women are directly oppressed by individual men. Others take a more cautious stance, noting that at the very

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<sup>5</sup>Presumably, while also still trying to feel good about being male – Crowder, like many authors looking at male survivors, seems to assume that she can take the notion that men want to be ‘masculine’ for granted.

least, men benefit from women's oppression. From either theoretical perspective, violence is seen as an agent of social control, used by men to control women when other forms fail (Charles, 1995). Domestic violence, child abuse, rape and assault, and even murder are all seen as methods by which men exert control over women. The sexual abuse of female children fits easily into this model (Matthews, 1995).

The sexual abuse of male children, however, is not such an easy fit. Some theorists have revamped their theories about sexual abuse to argue that boys, being children, are seen as occupying the same 'space' as women – lower on the hierarchical scale than adult men. However, as a theory of gender and violence, this explanation is not adequate (Nelson & Oliver, 1998). For one thing, it ignores the fact that although many effects of sexual abuse are the same for boys and girls, "men have things to tell us that are... different from women's experiences" (Matthews, 1995, p. x). Boys are not simply girls with penises, and they can't just be slotted into theory as though the two genders were interchangeable.

Doing so neglects the fact that boys grow up to be men, who continue to be portrayed unproblematically as abusers in many theories of violence that employ the idea of a cycle of abuse. In fact, the effects of childhood sexual abuse last far longer than childhood. Male survivors often suffer from long term disadvantages such as chronic unemployment, under-education, over-representation in institutional settings (hospitals and jails, for instance), problems with substance abuse, and greater risk of suicide (Gartner, 1999; see also Mendel, 1995). These pervasive long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse serve to keep these men marginalized with regard to other men. In other words, the perpetration of sexual abuse on these men serves as a form of social control, keeping them oppressed, just as it does for adult women. What is needed, then, is an understanding of patriarchy, especially with regard to the role that violence plays, that can account for the ways in which it operates as an oppressive force for both men and women, without disregarding the experiences of either.

There is no denying that "there is a gendered dimension to the phenomenon" of violence (Matthews, 1995, p. ix). I do not contest the fact that patriarchal systems benefit men economically and socially. What I do contest, however, is the idea that *all* men benefit from patriarchy at all times, or that men do not experience oppression under

patriarchal systems. In fact, patriarchal systems involve a hierarchy of power that marginalizes groups of men who have less power than other men (Metcalf, 1985).

Hegemonic discourses of masculinity that posit that men are and should be powerful, and that they should exert that power over others who should submit to them, reinforce patriarchal structures in everyday life. As Stoltenberg (1999) explains, “unless males do power, they do not experience themselves as men” (p. 37). That is, they do not view themselves as qualifying under the tenets of hegemonic masculinity. In such instances, men encounter a contradiction between the roles ascribed to them under patriarchy and their actual experiences:

The quest for power becomes an incessant drive and unattainable goal. For those who cannot satisfy the expectation... the struggles with failure are deep. Many men live with the shame that they are not powerful enough. Given little alternative to living out the images of power, many men know only to addictively try harder, with ruinous consequences (Kuypers, 1999a, p. 7).

Boys learn that it is not only women who are targeted with violence as a method of ensuring they comply with the gender order required to maintain patriarchal structures. Similar methods are used to ensure that boys continue to reproduce hegemonic masculinity:

In learning the political difference between having and expressing feelings, I also learned how to avoid becoming a target myself. It was clear (although not something I was fully conscious of) that by not at least adopting the pretenses of power and by not staying quiet in front of men’s power plays, I risked ridicule and violence. I learned there was safety in pretense. I learned, as all boys must learn, how useful it was to be a pretender to power and to ignore the victim’s pain (Kuypers, 1999b, p. 18).

Indeed, an important stumbling block is the lack of recognition of male victims of violence. Mendel (1995) comments that “male survivors... constitute an extremely under identified, under served, and all too often, misunderstood population” (p.1). A main reason for this is that we lack a discourse in which to talk about male victims. Matthews (1996) describes the way in which associations between seemingly gender-neutral terms and gender-specific forms of violence hide the experiences of males who have been victimized:

The language we use in the current discourse on violence and abuse masks, minimizes, or renders invisible certain realities for male victims. Terms such as ‘family violence’ have become co-terminous with ‘violence towards women’, particularly on the part of husbands, fathers, or other adult male figures. Male teens, boys, male seniors, male victims of sibling-on-sibling violence, and female abusers disappear in this term (Matthews, 1996, Introduction section 1, para. 4).

This lack of attention to male victims occurs in many ways. Weinberg (2000), for instance, points out that “almost no parents or other caring adults have conceptualized ‘their’ boys... as potential victims” (p. 2). This means that the abuse of boys is likely to unrecognized by those adults closest to them. Mendel (1995) notes that even among trained professionals, with experience and expertise in the area of child abuse, the victimization of boys tends to go unrecognized. He argues that discourses about violence that position men as perpetrators and women as victims influence what professionals are able to observe:

Professionals... tend not to recognize sexual abuse in boys. This, I believe, is largely due to a schema of sexual abuse that primarily encompasses female victims. There is an allied notion, similarly based on societal (mis)conception of masculinity, in which males are more readily recognized as victimizers than as victims... The [victimizer] category resonates with our mythology regarding men and is, therefore, accommodated, whereas the [victim category] is overlooked because of its dissonance. We are primed and ready to recognize male perpetrators but turn a blind eye to male victims (p. 4).

Similarly, men may not realize that they’ve been abused because they’ve accepted the association between victim and female; as a result, “males tend to have a definition of abuse which does not include what happened to them” (Briggs & Hawkins, 1996, p. 221). Instead, many men reframe their experiences in such a way as to place the responsibility on themselves, seeing themselves as participants instead of victims. Describing one study with male survivors, Briggs and Hawkins (1996) explain:

[The male survivors] accepted responsibility for what happened even though a third of the offenses occurred before the age of 6. As adults, male victims were unable to accept that they had been too young to make informed decisions about participation (p. 222).

Once again, the relationship between hegemonic discourses of masculinity, which posit that men are sexually aggressive and powerful, and the contradictory experience of

having been abused, is shown to have negative consequences for male victims in terms of their ability to come to terms with their childhood trauma.

It is not only on the individual level that gendered discourses about victimization are reproduced, however. Public – including academic – representations of violence continue to unquestioningly reproduce the notion that on the whole, females are victims and males are perpetrators:

Several large scale Canadian studies about interpersonal violence... have reported the findings pertaining only to female victims. Many academic papers written about victims of violence purport to be 'balanced' yet typically bring only a faint male 'voice' to the analysis. From a conceptual standpoint, many also make the mistake of accepting and using, uncritically, a woman-centered-only model of victimization. Male victims... find much of this work dehumanizing and dismissive of their experiences. They feel many writers and thinkers in the field have delineated the boundaries of the discourse on violence and abuse, boundaries that leave males out (Matthews, 1996, Introduction section 2, para.3).

Thus, the way in which we theorize and present information about violence serves to reinforce the idea that men are not victims. The common practice in literature on abuse and assault of talking about the victims as 'she' and the perpetrators as 'he' is one good example of how this relationship gets continually reinforced, but it goes even deeper than that: our laws and even language itself are imbued with this relationship. Wright (2000) points out, for example, that some instances of the sexual abuse of boys during the 1960s and early 1970s cannot even be prosecuted today. While there is no statute of limitations on criminal charges of sexual abuse, there had to be a law against the act at the time, and 35 years ago, Canadian laws did not cover the range of acts considered to be sexual abuse today (Sullivan, 1992). In a similar vein, Weinberg (2000) notes that "in Portuguese, Spanish, Italian and French, the word victim is gendered female" (p. 9) – a clear indication of who is intended to be a victim, and who is not.

Clearly, discourses about violence have suppressed the experiences of male victims. This has implications for our understanding of patriarchy. In fact, I would argue that continuing to define men as perpetrators and women as victims helps to reinforce patriarchy, by reinforcing the polarized, oppositional gender ideals upon which patriarchal structures rest. It also directs our attention to 'solutions' that do not address the creation of these roles, but seek to place blame on men and masculinity:

Much of the current thinking and discourse, both public and professional, about abuse and interpersonal violence is based on a woman-centered point of view. This is neither right nor wrong, good nor bad, but rather the result of who has been doing the advocacy. However, as a result of this history, victims have a female face, perpetrators a male face. Because of this image of perpetrators as having a male face, violence in our society has become 'masculinized' and is blamed exclusively on 'men' and 'male socialization'. Though there is without question a male gender dimension to many forms of violence, especially sexual violence, simple theories of male socialization are inadequate to explain why the vast majority of males are not violent (Matthews, 1996, Introduction section 3, para.2).

In order to contribute to addressing the way in which gender and violence are theorized, examining the lived experiences of men who are victims is an important step. This research can hardly answer the question of how we account for male victimization in full; however, it does provide an opportunity to focus on how male survivors speak about hegemonic masculinity and the way that they relate to it. Ascriptions of gender, masculinity and femininity, are important processes in the maintenance of patriarchal systems. By exploring the relationship between masculinity and victimization, we may begin to answer the question of how male survivors fit in to our theories on violence and, more importantly, how these theories can be modified to accommodate men who are victimized.

## ***5. Research Questions***

This endeavor is part of a new wave of research that recognizes the need to problematize patriarchy for men's lives as well as women's. Of course, it is not my intent to definitively redefine patriarchy theory to be more inclusive of male survivors. I only wish to contribute to such a project. My plan is to do this by exploring three specific questions with regards to male survivors and masculinity.

Broadly, I am interested in understanding how male survivors contend with hegemonic masculinity. Theorists examining the role of hegemonic masculinity in the maintenance of patriarchy have pointed out that men must 'buy into' hegemonic masculinity – must accept the related values, emulate the characteristics, and subscribe to the discourses – in order for patriarchy to be reproduced. Therefore, it seems important to understand whether men who have been victimized also 'buy into' hegemonic masculinity, or whether they have found new ways to understand themselves as men.

This information could help explain the way in which male survivors attempt to 'fit' into patriarchy by subscribing to hegemonic roles. It could also, however, bring to light ways in which men who don't 'fit' have been able to find gender identities which are resistant to patriarchal gender norms.

More specifically, I am interested in the way in which male survivors respond to dominant discourses of violence, particularly those which posit that men are abusers and women are victims. Such discourses have been central to theorizing about the role of violence in patriarchy, suggesting that violence is used by men to maintain power over others. Few alternative explanations of male violence have been posited<sup>6</sup>. However, this discourse renders invisible those people whose experiences do not fit, such as male victims. Thus, it is important to provide a space in which men's voices can be heard, which contributes to identifying the need for more inclusive discourse. Acknowledging the existence of men for whom violence in a patriarchal system is not a tool to maintain power, but a method by which power is enacted against them, is an important first step in creating the possibility of an alternative analysis.

Finally, I believe that sociology as a discipline has yet to engage with the issue of the childhood sexual abuse of males in any meaningful way. Women's experiences of sexualized violence have been connected to a whole body of knowledge that places those experiences in a social context, exploring the ways in which violence against women operates as a mechanism of patriarchy. The sexual abuse of men, however, continues to be neglected in mainstream sociological theory. The bulk of the information available on male survivors is psychological. By its very nature this means that the focus is on the individual, which runs the risk of contributing to a discourse that represents male victimization as a private trouble, not a public issue. My research set out to counteract that imbalance by connecting men's experiences to the social through identifying commonalities between male survivors in their use of and response to discourses of masculinity and linking these back to the theories of masculinity, patriarchy, and violence that I outlined in the previous section.

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<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that other theories do not exist. Indeed, psychological theories of violence abound; however, these tend to view male violence as the product of a few pathological men, as opposed to examining the sociological element of maintaining power through the use of force.

## Chapter Two: Research Methods

For any given research question, there are countless possible methods of addressing it. Researchers make decisions regarding how they will collect data (and what kind of data they want to collect), who they will ask to participate, and what kinds of analyses will be conducted on the information they gather. These decisions are shaped by the theoretical perspectives that guide the research project. In my case, I developed my research questions from a social constructionist approach, which I describe in more detail below. Taking such an approach had implications for the form of data collection I used, the steps I took to analyze my data and the final narrative I wrote to communicate my findings (Creswell, 2003).

Guba and Lincoln (1998) describe three “fundamental questions” that help to define a particular paradigm: the ontological question: “what is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?; the epistemological question: “what is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?”; and the methodological question: “how can the inquirer (would-be knower) go about finding whatever he or she believes can be known?” (p. 201). Ontology and epistemology are thus seen to influence what kinds of methodologies are appropriate within a given paradigm.

Within a social constructionist paradigm, the nature of ‘reality’ is considered to be relative. That is to say that “realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based” (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 206). These constructions are developed and maintained through social interaction, implying the answer to the epistemological question, that “the investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked” in the creation of shared constructions of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 207). This further suggests the use of a method that allows for “individual constructions [to be] elicited and refined through interaction between and among the investigator and respondents” (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 207). Interviewing, then, was an appropriate technique for me to employ, since it allowed for such interactions to take place.

Although the theoretical emphasis in this project is on the ways in which participants use discourses about masculinity to construct their understanding, it is

important to understand that these constructions are often experienced as ‘real’, or ‘true’. In some ways, then, approaching a problem from a social constructionist perspective is similar to adopting a phenomenological approach to the interviewing itself, in that within the interview, the researcher is trying to understand the “lived experiences” that participants report, by examining “patterns and relationships of meaning” (Creswell, 2003, p. 15). Schwandt (1998) explains how phenomenological and social constructionist approaches dovetail:

“[Both approaches] challenge the idea of some objective basis for knowledge claims and examine the process of knowledge construction. But, instead of focusing on the matter of individual minds and cognitive processes, [social constructionist approaches] turn their attention outward to the world of intersubjectively shared, social constructions of meaning and knowledge” (p. 240).

The way in which this shapes the specific strategies used in the interviewing for this project is described in section 2: Methodology, below. However, first I describe the overall research design that developed from taking a social constructionist perspective on how male survivors of sexual abuse understand and interact with concepts of masculinity.

## ***1. Research Design***

In order to explore the issue of masculinity amongst male survivors of sexual abuse, I first had to locate suitable research participants. Fortunately, living in Victoria made this easy for me, as there was at the time of my research a counseling agency in the city that was specifically dedicated to men who had been victims of sexualized violence: the British Columbia Society for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse (BCSMSSA), which also had an office in Vancouver<sup>7</sup>. At the time of the research, the agency employed 13 counselors, and saw approximately 100 clients in the two offices combined.

The research began as a multi-stage, multi-method project. Original plans included a preliminary stage in which information would be collected through a small number of interviews, followed by a more detailed quantitative stage. This second stage

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<sup>7</sup> Since that time, the BCSMSSA has split into two groups; the office in Vancouver is retaining the original name, while the Victoria office has become a separate agency, called the Victoria Men’s Trauma Recovery Society.

involved having clients and counselors complete a Q-sort<sup>8</sup> to explore various images and ideas about masculinity that exist in contemporary western society. My hope was that using a Q-sort would give participants a tangible way of sorting through different, and sometimes conflicting, ideas about what it means to be masculine. The third stage of the research would then have been follow-up interviews with those participants whose Q-sorts exemplified the factors that arose in the statistical analyses of stage two.

As planned, four preliminary semi-structured interviews were conducted in July and August of 2002<sup>9</sup>, and these interviews, as well as academic and popular literature, informal conversations with men, and a variety of media (such as magazines, television, and so forth) were combined to develop a set of Q-sort statements. However, the quantitative stage of the research was never realized. The Q-sort packages were delivered to the counseling agency through which the research was to be conducted, but a combination of several factors led to the packages not being distributed to individual clients<sup>10</sup>. Over the three month period in which this stage of the research was to have been carried out, only four Q-sorts were completed by male survivors, and this methodology was ultimately abandoned. In some ways, having to abandon the Q-sorts represents a loss; however, the work that was done at the Q-sort stage was not merely set aside. The development work that I did was useful to me in that I was able to clarify a multitude of masculinities that I had never articulated before.

As a result, the project became a one-method design. I had already conducted four initial interviews (as part of stage one of the original project) at this time. These interviews had been productive and useful discussions that not only provided the kind of information about masculinity that I was looking for, but also brought new themes and ideas to light. Thus, I decided to continue with the same interview guide, and turned my attention to locating additional participants through the counseling agency who could engage with me in an interview. Counselors at the agency also seemed much more comfortable referring their clients to an interview than they had been with the Q-sort.

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<sup>8</sup> The general procedure is to use a Q-Sort, which is a set of statements representing a range of possible opinions or beliefs on a given subject. Participants sort the statements by ranking and rating them according to their agreement or disagreement with each. Typically, the Q-sort takes the form of a normal distribution. This allows participants to simultaneously rank and rate each statement against the others in the set (Horwood, 2000). The Q-sorts are analyzed statistically using a form of factor analysis.

<sup>9</sup> For more information on why this approach to interviewing was selected, and how the interview guide was developed, please see section 2:Methodology.

<sup>10</sup> This aspect of the research is explored more fully in the Reflexive Account.

## **2. Methodology**

There are many ways of approaching interviewing as a qualitative method. In addition to the theoretical approach shaping my research, there were also methodological considerations about which I had to make decisions. The first of these involved deciding that I was interested in discovering participants' particular opinions, beliefs, and understandings about masculinity, as opposed to hearing a story about their gendered identities. This led me to choose semi-structured interviewing over a completely unstructured approach. Berg (1989) explains that semi-structured interviews allow the research to ask question on specific, predetermined topics, without sacrificing the "freedom to digress" that often results in new information coming to light (p. 17). I chose this approach because I wanted to ensure that specific issues, such as men's understandings of what 'masculinity' was, were covered – but I also wanted to be sure that other ideas related to masculinity could emerge from the interviews themselves. As it turned out, while my interview guide was developed with semi-structured interviews in mind, my approach to interviewing was much more loosely structured than is typically associated with this form (more information on the way I used my interview guide can be found below, in section 2.2., Procedures).

A second choice regarding the kind of interviews I wanted to conduct involved the way in which I approached my participants. Simply calling them 'participants' indicates a particular approach to interviewing – that is, I saw the men I interviewed as being the authorities of their own experiences. As a result, I saw it as important that they direct the interviews to the issues that they thought were important to the topic. Of course, I was the one with the agenda – I had specific topics on which I wanted the men I interviewed to speak and therefore used my interview guide as a way of directing their attention to specific issues. However, within those topics, I wanted my participants to tell me what was important to them. They were thus not informing me about limited areas that I had predetermined, as might be the case with structured interviews, but responding to my questions by telling me what they thought it was important for me to know.

In fact, I believe that it went further than this: together, we participated in the construction of an understanding of masculinity that was "fluid, negotiated, and contextual" (Mason, 2002, p. 226); by engaging in discussion about what 'masculinity' was and was not, in other words, we created a shared understanding of the concept that

was negotiated through questions and answers. In keeping with a social constructionist approach, I saw my participants and I as engaging with various discourses about gender in order to explore their understanding of masculinity in everyday/everynight life. This approach has implications for what I believe an interview can accomplish:

“It cannot unearth the relevant data, using the interviewee as informant, because the phenomenon under research does not have a static decontextual and therefore uncoverable existence. Yet the interview, or the interviewer, cannot be in all of the relevant contexts to witness the operation of practices and processes, which in any case may not be observable in the conventional sense. One way to... resolve this dilemma is to treat the interview as a site of knowledge construction, and the interviewee and interviewer as co-participants in the process” (Mason, 2002, p. 227).

To signal the fact that I do not treat the men I interviewed as mere informants, but as people who, with me, constructed knowledge about masculinity in an interview setting, I have referred to them throughout this thesis as “participants”. I now turn to a discussion of who these men are.

## **2.1 Sample**

The participants in this study were clients of the BCSMSSA. Access to clients was granted through a multi-level gate keeping process. First, I had to gain access to the organization, which I accomplished through discussions with the agency’s executive director. Then I attended staff meetings to introduce myself to the individual counselors and provide information to them about the project. Counselors then acted as gate keepers to client participants, providing me with names and contact information (usually telephone numbers) of clients whom they had approached about the project and who were interested in participating<sup>11</sup>. In some cases, clients preferred to maintain their anonymity by having the interviews arranged through a counselor, or by contacting me instead of having me contact them. This was easily accommodated.

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<sup>11</sup> I did create a brochure informing clients of the BCSMSSA of the research project, thinking that it might be helpful in recruiting the relatively large number of people I needed to fill out the Q-sorts. One interview client approached his counselor because of this brochure, which can be found in Appendix A.

Although demographic information was not collected during the interview process<sup>12</sup>, some participants did disclose this information. This, combined with my observations regarding participants' age and ethnicity, enables me to provide a limited description of them. My participants ranged in age from their mid-twenties to their mid-fifties. All participants were Caucasian; one identified as an immigrant to Canada, and he was the only participant for whom English was not his native language. Few participants related information about occupation or education; only one participant mentioned having a university education, and only three disclosed their occupation. Information about occupation is not reported because one participant's job could potentially identify him. Two participants mentioned the length of time they had engaged in therapy; one had been coming to counseling for six years, while the other had only been attending sessions for six months. My inference from the other interviews is that the rest of my participants likely fell within this range.

All participants disclosed some information about their marital status. Four were single and did not mention any previous marriages. Three others were divorced and did not mention remarrying. Three other participants had been divorced and had since remarried; one of these was in his third marriage. The remaining three participants mentioned being married, but did not indicate whether they were in their first or in subsequent marriages. Of the nine men who had been, or were currently married, eight of them were fathers. The number of children participants mentioned having ranged from one to five, including step-children. Only one of the men who had been divorced had custody of the children from his first marriage, and he was a single father.

Information pertaining to participants' experiences of sexual abuse was disclosed in seven interviews. Of those seven, the majority (five) reported being abused by men. Two participants reported being abused by women, though one of them reported multiple perpetrators. It was not clear whether all of the other perpetrators in this instance were women. Two men who reported being abused exclusively by men also reported multiple perpetrators. It should be noted, however, that this information is limited to what participants chose to disclose; for ethical reasons I did not ask follow-up questions about these experiences. This means, for instance, that a participant who reported to me that he

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<sup>12</sup> Demographic information was initially to be collected with the Q-sorts, when it could have been collected anonymously, as I would have no face-to-face contact with the majority of participants; due to time constraints as well as concerns about privacy, it was not included in the interviews.

had been sexually abused by a man could potentially have been abused by multiple men; unless multiple perpetrators were specifically mentioned, I have no way of determining that information.

Although this is in many ways a sample of convenience, it is also theoretically appropriate. Because it was specifically the link between men's experiences as victims of violence and masculinity that I wanted to examine, looking at male survivors of sexual abuse simply made sense. In particular, men who have been sexually victimized have been a hitherto neglected group in discourses about violence, and these stories need to be accounted for in our theorizing.

## **2.2 Procedures**

Including the four interviews that had initially been conducted as part of the multi-method design, 15 semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with male survivors of sexual abuse. Interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed by the researcher. Poor tape quality in two of the tapes meant that these interviews could not be transcribed, bringing the total number of interviews used in the analysis down to 13. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, either at the BCSMSSA office or at an office in the University of Victoria Sociology Department, and lasted approximately one hour, covering a variety of topics about masculinity. An interview guide consisting of five questions was referred to at times in order to stimulate discussion, though interviews were not limited to these.

The questions were designed to encourage my participants to think about the ways in which they defined what 'masculinity' was or wasn't, as a starting point for a discussion about how they understood and identified with ideas about masculinity in relation to their own gendered identities. Four questions presented a variety of strategies to stimulate discussion about what masculinity entailed and what (if any) limitations could be put on its definition, while a fifth question asked about positive aspects of masculinity, in order to counteract a tendency to view 'masculinity' in a negative light. This trend has been identified by critics of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, who argue that a lack of definition has led to 'masculinity' simply becoming a dumping ground for those characteristics, typically associated with being a man, that are not held

in high favor, such as violence (for example, see Demetriou, 2001) . Given this tendency, I also wanted to find out what my participants thought was positive about the concept.

A copy of the interview guide can be found in Appendix B. While the interview guide was used as a reference, most interviews were conducted in a loosely structured way, incorporating a variety of follow-up questions which differed according to the ideas introduced by each participant. This allowed for some topics that I had not anticipated discussing to emerge naturally from the interviews. In fact, early on it became apparent that two other broad topics – feminism, and society’s views of violence - were considered relevant by my participants. These topics were raised without any prompting from myself in the first few interviews I conducted. Recognizing that these were important topics theoretically, I made a point of raising them in subsequent interviews, although in many cases I didn't have to, because my participants continued to raise them on their own. No specific questions around these topics were developed, as the actual question I asked depended on what a participant had already said in regard to the topic and varied from interview to interview. As a result, I did not formally add additional questions to my printed interview guide.

One of the reasons that I was able to carry out interviewing in this project was that counselors felt comfortable with the method. They thought that their clients would have an easier time with interviews because it more closely resembled a counselling session. However, as Gerson and Horowitz (2002) point out, “unlike therapy... the sociological interview... is not explicitly aimed at helping the respondent. Relationships must be forged (and ended) quickly, and they must be constantly re-established with new participants as the study proceeds” (p. 210). Rapport and trust were thus two important factors in the interviews that I conducted. At the start of each interview, in addition to reviewing the consent form (discussed in section 3, Ethical Considerations, below), I gave a brief explanation of why I was interested in this research. In many cases, I disclosed that I knew a male survivor and had been interested in what he had to say about masculinity, which led me to want to talk to others. This brief explanation, coupled with my ability to joke and chat with participants as the interview got going, in order to put them at ease, made establishing rapport relatively easy for me. There was only one interview in which the participant seemed overly nervous to speak with me; that

participant was not a native English speaker, and he revealed that he was worried he wouldn't be able to understand my questions.

In all my interviews, it was important to maintain this rapport throughout the course of the discussion, which I did by engaging in active listening (Esterberg, 2002). Active listening involves a number of techniques designed to ensure that the listener is consciously engaged with what the speaker is saying. For example, in my own research, I ensured that I was able to communicate my questions effectively, watching for signs that they didn't understand and offering to rephrase, or even move on, if they seemed frustrated or confused. In hearing their responses, I took the time to ensure that I had understood what they were saying, asking for clarification when needed. Further, I was careful to pay attention to both verbal cues (such as pauses, 'ums', and stops-and-starts), and nonverbal cues (shifting, looking down, leaning forward and so forth) to determine whether to pursue or back off of an area of questioning. Giving my participants "time to think" about a question instead of "rush[ing] in to fill the gap" during periods of silence was also an important skill that I employed (Esterberg, 2002, p. 105). As a result, I believe that these interviews were successful in developing sufficient rapport between myself and my participants for them to be a worthwhile and rewarding experience for both of us.

### ***3. Ethical Considerations***

It was of the utmost importance to me that client participants felt safe; I wanted to be certain that they would not be re-traumatized or hurt by their participation. Indeed, ensuring the safety of client-participants was important to therapists at the BCSMSSA as well. In order for me to address their concerns, I attended a number of staff meetings during which time staff were able to ask questions, give suggestions, and also examine my research materials.

Confidentiality was also important. Full anonymity for participants could not be ensured; since counselors were involved in inviting clients to participate, they were necessarily aware of which of their clients were involved. Clients were, however, introduced to the researcher only by their first names. Participants were assigned a pseudonym in order to protect their anonymity in the transcripts, and potentially

identifying information (such as the names of spouses or children, or mention of workplaces) was also changed. Thus, although counselors were aware of who participated, they were not aware of what their clients said, and could not trace that information back to the individual participant. Of course, in such an intimate relationship as exists between therapist and client, one might not need to know the name of a particular individual in order to identify them. While it is, of course, impossible to eliminate all identifying features, every effort was made to protect anonymity wherever possible.<sup>13</sup>

Another concern that I shared with the counselors was that the clients should participate in the research of their own volition, and not out of any sense of being coerced to do so. Given the nature of the therapeutic relationship, the line between participating voluntarily and participating because one's therapist suggested it seemed quite blurry. Keeping this in mind, counselors considered their clients carefully before approaching them, and I am confident that no one was sent my way who the counselors felt would only participate at their urging. As well, voluntary consent was reviewed as part of the written consent process undertaken with each participant; before every interview, the researcher and the participant reviewed a consent form, which the participant then signed. A copy of the consent form used in this project can be found in Appendix C.

It was also important to recognize that this research covered a topic that is extremely sensitive and could be painful for male survivors to discuss. I wanted to be sure that participants would have access to counseling and support during the research. Of course, by drawing from a sample of men who are actively engaged in therapy and healing work, this concern is greatly lessened. Still, in order to mediate any potential negative effects of the interviews, most were held at one of the BCSMSSA offices. For two participants, this was not possible, and interviews were held at the University of Victoria; in both cases, however, the participants had been involved in healing work for a number of years and were able to access alternative supports if they had need of them.

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<sup>13</sup> This did, in fact, present me with a difficulty in many cases. Since the number of men I interviewed was small, and the number referred to me from any one individual counselor even smaller, it was difficult to fully protect clients' anonymity. While in some cases identifying information could simply be excluded, in other cases this information provided an important perspective that I did not want to lose in my analysis—in the case of men who talked about masculinities in prison, or in military service, for example.

#### **4. Methodological Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study that should be noted. First of all, like all qualitative studies, the aim of my project was not to identify causal relationships between victimization and particular understandings of masculinity, or to make generalizations about all male survivors. My findings should be read with this caveat in mind. Interviewing thirteen male survivors who have all sought counseling through the same agency would introduce significant issues of bias, were generalization or representativeness my aims. Rather, this research is intended to explore some implications of the ways in which patriarchy and discourses of violence are constructed for male survivors. While I use the accounts of my participants as a starting point from which to theorize, I am not in a position to make any claims about how similar or dissimilar these accounts might be from those of other male survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

Secondly, it is important to acknowledge that all the men I interviewed were men who had, for one reason or another, chosen to engage in counselling specifically regarding their experiences of sexual abuse. Further, the agency that they chose to access has specific ideas about providing men with nurturance and tenderness that they might not otherwise get. This includes receiving empathy and care from other men. Such an atmosphere no doubt has influenced the ways in which these men relate to and understand masculinity. As well, counsellors at the BCSMSSA often talked to their clients about masculinity, and about the ways in which their experiences were connected to larger social issues (Wright, 2002). In many ways I believe that this makes these men that much more important to consider in terms of theoretical sampling, because they have had an opportunity to consider some of these issues and form opinions about them. It is a limitation, however, in that they have all been influenced by the same organization; it would have been interesting to compare their accounts with those of men who had engaged in counselling at a center with a different mandate, or who had not engaged in counselling at all (were there an ethical way to do so). Unfortunately, this is a bit of whimsy on my part, as the BCSMSSA is the only organization of its kind of British Columbia. There is nothing similar to compare it to.

It should be noted that the population of male survivors that seek counseling from the BCSMSSA are, of themselves, generally a homogenous group: for instance, there is

very little ethnic diversity, with over 90% of clients of European descent (Wright, 2001). Additionally, since no demographic information was collected, information about sexual orientation, marital status, educational attainment, and so forth was not available unless it was explicitly mentioned in the context of the interviews. As a result, a fully theoretical sample was not possible; information that would allow me to ensure I had captured a full range of the diversity amongst the group was not available. However, collecting this information would have been a time consuming task during the interviews, as well as a potentially painful one for participants to complete (for example, a fully theoretical sample of male survivors of sexual abuse would require information about the age of victimization, the setting in which it occurred, and the number and gender of perpetrators, amongst other factors). Given the agreement that I had entered into with counselors in order to gain access to clients, accepting this limitation has been a necessary part of the research process.

## ***5. Analytical Framework***

In any endeavor to understand something, there are certain questions that must be addressed: what it is important to know, why it is important, and how we can go about knowing. Sociology as a discipline offers a plethora of analytical frameworks about a wide range of topics that are designed to address these questions. In deciding how I wanted to analyze my interviews, it was important to determine what was important to me, given my theoretical perspective. The interview data that I had could have been interpreted in a variety of ways. For instance, although I had not started out looking for stories, I found that my participants did, in fact, tell one: they told the story of how they had moved from investing in hegemonic understandings of masculinity to exploring, and ultimately adopting, alternative conceptualizations of their own gendered identities. Exploring this story could easily have lent itself to narrative analysis, which takes as its project “to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives” (Riessman, 1993, p.2). However, I began exploring this topic from a social constructionist viewpoint, and in keeping with that, I chose to examine my interviews using discourse analysis.

As is the case with any theoretical framework, social constructionism is not one unified approach to the world, but encompasses a number of approaches that agree on

these points to varying degrees. Some social constructionists argue, for example, that no objective conditions exist in reality; that is, everything is subjective and socially constructed (Foucault's (1978) discussion of the social construction of sexuality through discourse might be an example). Others concede that "while certain objective conditions exist... the way we understand the condition is not a given in the world, but rather is constructed, formulated, and organized by social actors in an attempt to make sense" of it (Canham, 1999, p. 8)<sup>14</sup>. This organization takes place through the construction of discourses. Jary and Jary (1995) define discourse as:

The particular 'scientific' and specialist language(s), and associated ideas and social outcomes which, according to Foucault, must be seen a major phenomenon of social power, and not simply a way of describing the world... it is an important aspect of Foucault's conception of discourse(s), that, in part at least, social phenomena are constructed from within a discourse, that there are no phenomena outside discourses (p. 169).

It is precisely this latter point that is the source of much contention, as many other theorists argue that the claim that all social phenomena are created within discourses is too deterministic –for where, they ask, do the discourses come from, if all phenomena come from discourses? It is not my intention to engage in this debate here. However, it is important to understand that tension exists between discourse and the possibility of individual agency (Parker, 1992).

Participating in discourse is not necessarily a conscious process. Indeed, Canham (1999) points out that most people are not aware that they are creating and maintaining social realities when they converse. She argues that "people have phenomenological tendencies, which implies that they see everyday life as existing outside of themselves or independent of themselves" (p. 8). This is not surprising, since many of these socially created understandings have histories that exceed the lifetime of any one individual. Burr (1995) explains that:

We are born into a world where the conceptual frameworks and categories used by the people in our culture already exist. These concepts and categories are acquired by all people as they develop the use of language

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<sup>14</sup> The following, from Stoltenberg (1990), is a good illustration of this vein of social constructionism: "Penises and ejaculate and prostate glands occur in nature, but the notion that these anatomical traits comprise a sex – a discrete class, separate and distinct, metaphysically divisible from some other sex... is simply that: a notion, an idea. The penises exist; the male sex does not" (p. 30).

and are thus reproduced every day by everyone who shares a culture and a language. This means that they way people think, the very categories and concepts that provide a framework of meaning for them, are provided by the language that they use (pp. 6-7).

Thus, it is not only the syntax and grammar that we share with others who speak the same language as we do; there is also a shared way of putting ideas together, of taking different concepts and combining them as similar or dissimilar to others, and so forth. We share common discourses about how the world is, why it is that way, what the problems are, and what can be done about these problems.

Taking a discourse analytic approach, then, involved firstly the identification of the different discourses that my participants were using to describe their experiences. Using the literature I had read on masculinity as a guide, especially those works such as Connell's (1995) book that took an explicitly social constructionist approach, I was able to recognize the way in which participants were mobilizing 'ready made' ways of talking about masculinity (indeed, ways that had been identified by other researchers in other contexts) to describe their own experiences. This was the case for our discussion of homosexuality, violence, feminism, and even alternative constructions of gender. By familiarizing myself with work that had been done on discourses in this area, I was able to interpret my participants' construction of meaning as drawing on these discourses in specific ways.

I was particularly interested in the ways in which they drew on discourses in order to refute them, actively resisting hegemony. Indeed, there is no reason why the use of discourses cannot conceivably become a conscious choice. While I agree that much of our way of knowing about the world comes through the mobilization of discourses, I also believe that individuals or groups of individuals can actively and consciously produce discourses to serve their needs. My understanding of the importance of this came from the way in which my participants described the effects of not having an accessible discourse on violence or masculinity that was inclusive and nonjudgmental of their experiences as survivors. It was this emergent understanding that led me to add a third research question to my project, which translated also into the inclusion of a separate, more theoretical Analysis chapter in this thesis. More is said about this process in the following section.

## 5. 1 Method of Analysis

Once all interviews were transcribed, I read through them several times. This initial reading allowed me to identify several broad topics that the participants explored. Using these as a guide, I wrote descriptive case studies of each interview. Not only did this allow me to become more familiar with my data; it also revealed the strength of my initial framework, as I was able to see how well it applied to each interview. The case studies confirmed that my general framework was appropriate, and I then combined the 13 separate analyses into one descriptive work. Writing the case studies was a useful step in moving from the individual experiences that men reported in the interviews to the level of being able to analyze the common discourses they drew upon in doing so, as addressed in my Findings and Discussion chapter. Through the use of case studies, I was able to see how different discursive elements were employed in each interview, and could construct from these documents a sense of how discourses were being mobilized to describe my participants' experiences. A sample of two case studies can be found in Appendix D<sup>15</sup>.

From this, I was able to identify areas in which my participants were drawing on particular discourses to frame their opinions and the accounts of their experiences they presented. In particular, two discursive areas seemed to be important: masculinity and violence. I began the research project intending to examine male survivors' use of and response to discourses of masculinity. When I read through the transcripts, therefore, I was especially attuned to the ways in which my participants mobilized different conceptualizations of gender to tell stories about their identities. However, through reading the transcripts with a mind to identifying *any* salient themes, I was also able to recognize another discursive area that was important to the men I interviewed, that of violence.

When I considered the way that discourses of masculinity and discourses of violence were interrelated, I discovered a third research question: there was a lack of

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<sup>15</sup> These two case studies were selected because they encompass a full range of the analytical themes presented in my Findings and Discussion chapter. Both interviews were also helpful in identifying feminism and society's views of violence as areas of important interest, which were taken up analytically in this project because they were so heavily emphasized by my participants. The case studies are working documents intended to assist in the process of analyzing the interviews; they are included here to illustrate this step in my research, and not as an alternative to the analysis presented in the Findings & Discussion or Analysis chapters.

discourse on male victims of violence, especially sexualized violence. My theorizing about this lack of discourse arose from the information I found in my interviews. This process of developing theory from one's data is described by Corbin and Strauss (1994) as "grounded theory" (p. 273). Although I did begin my research with some idea of the kind of information I was looking for, it was through a "continuous interplay between analysis and data collection" (Corbin & Strauss, 1994, p.273) that I was able to develop my theories about the lack of discourses of male survivors, and the implications of their absence<sup>16</sup>. Corbin and Strauss (1994) note that it is this interactive feature that distinguishes grounded theory from other methods:

First, theories are always traceable to the data that gave rise to them – within the interactive context of data collecting and data analyzing, in which the analyst is also a crucially significant interactant. Second, grounded theories are very fluid... they call for exploration of each new situation to see if they fit, how they might fit, and how they might not fit. They demand an openness of the researcher based on the 'forever' provisional character of every theory. For all that, grounded theories are not just another set of phrases; rather, they are systematic statements of plausible relationships (pp. 278-279).

In some cases, qualitative researchers may set out intending not to theorize except in a grounded way. Creswell's (2003) description of grounded theory as a process "in which the researcher attempts to derive a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants" suggests a certain degree of intention (p. 14). This was not the case in my research. I intended to approach my research using a specific theoretical approach (social constructionism), and a corresponding analytical approach (discourse analysis), focusing on the issue of hegemonic masculinity. However, because I was able to actively pay attention to what my participants felt was important in the interviews, I was able to identify additional directions in which to take my analysis. This is, of course, in keeping with the nature of qualitative research as a whole:

Qualitative research is emergent rather than tightly prefigured. Several aspects emerge during a qualitative study. The research questions may change and be refined as the inquirer learns what to ask and to whom it

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<sup>16</sup> Indeed, through such a process, I identified feminism as an important source of discourses on masculinity, particularly with reference to violence. This occurred after only two interviews had been conducted; subsequently, I made sure to ask other participants to give me their responses to feminist discourses on masculinity as part of the normal course of the interview.

should be asked. The data collection process might change as doors open and close for data collection, and the inquirer learns the best sites at which to learn about the central phenomenon of interest. The theory or general pattern of understanding will emerge as it begins with initial codes, develops into broad themes, and coalesces into a grounded theory or broad interpretation (Creswell, 2003, pp. 181-182).

Following Creswell's thinking, then, all qualitative research can be argued to contain an element of grounded theory. With regard to interviewing, it is the centrality of participants' experiences that requires us to begin theorizing from those places; recognizing people as the authorities of their own lives enables us to treat them not as informants to our already preconceived theories, but as participants in the creation of theories to connect their experiences with larger social phenomenon. Indeed, it was through grounding my theorizing in the accounts of my participants that I discovered the need to pay closer attention to the lack of inclusive discourses about male victimization; my analysis contributes to this area. The results of this exploration are reported in the next two chapters, in which I first present my findings and discuss them, and then develop an analysis of how those findings relate to broader sociological theory.

## **Chapter Three: Findings and Discussion**

My primary concern in conducting this research was to examine male survivors' understandings of hegemonic masculinity and, as described in previous chapters, I initially focused on exploring two main questions within my interviews:

1. How do male survivors engage with hegemonic masculinity?
2. How do male survivors respond to dominant discourses of violence?

A third question, developing out of my interview findings, also became important to my research, and this takes my analysis beyond the immediate scope of my interviews and connects what I learned from these with other research on masculinity, violence and patriarchy. This third question – 'how can male survivors' experiences inform theories of patriarchy?' - will be discussed in the next chapter. The first two questions, however, were addressed comprehensively within my interviews, and the information my respondents provided with regard to these will be explored in this section

### ***1. Male Survivors and Hegemonic Masculinity***

I was interested in learning what my participants thought 'masculinity' was. I was also very much interested in how male survivors related to their idea of masculinity; for instance, I wanted to know to what extent they felt they expressed 'masculine' identities, and how the idea of masculinity was played out in their everyday/everynight lives. Participants provided me with great detail regarding what they understood masculinity to be, as well as regarding how they responded to discourses of masculinity themselves.

#### **1.1 Attributes of Masculinity**

When asked what came to mind when he heard the word 'masculinity, every man I interviewed was able to list a number of characteristics that are congruent with discourses of hegemonic masculinity. Most of these ideas centered around four common

themes: the male body and sexuality; emotionality; competition for power; and aggression and violence.

### **1.1.1 The Male Body/ Sexuality**

First, my participants identified the male body as an important feature of masculinity – especially with regard to what such a body could accomplish sexually:

*“I’m a fairly visual person, so I will see, you know, immediately, like a large male, you know? Like, um, heavily muscled, you know, a moustache of all things right off the top of my head, um, and short hair. Fairly, in my eyes, fairly typical, like that’s the idea of masculine, I think that’s what you’re getting at. That’s my idea of masculinity. Uh, and I guess, you know, a deep voice, so there’s something auditory to it” (Marcus, p. 1).*

*“I think that, uh, um, men, whether it’s gay men or heterosexual men, there’s tremendous emphasis on the penis, and, um, how large it is, you know, how long you can maintain an erection, and all this stuff... at least in my, my kind of upbringing, women and men didn’t talk very openly about this. There were sort of whispers that, you know, so and so had a big penis, and, you know, women liked a bigger penis and all this, you know. I mean, I think the data shows that it’s not that critical for women, but men think it is... men have this concept that bigger is better” (Richard, p. 3).*

That sexual performance is an important part of hegemonic masculinity has been well documented. Indeed, as Metcalf (1985) notes:

Men’s own sexual needs are taken for granted – to get more of ‘it’ and better quality ‘it’. That men may have needs that don’t fit the compulsive model is rarely acknowledged (p.6).

While men can and do seek emotional intimacy in sexual situations, this is rarely recognized in mainstream discourses of male sexuality, which assume “that men’s sexuality is directly produced by a biological drive, the function of which is to ensure reproduction of the species” (Hollway, 1984, p. 231). That male sexuality is presented as solely a biological drive is hardly surprising: acknowledging that men’s sexuality

includes more than performance and aggression would be to acknowledge that there is an emotional element to sex for men.

Masculine sexuality was also understood by my participants to be explicitly heterosexual:

*“A man is supposed to love a woman, not a man, not being with a man” (Ben, p. 2).*

Again, this is in keeping with hegemonic discourses of masculinity, which take for granted that masculinity is heterosexual, and which devalue homosexual relationships and identities.

### **1.1.2 Emotionality**

My participants recognized that just as the form of masculinity they identified contained restrictions with regard to whom a man could be intimate with, so it also contained restrictions with regard to what ‘masculine’ intimacy could look like. Specifically, the men I interviewed commented that men were less permitted to express their emotions:

*“I think [that many men see] being sensitive to a problem as a weakness. And the only way to deal with a weakness is to take it, get it under control, you know, to take control of it. And it’s also sort of coupled with expressing emotion, which is looked at... as a weakness with your stereotypical kind of macho man” (Rene, p.10).*

*“Big boys don’t cry, remember? Big boys don’t cry, and with that comes the rationality that, you know, you don’t share. Because crying is, is a major way we learn to share to begin with... that’s how we’ve learned to communicate and share how we’re doing in the very beginning. But boys don’t cry, so we’ve been told to be quiet most of our lives” (Darryl, p. 7).*

There was one important exception to this rule against emotional expression, though, and that was anger:

*“I was taught at a young age that men don’t feel, that men are tough, men don’t cry... I learned that anger is the first thing that comes out. That’s one of the first things I learned... anger was the only thing a man was allowed to have, right?” (Jim, pp1-2).*

Restrictions on emotional expression have been well documented with regard to masculinity. Lisak (1997), for instance, explores the way in which men police their emotions in order to present a hegemonic understanding of gender (what he calls ‘warrior masculinity’:

The core... is the regulation of emotional experience. Warrior masculinity is predicated on denial, suppression, and repression. Fear and other emotional states associated with vulnerability are suppressed, then their very presence is denied, and ultimately they are repressed; there remains no conscious awareness of them” (p. 161).

The denial of emotion expressed in this discourse of masculinity is necessary for a gender socialization that emphasizes hierarchical structures rather than interpersonal connections and empathy in relationships.

### **1.1.3 Competition for Power**

Given this, it was not surprising that issues of power and control played a large part in my participants’ descriptions of masculinity. They explained that the lack of emotional expression on men’s parts created distance in all their relationships. This was connected to the competition for status that the men I interviewed saw as typical of men’s interactions with others, especially other men:

*“[Even in environments where it seems totally inappropriate, men are] still competing with each other, being competitive, you know, one-upping each other... being first is very highly valued in all cultures. Number one, in a lot of different things, like, you know, in sports, or even in politics” (Fred, pp. 3-4).*

*“That’s really important, um, I would say for shallow relationships with mature men, and for a lot of the relationships for younger men, in their teens and twenties, where, uh,*

*heavy drinking and bad driving and bad behavior in relationships, and, uh, and violence are all a part of that establishing the top dog” (Walt, p. 6).*

My participants spoke at length about the kinds of relationships men had with other men, and all noted that there often seemed to be an undercurrent of competition that prevented them from becoming intimate with the other party. Indeed, other studies of men and masculinity have noted “that power is a very significant, pervasive aspect of men’s social relations, actions and experiences” (Hearn, 2004, p. 51) and that the enactment of power is an important consideration:

What is at issue here is the persistent presence of accumulation of power and powerful resources by certain men, the doing of power and dominance in many men’s practices, and the persuasive association of the social category of men with power. Men’s power and dominance can be structural and interpersonal, public and/or private, accepted and taken-for-granted and/or recognized and resisted, obvious or subtle. It also includes violations and violences [sic] of all the various kinds (Hearn, 2004, p. 51).

Indeed, my participants noted that the competition for power that colored men’s relationships with other men was also tied to men’s aggression and violence.

### **1.1.4 Aggression and Violence**

Most of my participants agreed that aggressive behavior was a logical extension of the competition for power that men engaged in. Martin offered this example:

*“Aggression is a means to the end of power, possibly. And you use aggression maybe to exhibit your power or to obtain that power. To have your way, to let your feelings be known, direct or indirect, through aggression, whether it be words, or profanity, or an aggressive act” (p. 6).*

For others, violence was a result of the emotional constriction men experienced:

*“We are geared to adrenaline, geared to aggression, and, and that’s not bad, I’m, not saying, in it’s, in it’s proper place it has benefit. The trouble is, if you’re not allowed to*

*feel, if you don't have a proper outlet for aggression... [men get] so insecure, because they don't, they don't have access to anything but light-hearted conversation, or, you know, talking about the sports, or, you know, all the inane things, but nothing that really matters... it's sad, you know, that aggression gets diverted because there isn't access to real feelings. You can't be, uh, there's a thought or a., or a belief that you can't be sensitive and still be a man or still be a, you know, protector and all that" (Jim, pp. 4-5).*

While the individual men I interviewed emphasized or de-emphasized violence in different ways, it was clear that this was a central aspect of their understanding of masculinity. While several of my participants expressed their disdain for the hegemonically masculine characteristics they were identifying, none really questioned whether these characteristics were actually masculine.<sup>17</sup>

## **1.2 Participants' Responses to Discourses of Masculinity**

In describing what masculinity was, my participants drew on discourses that naturalized hegemonically masculine behavior (e.g. "we are geared to aggression") and normalized such behavior amongst men (Walt's description of plays for dominance as being a normal part of young men's development). Both of these strategies were used to produce "normative definitions" of masculinity (Connell, 1995, p. 70). Such definitions, Connell (1995) notes, "offer a standard: masculinity is what men ought to be" (p. 70). Such normative definitions are fraught with issues of application:

"Normative definitions allow that different men approach the standards to different degrees. But this soon produces paradoxes...Few men actually match the 'blueprint'...What is 'normative' about a norm hardly anyone meets? Are we to say the majority of men are unmasculine? How do we assay the toughness needed to resist the norm of toughness, or the heroism needed to come out as gay?" (Connell, 1995, p. 70).

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<sup>17</sup> The sole exception to this statement was with regard to physical violence – two participants argued that while masculinity involved power and men were more aggressive than women, physical aggression crossed over a line, especially if it was directed toward women. Men who resorted to violence were seen by these participants as actually un-masculine. Other participants, however, saw violence as a 'masculine' trait, albeit a negative one.

In their own explorations of ‘masculinity’, my participants identified the way this paradox was expressed in their everyday lives. Indeed, even within a single image, they noted that layers of contradictions existed with regard to masculinity:

*“One of the first major jobs or long term jobs I had was with a mining company, and, um, we had a cook who was, you know, very gay. I mean he was flamboyantly gay, you know, spoke very – he’s a big man, but he spoke very effeminately and, you know, wore these frilly pink shirts... he was bigger than most of the other guys, probably a lot tougher, you know, so there was sort of that real clash of images, you have this very outwardly effeminate man who’s very obviously gay and made no pretence about where he stood in the world, sort of pitting himself against the, you know, macho diamond driller types. Nobody ever clashed with him” (William, p. 2).*

Thus, it seemed that while in discursive form, the idealized masculinity my participants identified was relatively straightforward to them, in practice masculinity, as embodied in the actual lives of men, seemed to be somewhat contradictory.

Their understanding of masculinity became less clear as they began considering the multitude of cultural and historical images of masculinity. Furthermore, talking about masculinity in the abstract was something they seemed to find very difficult to do without applying it to images from real life, which simultaneously uncovered the contradictions inherent in their understanding:

*“So how do I react to that myself? Um, uh, I’m not sure... do I think if I relate to that person, am I that way? If I’m like that, does that mean I’m gay or does that mean I’m masculine? Or straight? Um...” (Marcus, p. 12).*

While hegemonic discourses of masculinity seemed fairly easy to identify, when the men I interviewed started to interrogate the discourse further, they found that it wasn’t describing their reality at all; many expressed confusion about the apparent lack of applicability to their lives.

Simultaneously, my participants seemed to recognize a space in which alternative understandings of gender could be articulated. Indeed, this space became very important,

since the men I interviewed began espousing very non-hegemonic beliefs when they started talking about their own gender identities. In short, while each of them was able to identify some characteristics of the dominant form of masculinity, none of them identified themselves as subscribing to such a discourse in any more than a passing way.

### **1.2.1 Hyper Masculinity**

It is important not to downplay the fact that male survivors, like all men, are taught to revere hegemonic masculinity, and to fear being seen as unmasculine. Given this fear of not fitting into masculinity, it is not surprising that many of the men I interviewed explained how they had, at times, attempted to enact hegemonically masculine attributes in order to compensate. Indeed, a well-documented concept found in the literature about male survivors is ‘hyper masculinity’ (e.g. see Prendergast, 1993). This term refers to the idea that a man, feeling he has been disqualified from hegemonic masculinity for some reason (in this case, because of his childhood experiences) will turn to extreme behavior as a way of proving himself. The concept of hyper masculinity fits well with dominant discourses of violence, wherein males act ‘out’ and females act ‘in’ (i.e. internalize) negative emotions (Mendel, 1995). It is consistent with discourses of masculinity as well, in that it presents an action-, rather than emotion-oriented approach to problem solving, and still positions men in the role of aggressor, rather than victim.

There was some evidence in the stories my participants told that they had ‘tried’ hyper masculinity as a way of proving that they could fit. Often, their behaviors were overtly aggressive:

*“You want to fit in. Nobody wants to not fit in, [but] with sexual abuse you’ve already started off with not fitting in. You know, you’re bad. You know, you have a secret. So you automatically – and, and you have so many different beliefs about yourself that go farther the other way, I think, you become more aggressive, more violent, more, uh, more uncaring, more unfeeling. Or you tell yourself that and eventually you believe it”* (Jim, p. 5).

Some men explained that they had engaged in such behaviors because they wanted to prove that they were not victims:

*“Quentin: There was a part of me that was, I was searching for my sexuality, probably. I didn’t know who I was. You know, I lost my cherry to a guy, you know, and for a lot of years I questioned myself. I used to, I used to chase women, and I couldn’t even be faithful to her, it was just one after another.*

*Kristin: Do you think you were trying to prove something?*

*Quentin: Well, to myself, of course. And when I looked back, when I started analyzing things like that, my behaviors, sure. And then when I had girls tell me that I was this or that, I’d just go mental. I’d just, you know, ‘I’ll show you.’ I used to bullshit women, wine them, dine them, with drugs, whatever, just to get a notch in this belt or whatever the case may be” (p. 10).*

Others emphasized the importance of feeling like they were in power or in control. Darryl, for instance, noted that his promiscuity was related to his sexual abuse: “because women had the power over me during my abuse, [using women for sex] made me feel like I had power over women” (p. 5). One man talked about the way in which acting out in violence was an attempt to communicate to other people what he had experienced as a child:

*“I became consciously angry and consciously aggressive that, and uh, and I, for me, I guess I did that because I, I didn’t care. I didn’t want to care; I didn’t care. I wanted people to hurt. The only time for me that I got any good feelings was when I was making someone hurt physically like I hurt. You know, ‘cause maybe they would feel just a little tiny bit of what I felt. And that’s such a sad, sad thing but that’s what it was like. I, I, maybe I thought it was business and I got paid for it, but secretly in my heart was that I always, I wanted them to feel, and because I had such hatred going on for everything and everyone around me. You know, because I didn’t fit in, because control was taken away from me, because of all these things” (Jim, p. 6).*

For the men I interviewed, then, participating (or attempting to participate) in hegemonic masculinity was part of their experience with gender. However, all the men I interviewed explained that they had later developed new beliefs about what it meant to be

a man in our society, because trying to conform to a standard of hegemonic masculinity was no longer working for them:

*“You know, that might have worked in the fifties and the sixties, but I mean, it doesn’t work for me. Because grown men do cry, and crying, there’s nothing wrong with crying, and for the most part, it helps. It’s helpful. I’d rather cry than put my head through the wall. Or, you know, do something really drastic that I’m going to pay for, for the rest of my life. ‘Cause that’s what happens, you know. You get to a point where if you don’t have a release of some kind, you know, and I’d rather cry than go out and use drugs again” (Quentin, p. 12).*

### **1.2.2 Adapting Definitions, Opting Out, and Rejecting Gender**

After my participants explored the process of rejecting hegemonic masculinity, they described the new identities that they had begun to take on. Their alternatives involved adapting the concept of masculinity to their own definitions, ‘opting out’ of gender for themselves, or rejecting the importance of gender as an overarching social system.

For some, masculinity was redefined to fit their beliefs about themselves:

*“I would classify myself as more of a man than a lot of the macho type of guys because, uh, I know how to show my inner self, like, uh, I’m not scared to show compassion just for a human being, you know, and, like, that, you know, somebody there needs help, I’ll do that... it’s just my nature, it’s just part of my being. Uh, I always believed since an early age that, I, like uh, like what I saw in my family was not the right thing, and I believed that there had to be love out there. And when I got into my teens, I wanted to help out all the drunks. I, like, I wasn’t ashamed to show them, like, or even give them a hug. Like a lot of people wouldn’t want to touch them, or be scared, right?” (Ben, pp. 5-6).*

*“Men can be masculine and, and, uh be much more open, warm and emotional and all sorts of things than our fathers or our mentors were. We need to change our conceptions of it” (Walt, p. 1).*

Others redefined the status that masculinity had; they often took a more neutral path, identifying as ‘human’ or ‘androgynous’:

*“I mean I admire women and I admire men too. I guess the last handful of years, I’ve often thought, you know, it’s such a pain in the ass or unrealistic to try and be male or female, it’s like I just want to be a human, right? Like that seems like the most effective way to go about things, I guess” (Marcus, p. 10).*

*“As far as my belief system, I, uh, probably believe more in 50/50, right down the middle, masculine and feminine are balanced, strike a balance between both... I think everyone should acknowledge their masculinity and femininity inside” (Fred, p. 2).*

*“You know in all the sorts of examples [of what a man is like] that resonate with me, they’re mostly negative... it’s only been relatively recently that I’ve started thinking about what the male image is, you know, how do I fit into that world, and the only- the only way I can see myself fitting into the world is this sort of gender neutral kind of – kind of place” (p. 8).*

Some participants decided that they weren’t masculine, but ‘gender neutral’, and that this was fine with them. Others took a more critical stance towards hegemonic masculinity, arguing that the concept itself was flawed, and that the fact that they didn’t choose to act in typically masculine ways didn’t mean they were less masculine, but that the things we typically think of as masculine were, in fact, ‘wrong’. Thus, my participants accounted for how they had moved away from ‘buying’ in but not ‘fitting’ in to no longer ‘buying’ in to the basic tenets of hegemonic masculinity.

This was an important story to illuminate. Other researchers have found a similar trend, in that male survivors tend to identify as either both masculine and feminine, or

neither masculine nor feminine, or as masculine, but not hegemonically masculine (e.g. see Gill & Tutty, 1997). However, they have tended to describe the lack of fit between men's experiences and hegemonic masculinity as having a negative impact on men's self-esteem. For instance, Gill and Tutty (1997) focus on the fact that their participants felt distressed by their inability to 'fit' into hegemonic masculinity:

As each of the men was interviewed, he revealed areas of his life that he believed did not fit with his perceived masculine ideal. Each believed that the areas of loss of adherence to the ideal were related to the sexual abuse that he had endured as a child, and each considered himself a *masculine failure*" (p. 38, emphasis added).

In contrast, while the men I interviewed did talk about areas in which they struggled with feelings of inadequacy, none of them expressed the idea that they saw themselves as 'failures'. On the contrary, my interviews revealed that my participants were expressing identities that they were content with, and indeed, comfortable in – most of them explained that they did not usually feel negatively about their identities as non-hegemonically masculine men. Instead, they spoke openly and proudly about being more true to themselves, able to acknowledge their feelings, and able to connect empathetically to others. Other authors have explored the way in which moving away from hegemonic masculinity can be a move toward a more authentic self (e.g. see Franklin, 1984; Weinberg, 2000); this suggests that developing alternative understandings of gender identity can be a positive and empowering step for men.

I am in no way arguing that my participants did not struggle with self esteem issues, or that being unable to 'qualify' for hegemonic masculinity was not difficult and hurtful to them. Instead, I merely wish to point out that understanding men's experiences of 'being disqualified' from hegemonic masculinity as only negative is, in fact, keeping with dominant discourses about masculinity. Hegemonic discourses of masculinity hold an implicit view that hegemonic masculinity is the 'best' form of masculinity available to men, and that all men must naturally want to emulate it. Theories about male survivors that focus solely on the negative impact of not fitting into dominant masculine ideals reinforce the idea that these are the ideals men ought to participate in. Exploring the ways in which the men I interviewed have positive understandings of non-hegemonic

identities counteracts this discourse by making it possible for men to reconstruct their sense of (gendered) self without having to see themselves as ‘masculine failures’.

### **1.2.3 Transitioning to New Beliefs**

That being said however, it is important to acknowledge that these new beliefs did not develop smoothly from their old understandings. On the contrary, my participants described experiencing a great deal of uncertainty around what masculinity meant as they moved away from hegemonic ideas. For instance, some participants noted that while they were certain about their gender neutral identity, they did feel that this isolated them. Both men and women, they explained, expect men to act in hegemonically masculine ways. Failing to do so no longer held the same consequences it had for them as children (i.e. they were no longer afraid that other boys would taunt, bully, or assault them because they weren’t masculine enough), but it still represented a struggle. They talked about feeling like they had no community – no group of other men who also felt gender neutral, or who wanted to be less hegemonically ‘masculine’. They also described themselves as being in various stages of learning new beliefs about masculinity. Several participants described the way in which they had consciously come to believe that it was all right to let go of an ideal of hegemonic masculinity, such as the tenet that men do not express vulnerability, while at the same time struggling to act in a different way:

*“I can really push emotion down until I feel safe with it. But definitely I kind of, control my emotions, and I do sometimes start to hear that voice saying don’t be weak, don’t emote... get control of yourself here, stop that. [But] I think it’s a strength every time, and yet again I could contradict myself, and see someone doing that and, kind of, not, most of the time that would be true, but sometimes you feel a little uncomfortable. You know, I think actually it’s a strength. You know, a few times after I’ve had a good cry I’ve felt good after, because you’re releasing it and letting it out, rather than trying to hold it in where it just kind of stays inside” (Rene, pp.10-11).*

Thus, the transition from old to new beliefs about masculinity had not been perfectly smooth, and some of my participants expanded on the ways in which older beliefs that were more complicit with hegemonic masculinity still lingered:

*“I guess I was still there even, because I was just, uh, I’m still in the military, I was doing something with new enrollees, and one of their, I don’t know whether it was a mom or a sister, or aunt, or somebody that was related said that she had seen me doing something on that day, the day this girl was interviewed. And she said, ‘you looked so hard and tough’ and it just made me perk right up for a second. And it was funny, because I don’t think that way anymore. I’m 56 going on 57, I’m not hard and tough anymore. I’m gentle. I just want to go the smooth path. But it did perk me up, I must say, when she said that” (George, p. 8).*

Of particular interest to me were my participants’ explanations for why these beliefs and images of hegemonic masculinity continued to persist, despite the fact that they were actively defining their gender identities in non-hegemonic ways. Some implicated other people around them, explaining that they had encountered criticism or resistance in their attempts to redefine themselves:

*“It became very difficult to deal with [my step-son, who is also a survivor] because he was the person I desired not to be, and for him, I was the least acceptable role of a man. And he made that perfectly clear. To his understanding, I wasn’t a man. And so I had to deal with that, along the way, and say, well, you know, that’s all right, um, you know, maybe he’ll grow out of that eventually, but in the meantime I’m still going to be who I am, and try to show him that there are other forms of masculinity” (Walt, p. 6).*

Martin noted that sexual situations were one of the only times that he felt like he had to be a ‘man’ rather than just a ‘person’, because of the expectations he perceived women to have of him:

*“They just like to have a man do the, take the bull by the horns, you know, so I would say that with women who like to have a man who’s dominant, I guess, perhaps that has to something to do with it as well” (p. 5).*

Others talked about the way in which hegemonic discourses of masculinity entrenched these beliefs in men's minds:

*"There's these archetypical images of, I guess, male characteristics, like, yeah, and is that something like, it doesn't work on a cerebral level, it just like that's the way it is, so that's my option [for my own sense of self]" (Marcus, p. 13).*

*"In certain cases [masculinity] is a role you take on somewhat consciously. But I think that for a lot of people it's just, like, automatic, it comes out of culture and family and everything you're raised through" (Walt, p. 3).*

Of course, men derived some benefit from these beliefs, which is another reason why they did not change easily:

*"It [my masculine appearance] got me attention, and you use what you've got, you know... grade nine, I mean it was unbelievable the girls that were after me, you know, and liked me, and, uh, you know, with the stick up hair and the whole deal, I mean that's all through the media, that's, that's the look that'll get the girls, you know" (Rene, p. 5).*

*"I like the fact that tall men are held in higher esteem or higher value, and I happen to be a tall man, so that makes it easy. It's like being white in a white-dominated culture, you know, would you rather be black in a white-dominated culture, or white? Well, I guess in some ways it's nice to be the underdog, but it hurts, and it's hard, and there's a certain comfort in being automatically in the exalted or esteemed" (Richard, p. 9).*

Indeed, the comfort provided by hegemonic discourses of masculinity seemed to be a key feature in why my participants believed men continued to invest in them. When I asked Marcus what the appeal of 'archetypal images' of masculinity was, he replied:

*"I guess in their steadfastness, I mean, they're very consistent. I mean at least over my 27 years, 28 years... I guess consistency is part of their strength, maybe, or their appeal" (p. 14).*

## **2. Male Survivors and Discourses of Violence**

In addition to engaging with discourses of masculinity, male survivors found themselves having to engage critically with the dominant discourses of violence that they encountered. They articulated an understanding that dominant discourses of violence and hegemonic discourses of masculinity were interrelated; thus recognizing that hegemonic masculinity was, in fact, detrimental to the work they were trying to do in healing from their childhood abuse.

### **2.1 Discourses of Relationships and Violence**

Understanding discourses of violence involved an understanding of hegemonic discourses of relationships more generally. The men I interviewed noted that they had trouble identifying their ‘place’ in society once they began to experiment with gender identities that did not fit the hegemonic masculine norm. In particular, they noted that their experiences were rendered invisible in dominant discourses, and they discussed the effects that this had for their lives.

#### **2.1.1 Invisibility within Dominant Discourses of Relationships**

Male survivors grow up in the same social environment (broadly speaking) as other boys do – they learn that hegemonic masculinity is appropriate for them, and that they should emulate it to the best of their ability. Thus, an important part of their accounts of gender identity entailed a past point in their lives when they wanted to participate in dominant understandings of masculinity: they wanted to be tough, strong, and independent. Most also acknowledged, however, that they had been unable to: they had ‘bought’ into hegemonic masculinity, but they did not ‘fit’ into it. This had consequences both for their feelings about themselves and for their actions:

*“I spent ten years of my life in the army wishing I could fight, win fights that I couldn’t, but I always tried... when I was growing up and I guess when I was a kid, ‘cause there was a lot of violence in my life, I thought violence was equated to masculinity. I thought I was weak... I wanted people to think I was tough, hard” (George, p. 7).*

*“I basically lost my business because of not being willing, not being able to deal with people who, you know, there was always that kind of [covert] threat like, you know, if you don’t do what I want you to do, I’ll thump you... I think what I see it as is, um, is a recognition that in my growing up, not ever being a part of that, not ever learning how to deal with the-the bullies and the tough guys... I’ve found myself in a place where, you know, I wish was, you know, a 250 pound linebacker... it’s like ‘whoa’ – this is a really scary, scary place to be... I’ve never learned how to deal with this stuff... so the result for me has been to sort of take a big step back and to get rid of the business, and you know, write off literally tens of thousands of dollars in – in unpaid accounts, and you know, and, um, just essentially walk away from it” (William, p. 6).*

The discourses that described what interactions between people were acceptable within the tenets of hegemonic masculinity were problematic for male survivors. For example, a common image in hegemonic gender relations is of a strong man taking care of a weaker woman. For the men I interviewed, this protector role seemed foreign to them. Indeed, one participant even talked about wishing he was a woman so that he could be passive and receptive instead of having to take the lead all the time.

As a result, my participants generally expressed the feeling that their gender identities were not reflected in hegemonic discourses of masculinity. However, this had implications for them beyond their understanding of themselves, as it meant that they did not have access to discourses about how to relate to women and men from, for instance, a gender neutral place<sup>18</sup>. Contained within hegemonic discourses of masculinity are discourses pertaining to the way in which men should relate to women and to other men. When my participants chose not to participate in hegemonic masculinity (or were unable to because of their experiences), they found that their relationships with others were not reflected in dominant discourses either.

### **2.2.2 Relating to Dominant Discourses of Violence**

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<sup>18</sup> Though my participants did not express it, I believe that their inability to find discourses about relationships between men and women that involve gender neutrality is due to the fact that there are no such discourses in mainstream use.

Nowhere was this more obvious than in the relationships wherein their status as victims of sexualized violence was significant. Hegemonic discourses of gender have implications for discourses of violence. The basic tenet of such discourses is that violence is something that men do to others (most often, to women, although more progressive variations on the discourse recognize that some men do violence to other, less dominant men, and to children of either sex) in order to gain or maintain power (Nelson & Oliver, 1998). This discourse reinforces hegemonic discourses of masculinity by placing the power and the aggression in the hands of men, while hegemonic discourses of masculinity reinforce dominant discourses of violence by naturalizing men's aggression as well as, to some extent, normalizing it.

Hand in hand, these discourses have the effect of rendering other 'actors' invisible. Female perpetrators and male victims all but disappear in dominant discourses of violence (Wright, 2000). As a result there are few, if any discourses about male victims at all – good or bad. The men I interviewed explored the consequences of not having an easy way to talk about male victimization:

*“That’s a huge issue for me, because I have felt very powerless and yes, I have [known] an awful lot of women who can’t see that it’s possible for a man to be powerless, and a victim... Men or women can be victims; in fact, you know, women are probably victims and abusers in different aspects at the same time. And that, to define yourself [as a victim] or to define the other as an abuser... diminishes both... in the exercise of humanity, we have to stop those kinds of roles” (Walt, p. 10).*

*“Basically you just go on, and if [some recognition of your experiences as a survivor is] not there for you, it makes it even more of, uh, either a shamed or a taboo subject” (Rene, p. 7).*

Indeed, the lack of visibility for male victims within accounts of interpersonal violence, especially sexualized violence, is a significant issue. Crowder (1993) states that “our culture has no mythology to identify the process of male victimization,” (p. 17)<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Crowder (1993) uses the notion of mythology to describe the accessible accounts that individuals can draw upon in constructing their own experiences. Such accounts are understood in sociological terms as discourses; in this case, she is referring to discourses of hegemonic masculinity.

which results in our only having access to ways of talking about male victims that are stigmatizing and unhelpful.

### **2.2.3 Implications of Dominant Discourses of Violence**

The male survivors that I interviewed, speaking from a marginalized position, had no trouble at all recognizing the ways in which their experiences were hidden in dominant discourses of violence. More important to them were the tangible consequences of such discourses, particularly in their own lives:

*“What happened to me, like, a couple of people I got close to, I told. And, uh...they were women and I was going out with them. And the one girl, I told her, and we got in a big fight, and she started calling me faggot, and then I just ran from that... I wanted to tell people, but I didn’t. I had told two people, two women, and both times, you know, we got in that fight, they brought that up at me, right, and that sort of shut me down, and I just sort of went back into my little shell” (Quentin, p. 7).*

It was not surprising to learn that many of my participants feared that they wouldn’t be believed or accepted if they were more open to others about their experiences:

*“I think that a woman would be more open to [sharing their experiences]. Guys, guys couldn’t go to the police and say, you know, I’ve been [raped, or] anything, because it ‘wasn’t possible’” (Darryl, p. 8).*

*“I think conditioning. First off, I think conditioning. ‘Cause I mean, nobody ever wanted to, no one in the world wanted to know what goes on in the rest of the world. Like if they’ve been raped or assaulted or abused. But I think because of the feminist movement, more and more women felt secure about coming out of the closet, and men are still in there” (George, p. 11).*

The men I interviewed also pointed out the consequences of not having access to discourses of violence that included male victims. Primarily, my participants explained

that, seeing no confirmation in society at large that their experiences may have been as they were, they felt that they were alone in their experiences and that it hadn't happened to other boys. In such isolation, healing from sexual trauma becomes an extremely difficult task (Matthews, 1995). Men who were already silenced and shamed by their experiences grew up in environments where violence was an acceptable practice for boys, rather than a social issue in which victimization needed to be addressed:

*"I spent a large portion of my youth in these jails with this kind of like gladiator school, right? And, uh, and it was crazy. You know, like I got beat up for crying. And I got beat up for stupid stuff, like someone didn't like my shoes, or because I was snoring, or whatever, right? You know, and the times that I wasn't in prison, all I was doing was party hard, and hanging around the wrong people on the street. And so I never got any good values out of my abuse. And, uh, I hurt, and I felt hurt, and [as an adult] I just kept running" (Don, p. 7).*

Entrenched in such environments, my participants suggested that abuse survivors often believed they weren't deserving of help.

As well, some participants commented on how much harder being emotionally vulnerable seemed to be in comparison to acting out hegemonic masculinity:

*"I've been shot, I've been stabbed, I've been beaten with bats, all that stuff that I thought, you know, I had to be tough and take it, and you know, I- I- I did therapy in here and, uh, and I felt like dying. I would literally have to leave and lay on the ground outside to, uh, to slow it down, because I thought I was dying. You know, and the courage to come back time and time again to do that, took more courage than I ever had [on the street]. You know, and to accept the stuff that I'd done because I couldn't deal with it" (p. 3).*

Participants also explored how this obstacle was structurally and socially reinforced. Don, for instance, discussed how his experiences went unaddressed by the professionals who were supposed to be caring for him:

*“Like even when a lot of it came out, when I was like ten years old, um, it was all swept under the rug, and the guy, like they knew, uh, it happened, and my social worker didn’t even bother charging the guy. So he got away with it. And you know, it was their job to protect me, and they failed to do that” (p. 8).*

Some participants speculated that part of the problem was that there were men out there who were also survivors but who didn’t want to address their own issues:

*“Don: I think it’s just an uncomfortable subject to talk about. You know, a lot of guys in prison joke about sexual innuendoes, like a lot, and, uh, and, uh, so you know, when you say, you know that you were hurt sexually, right, and emotionally and physically and stuff like that, it, it’s just they don’t know how to interpret that or understand that, right?”*

*Kristin: Because their masculine posturing is on the surface level?*

*Don: Yeah. Or they’re survivors themselves, and it’s like, whoa, I don’t want to go there, so let’s talk about some jokes or take on this guy, right” (p. 2).*

More generally, participants suggested that acknowledging one man’s vulnerability might mean that other men might have to consider the possibility that they, too, were or could be made vulnerable:

*“So I think sometimes when men don’t want to hear it, it’s because they have to throw themselves on the table if they did that” (George, p.11).*

Whatever the reason, advocates for male survivors often comment on the lack of engagement in general society with the issue of male childhood sexual abuse (Wright, 2000). They claim that “many people do not want to believe that boys are ‘the other victims’ of sex crimes” (Grubman-Black, 1990, p. vii), because doing so would disrupt a familiar gender system in which the men are expected to be strong and aggressive while the women are believed to be weak and vulnerable.

## 2.3 Effects of the Lack of Discourses on Male Victims

The confusion and frustration with hegemonic masculinity felt by the men I interviewed was thus compounded by others' refusal to engage with the issue in any significant way. Their experiences are reflective of broader social forces, wherein we as a society are not discursively engaged with the possibility of male victims.

### 2.3.1 Invisibility and Isolation

The end result is that male victims have little or no visibility at a societal level. This lack of regard, in turn, is exacerbated at the individual level. The unwillingness of others to engage with the issue of male victimization only reinforced the isolation and secrecy that my participants struggled against in trying to deal with their experiences alone. This also made it more difficult for them to ask for help in dealing with their abuse.

It was important to my participants that they convey the breadth and depth of the consequences of their being abused in such contexts:

*"I lost like twenty years of my life. Like, I remember it, but most of the time, like, I basically don't know any of it. I almost flunked out. Um, high school was a blur. A lot of drinking. Got out of high school, I made a lot of money, and I started my own company. I was into drugs and all that other bad shit" (Martin, p. 14).*

Martin expressed the belief that these harmful behaviors arose out of a childhood spent struggling to understand what had happened and trying to cope with the aftermath of sexualized violence. This was echoed by other participants as well:

*"I watched a documentary on CBC, actually, that they compare childhood abuse to, like, war trauma. It's quite, quite similar to that... so I was like a ten year old child at war" (Don, p. 8).*

### 2.3.2 Lack of Resources

Given my participants' passionate need to communicate the severity of the consequences of male sexual abuse, it was not surprising that a common theme in many of the interviews I conducted was that more advocacy was needed for male victims, both as children and as adults trying to heal from abuse. Some spoke about the way in which such social issues need to become more visible through sources like the media:

*"[Mainstream media] kind of doesn't help, I think, somebody in pain in a family. You know, it can make it worse. And actually really, really rejected, 'cause you don't turn on prime time television and see a show about [being abused]. Generally, the big competition are comedies and kind of fluffy crap... then again, maybe I'm coming from a place that, uh, a lot of people don't want to tune into some show about how to cope with, you know, being physically or sexually abused, you know, stuff like that. Although I think that would be a lot more helpful in some cases, you know, if it was available on television on a special station, the 'help people' station." (Rene, p. 7).*

Indeed, while media attention has focused periodically on particularly sensational cases in which boys have been sexually abused (like the Mount Cashel trials), these tend to focus on the events, rather than on the men themselves (Wright, 2001). At any rate, such highly visible stories do not necessarily reflect the majority of male survivors' experiences (among my participants, for example, no one had been abused in an institutional setting)<sup>20</sup>. As well, education for children and teens rarely makes it explicit that sexual abuse happens to boys (Briggs & Hawkins, 1996).

On a structural level, few resources are expended on male victims of violence<sup>21</sup>. For example, Don spoke about the lack of resources for male survivors in the prison system, which continued despite evidence that a large percentage of incarcerated men had, in fact, survived some form of childhood abuse:

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<sup>20</sup> That being said, it is important to note that males are much more likely to be abused in institutional settings than girls, though this may be an artifact of the larger proportion of boys living in institutions than their female counterparts (Cermack & Molidor, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> During a keynote address at a national conference on the status of male children in Canada, for example, speaker Guy L'Heureux "gave a stunning indictment about our collective indifference to male victims when he stated that his home city spends over a million dollars per year saving stray dogs, but not one dime to assist adult male survivors of child abuse" (Conference Highlights, 2002, p. 10).

*“In prison for me first year I was just like, people would talk to me and just couldn’t hear them. And that’s when – the first time I reached out toward sexual abuse help, where I went to the teacher who taught the sex offender program, like she would give counseling to the guys who were offenders... and I lived with offenders, right? So, uh, I went to her and just said, listen, I – I need some help. My life’s hooped and I need to start doing something about it. And she says, well, you know, there’s not really much I can do” (p. 3).*

Although there were programs for sexual offenders in prison, there were no programs for men who were victims. Outside of prison, the same bias toward providing services for males only on the basis that they are perpetrators can be seen. For instance, there exist any number of centers for female survivors of sexualized violence, as well as transition houses, women’s centers, rape response programs, and safe houses. In contrast, there was at the time of this research one agency<sup>22</sup> in the province that is dedicated to serving male survivors of sexualized violence, and it has never been able to secure provincial funding for its operation (Wright, 2002).

For Don, as for several other participants in my study, agreeing to be interviewed was an important part of their own advocacy work for other male victims of sexualized violence. Indeed, this desire on the part of male survivors to increase their visibility has been documented in other qualitative studies with the same population:

Allied to the problems encountered with social sex roles were the participants’ opinions about how sexually abused males were perceived by society. Each of the men mentioned that they took part in this study in an effort to inform people that boys, too, are victimized by sexual abuse. Their perceptions about the general lack of acceptance of the sexually abused male concur with the findings... that families, professionals, and society have had difficulty assimilating the serious nature of the problems experienced by male victims of sexual abuse. Each of the men noted that the apparent refusal by members of society to recognize the extent of the problem... caused major difficulties, leaving each feeling a misfit” (Gill & Tutty, 1997, p. 45)

The tangible lack of resources for male victims speaks volumes about discourses of violence in our society today, and the invisibility of men who have been victimized

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<sup>22</sup> The BCSMSSA has since split into two agencies, one in Vancouver and one in Victoria, rather than continuing as one agency with two offices.

within those discourses. This invisibility feeds on itself, perpetuating the lack of recognition of male survivors by creating an environment wherein male survivors do not feel safe disclosing their experiences (Gill & Tutty, 1997, see also Cermack & Molidor, 1996). In calculations of prevalence rates, then, these men's experiences may not be reported, which in turn means that "the problem is given less attention than it deserves and requires" (Cermack & Molidor, 1996, p. 386)<sup>23</sup>. Parents, teachers, and professionals such as social workers and counselors are less prepared to recognize that a boy has been sexually victimized, which minimizes his chance of finding the resources he needs – a reality that my participants confirmed.

## 2.4 The role of Feminism in Discourses of Violence

When talking about the lack of visibility and advocacy for male survivors, one movement within our society seemed especially important to my participants: feminism. Although the feminist movement is responsible for our recognition of sexual abuse in general, through consciousness raising and advocacy work done in the 1970's, the focus of the movement has always been on female victims (Wright, 2001; see also Gonsiorek, Bera, and Le Tourneau, 1994). In the course of political action in support of female victims, there is often significant discussion about the perpetrators of violence. Feminism explicitly gives the perpetrator a male face (Matthews, 1996). Indeed, an important aspect of feminist advocacy is the connection of the personal to a broader sociopolitical analysis. Unfortunately, it is this same theorizing that has a tendency to render male victims invisible:

In feminist perspectives, sexual abuse is usually seen as a variant of the ways in which men control and oppress women... these models implicitly or explicitly minimize male victims and female perpetrators or recast them as mirrors of the male perpetrator/ female victim model without recognizing that they may have unique characteristics" (Gonsiorek, Bera, & Le Tourneau, 1994, p. 22).

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<sup>23</sup> Prevalence or incidence rates of male sexual victimization are particularly problematic. First of all, much depends on the definition of sexual abuse – what acts are included, what relationships between abuser and abused are counted, and so forth will greatly affect the percentage of men reporting that they have experienced abuse (Briere, 1992). Even when very conservative estimates are used, however, there is still evidence of under-reporting. Gill & Tutty (1997), for instance, note that "there are more perpetrators confessing to sexually molesting boys than there are boys admitting to being sexually molested" (p. 32). Similarly, Leaver & Gillespie noted that among over 100,000 pornography websites investigated by the Toronto Police, 70% of the children pictured were male, with the most common victim being a boy between the ages of three and seven (Conference Highlights, 2002, p. 12). For an excellent discussion of the seriousness of male victimization vis-à-vis calculated prevalence rates, see Violato and Genuis (1993).

The men I interviewed offered both supportive and critical comments on feminism.

### **2.4.1 Pro-Feminist Sentiments**

While only a few participants identified themselves as explicitly pro-feminist, most expressed agreement with what they perceived to be the feminist cause – i.e. women’s equality:

*“But then some stereotypes are, I think – there is a percentage that is accurate. You know, there is a lot of men out there are that are killing their girlfriends and their wives and doing horrible things. And you see a lot more of that on TV than women killing their men, their husbands or their boyfriends. So there’s something to that” (Rene, pp. 12-13).*

Of course, their agreement with some feminist ideas did not prevent my participants from being critical of others. In a few instances, their critique of feminism was framed in ‘backlash’ language: Walt, for instance, stated that “there’s a core leadership in feminism... which basically is hateful towards men” (p.11). However, the comments that my participants generally presented were not so much that feminists were discriminatory against men, but rather that they were unwilling to talk about the ways in which men might be oppressed or marginalized in our society. In fact, several participants took care to be clear that they opposed neither feminist principles, nor feminists themselves:

*“It’s been the way of the world for so long. Perhaps it’s the other end of this barrel where women are fighting back and all this other stuff’s starting, and they’re calling all men rapists, that’s just a reaction” (Martin, p. 10).*

*“I don’t blame them, I can’t blame them. We went through the same thing [sexual abuse], how can I? I support feminism completely” (Fred, p. 14).*

Interestingly, the men that expressed an understanding of feminist positions also talked about coming across resistance from women. For instance, Fred recounted the story of taking a Sociology of Gender course in university, in which he was the only male student:

*"I had one [woman] ask me to leave... in front of the professor, in front of the whole class. [She said], 'what are you doing here? Get out!' [I said], 'well, I paid for this one too'... her reasoning was that they wouldn't feel open to discussing certain issues... and you know, if that's the case, you're never going to be, you know, open to discussing the issues. She didn't leave the class, and neither did I" (p. 13).*

### **2.4.2 Critiques of Feminism**

Kuypers (1999) talks about men's contradictory experience of power in terms of the 'average' man – who is able to participate in hegemonically masculine claims to power, but often feels powerless in interpersonal relationships where he is unable to express his feelings or experience intimacy with others because of the way that 'masculinity' – which he needs in order to have power – is constructed in our society. Male survivors, however, experience an even deeper contradiction: they have been the victims of sexualized violence, some at the hands of women, but they are being told that in general, it is men who are violent and who need to change their behavior (Weinberg, 2000). In particular, some of my participants stated that feminism delivers such a message, criticizing men for being violent and oppressive towards women without recognizing that some men are victims, rather than perpetrators:

*"I mean, I don't like to use the word victim, but, um, feminism has taught them that they're victims, um, so they can't see their own power, and they can't see that men can be victims as well... I think that's the kind of excessive feminism that needs to turn back... That's a very negative aspect which made me extremely angry. You know, as a male victim of violence, um, I get extremely angry at the, even at Take Back the Night and all these kinds of things... I have no problem supporting the fact that women should not be assaulted in relationships. But I have a real problem that this means that all men are*

*bad, all men are abusers, all women are victims and powerless. 'Cause that's not true" (Walt, p. 10).*

*"I wonder if maybe the pendulum has swung so far over to understanding, um, how unfair things have been to women, that men have kind of been brushed aside" (Rene, p. 13).*

Once again, a lack of discourse about male survivors leaves little alternative to understanding sexual abuse as something that is perpetrated by men against women. This, of course, has implications for men who are victims:

Once boys realize that something sexual has happened to them that was confusing or inappropriate, there are no clear avenues for clarifying their confusion. Rape crisis centers and other victim services are generally staffed and identified as resources for women (Gonsiorek, Bera, & Le Tourneau, 1994, p. 46).

The male survivors I interviewed explained that isolation and a lack of resources left them feeling alone, confused and helpless, which only served to exacerbate the pain of trauma.

### **3. Locating the Problem – and the Solution**

Thus, my participants simultaneously expressed a desire for new understandings of masculinity and an acknowledgement that they had, at times, actively tried to participate in hegemonically masculine behavior in an effort to qualify – actions which, far from being resistant to dominant understandings of gender, actually comply with them. This contradiction is consistent with the idea that masculinity as a concept is in flux (e.g. see Connell, 1995). Participants, however, tended not to locate their struggle in the realm of the social.

Instead, they located the source of the confusion within themselves as individuals. In particular, the fact that they had been abused as children was strongly salient. Nearly every participant I interviewed commented that it was difficult for them to separate out which beliefs and behaviors were consequences of the abuse they had suffered, and which were a result of the kind of masculinity they had been taught to emulate:

*“You know, I can’t speak to where that comes from, whether it’s a part of the abuse stuff, whether that is a factor of feeling so alone, you know, so isolated that it becomes impossible or very difficult to trust anybody else... I can’t speak beyond that... I think for me [there is] a whole piece of not trusting people in general, and having an even deeper distrust of men in particular” (William, p. 12).*

*“I don’t know. I have a hard time pinpointing that out because as a survivor of abuse you get into all kinds of trigger reactions and essentially not knowing what’s normal – normal for you, normal for men, and so that it’s a lot more uncertainty than it would be if you’ve never had the kind of experiences that I’ve had. And you’re a lot more uncomfortable with whatever your received concepts of masculinity were. And, uh, so I can’t isolate how [things] work differently. I know they work differently, I can see that they work differently, but I’ve got too much other factors involved there” (Walt, p. 4).*

Academic research on male survivors of sexual abuse also tends to focus on the individual more than on broader social forces:

The interaction between... abuse and the process of masculine socialization can create an intense conflict for male victims. To be abused as a child is to experience fear, helplessness, powerlessness, shame and humiliation at an intensity that is overwhelming... He is plunged by the abuse into a sea of emotions that have already been identified as inherently non-masculine; emotions that, in fact, define nonmasculinity. Yes he is experiencing them, and they become indelible parts of him, because they are traumatically etched into his memory and therefore his experience of himself; of who he is... how does the male victim live with such a conflict? (Lisak, 1997, 168)

A continued focus on individual identity issues, as opposed to broader political concerns, in some ways reinforces the lack of a coherent sociopolitical agenda around male victimization (Matthews, 2003). In other ways, however, such a focus is justified and even necessary: male survivors struggle with these conflicts on an individual level and this struggle has consequences for their everyday lives. Before the personal can be connected to the political, awareness must be raised about what private troubles exist<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Of course, the difficulty is that private troubles will be harder to share – a necessary step in creating awareness - if some level of public attention – and acceptance, does not already exist.

This involves understanding the ways in which hegemonic masculinity and the sexual abuse of males are intertwined.

### **3.1 The Overlap between Hegemonic Masculinity and Abuse**

The men I interviewed had difficulty separating out the effects of sexual abuse from the effects of investing in hegemonic discourses of masculinity, because the effects were similar in many ways. There were two areas in which the overlap between hegemonic discourses of masculinity and the consequences of surviving sexual abuse were particularly evident. These were with regard to intimacy and feelings, and sexuality and sexual identity.

#### **3.1.1 Intimacy and Feelings**

My participants noted that they had difficulty being intimate and expressing their feelings. They acknowledged that under the tenets of hegemonic masculinity, emotional expression on the part of men was penalized; however, for the men I interviewed, such sanctions were compounded by the shame and fear that surrounded their sexual abuse:

*“I guess my perception on how intimate someone’s been with me is masked by the fact or colored by the fact that, I mean, I know I have this history that a lot of people don’t know about, and then I feel like, okay, I’ve only gone this far with them, we’re not, like super tight friends, um, even though I would call them my best friend. But there’s a distance in there still. I don’t know if they have these same kinds of issues they haven’t told anybody. So I don’t know how intimate we really are” (Marcus, p. 8).*

The inability to talk about feelings that some participants had initially identified as a characteristic of masculinity was also revisited as a result of having been abused as children:

*“I have known that I have been abused all, all my life. It wasn’t something I shared, so there wasn’t a whole lot else I shared about myself, really. That defined my whole life. The rest of my life. My abuse defined my life – can’t share” (Darryl, p. 7).*

As a result, men expressed a feeling of isolation in the relationships they had:

*“I think part of that is just a general discomfort with, with identifying with any group...I really honestly don’t know [what] that is all about. Um, coming from sort of the background that – that I have, there’s a big piece of me that just feels like, um, I guess, feeling sort of damaged beyond repair. It’s like this stuff has happened in my life which has really changed how I view the world to such a degree, to such an extent, that to try and identify with, you know, other men, um, in particular has become really, really difficult. Um, you know, I’ve in the past tried to figure out how to identify with my dad and with my brothers, and there’s just no connection at all, in fact, the process of trying to work that out has in fact caused me to want to have less to do with them, you know... Likewise as I’ve tried to get to know men through the center, again realizing that the void between us is so great that, yeah, there’s this common piece, but there’s not any common ground, you know, to-to develop a relationship on. And likewise with trying to develop female relationships, the same kind of stuff comes, comes to the surface for me, where, um, I feel so, I guess uncomfortable about my history, you know, that I have a hard time, you know, trying to visualize what a healthy relationship could be” (William, p. 13).*

One participant explained that his abuse was “one of my... deep dark secrets” that he couldn’t safely share, in part because he was afraid of other people’s reactions, and in part because men didn’t talk about their feelings (Quentin, p.6 ).

### **3.1.2 Sexuality and Sexual Identity**

Even more confusing for the men I interviewed was the way in which hegemonic discourses of masculinity and the experience of childhood sexual abuse interacted when they considered sex and sexuality. For some men, the most salient point was that they had been sexualized so early that they believed sex was a normal part of all relationships:

*“I never had a girlfriend that I didn’t have sex with. I never had a girl who was a friend – well, yeah, I did, but most of the time it was very difficult for me to have a girl who was a friend and not have sex with them. And that’s the way it was. The sex played such a*

*large role in my life at such a young age that I believed it was a natural part of it” (Darryl, p. 8).*

*“I put, uh, all my thoughts into the sex part of it all, because I was brought up, uh, being very sexual since I was, uh, since I was five years old, or maybe even earlier, and, uh, so, I was into thinking like a proper man, like the way a proper man would think” (Ben, p. 3).*

For Ben, sexualized behavior was so normalized that when he was young, he considered it the ‘proper’ way for a man (or, in his case, even a boy) to behave.

Others emphasized the way in which their normal needs for love and affection were twisted by what they had learned about love through the experience of sexualized violence:

*“I don’t think I had any morals sexually because of the abuse, so I slept with whoever, whatever, and it really, it bothered me, some I didn’t want to sleep with, but I just associated [sex with] love and whether it was male or female didn’t really matter... I didn’t know why I had no sexual values, um, and I was also a heroin addict so I... grew up on the streets mostly, so I spent a lot of time just doing whatever it took. So that meant sleeping with people, or hustling, or whatever, or even just to be loved and cared for. I was raped by bikers when I was 15, and I stayed there [with the biker gang] on and off until I was probably 23. And the reason why was because this guy understood, they would care about me and I could do whatever... I don’t know what it was like to have a normal childhood, really, or a normal life” (Jim, p. 1).*

It is important to consider the ways in which experiencing sexual victimization as a child also led men like Jim to be in places of increased risk of further violence. While this is a generally accepted consequence of the sexual abuse of women, very little research, to my knowledge, has been done on the cycle of victimization in men’s lives. Nonetheless, those researchers who have considered the possibility that men may be re-victimized as adults, much as women often are, have affirmed that this can be the case. Gartner (1999), for example, found several instances in which his participants had been victimized as adults, in both sexual and non-sexual relationships. He concludes that

“these men, like their female counterparts, often enough find adult relationships in which they themselves are sexually abused or otherwise exploited” (p. 330).

Confusion about sexuality thus had important implications for my participants’ relationships with others. Further, they explained that this confusion also affected their relationship with themselves, especially with regard to how they viewed masculinity:

*“The issues with the man who abused me really, um, take that whole sexuality aspect of maleness and make it, turn it around, so that, you know, I don’t feel like there’s that I have very much to be proud of, being a man” (William, p. 8).*

*“Just because of my past, and the abuse, it’s just been a lifetime of trying to deal with that, which is probably why, why I’ve abandoned [traditional ideas about masculinity] in my life, because it’s been people who epitomize stereotypical masculinity who were the abusers in my past” (Fred, p. 4).*

Problems with the physical act of sex were also identified, as the act often triggered anxiety or even memories for male survivors:

*“Well, I’ve been in abuse therapy for, um, three and half years, and, uh, I certainly have had a lot of partners, but even as recently as this last fall I was having problems with being present in the moment during sex without dissociating, or having performance anxiety and being unable to perform, and at either event producing sexuality which was unsatisfying to me and probably unsatisfying to my wife, and trying to talk about this, to say well, no sweetheart, you’re not the problem. I mean there are things that you can do to help, um, but it, you know, it’s part of being a survivor, and it makes me really angry that as a survivor I have to put up with this, and this is 34 years later” (Walt, p. 14).*

A final important area in which sexual abuse affected my participants’ sexuality was with regard to their sexual identities. Several of my participants mentioned that being abused by men created a concern for them, because they feared the implication that they were gay. They were very much aware of the fact that hegemonically masculine men were explicitly heterosexual:

*"I pushed myself to become more of a man because of my sexual abuse, right? I said, 'okay, you're supposed to – a man is supposed to love a woman, not a man, not being with a man, or whatever, and so I forced myself to always do that. And, uh, so always looked at sexuality as a man, sometimes, my personal way was, uh, if you could please a woman sexually, then you're a man'" (Ben, p. 2).*

They were also very much aware that having been abused by men might 'disqualify' them from heterosexuality:

*"You know, someone who is a survivor, a male survivor, I think whether they're victimized by a male or not but especially if they're victimized by a male, has all kinds of problems with, um, sexual identity, that it's just not the assumed thing that it is for most other people. So I mean I went for a decade after the last series of assaults when I was a teenager, I didn't date at all. And I – has this guy made me homosexual? And, uh, and still I'm working things out, all these years later" (Walt, p. 14).*

The question of what the implications of being sexually abused were for a man's sexual identity was a difficult one for most of my participants to unravel. George, in particular, spent a lot of time trying to articulate why homophobia was an issue for male survivors:

*"They wonder, if a man did that to me, does that mean I'm gay?... 'Cause you see, I hear some men talk about, even young men, I don't see men saying don't be afraid, don't be homophobic. I see women doing it all over the place... [once I made a joke to this woman about Elton John] and within two sentences out comes the word homophobic. And I was thinking about it today, and I guess I can kind of see – am I homophobic or am I just a survivor?... If you're homophobic it's because you're afraid of something, so I don't know" (George, pp. 11-12).*

I asked him what he thought men were afraid of, with homophobia, and he reflected on his own behaviors:

*“George: I don’t think it is something to be afraid of... I don’t know if this makes much sense, but... I think that, uh, its not so much that I’m, I’m going to be afraid, it’s, uh, I’m being real... And the second thing is that I tried to control women. I grew up in a society that did that too, and I’m not sure why. We were afraid, obviously. We were afraid of being, being like them, or that something deep inside us could be that way, and we’re afraid of that. Or whether it’s that we’re afraid just because somebody had hurt us. And I bet if you asked I’d say more men than women hurt us. There’s a lot more men out there like me.*

*Kristin: So the fear is that if you’re associated with, if you’re identified as gay, you can be hurt again.*

*George: Either that or [homophobia is our reaction to men hurting us] much the same way as a woman hates her assaulter” (pp. 12-13).*

It seemed that the complicated relationship between childhood sexual abuse and sexual identity was layered. The men I interviewed identified concerns that the abuse might have decided their sexual identities for them. They expressed fears about being ‘made gay’ by their experiences. However, they also expressed confusion about why homosexuality was fearful, trying to understand for themselves something that hegemonic masculinity takes for granted – the idea that heterosexuality is preferred, and that there is something inherently wrong about gayness. Just as they had come to redefine their understanding of masculinity, some participants talked about redefining their understanding of homosexuality. Jim, for instance, talked about moving from a place where “I had such a fear that I’d be gay” to a place where “I realized that it wasn’t such a bad thing even if I was” (p. 1).

The homophobia entrenched in men’s experiences of sexual victimization has been well-documented; indeed, confusion and concern about sexual orientation is considered one of the distinctions between how sexual abuse affects males versus females (Matthews, 1996). This concern is symptomatic, of course, of the pervasive existence of homophobia in society at large. In relation to sexual abuse, homophobic reactions are predicated on the notion that sexual abuse, however forceful, is still sex – one can be ‘made gay’ by engaging in homosexual activities in a way that would not be possible if

sexual abuse were understood to be primarily an issue of violence instead of as one of sex:

As a result of the pervasive homophobia [in society], in situations of sexual abuse where both the victim and the perpetrator are male, there is a distinct tendency for the same-sex aspect of the interaction rather than the exploitative aspect to predominate in the minds of most observers (Gonsiorek, Bera, & Le Tourneau, 1994, p. 15).

More generally, Bavelas (2000) documents the way in which the dominance of the sexual element of sexualized violence over the violent element is discursively produced through the use of euphemistical references to discourses of romance and consensual activity to describe childhood sexual abuse (for instance, saying 'he kissed the boy' or 'she fondled the boy' instead of 'he put his tongue in the boy's mouth' or 'she touched the boy's genitals'). A sexualized discourse is much more available than a discourse that emphasizes the violation inherent in the acts; it is not surprising that many survivors, themselves, end up drawing from sexualized discourses to describe their experiences. A byproduct of this, however, is that the traumatic experiences are associated with (consensual) sex, which means that sexuality and sexual identity must be brought into the equation (Weinberg, 2000).

Adding to this, of course, are discourses about homosexuality that treat it as though it could be passed on like some contagion (Humphries, 1985). When homosexuality is discursively associated with pathology, and treated as something more like a disease than an individual characteristic, it becomes possible to be 'made gay', and it is understandable that men who already face so many experiences that violate hegemonic masculine norms may come to fear this.

### **3.2 The Role of Sexual Abuse in Alternative Understandings of Masculinity**

Just as my participants located the struggles they faced with regard to masculinity in the realm of the individual, they also attributed their changing beliefs about masculinity to factors related to their individual agency. By engaging in attempts to be powerful or dominant, these men had used the trappings of hegemonic masculinity to bolster their sense of self-esteem. However, most noted that acting in such ways did not

have the desired effect – it did not make them feel as though they qualified as ‘masculine’, since there was still the issue of having been a victim of childhood sexual abuse to contend with. Several talked about the way that acting hyper masculinity out made them think that they weren’t being true to their own natures. Thus, while many of my participants talked about engaging in aggressive behaviors in the past, before they had begun therapy work for their sexual abuse, their present focus seemed to have shifted. Indeed, some of the participants I talked to implicated their abuse as a primary reason for wanting to reconceptualize their understanding of gender:

*“Just because of my past, and the abuse, it’s just been a lifetime just trying to deal with that, which is probably why, why I’ve abandoned [traditional masculinity] in my life, because it’s been people who epitomize stereotypical masculinity who were the abusers in my past” (p. 4).*

The experience of having been victimized gave my participants a unique perspective on human vulnerability, which allowed them to be more compassionate than they thought other men might be:

*“Unlike most people I know that people are fragile. I know they can be hurt really easily. And I know that nobody deserves to have anger in their face. You know, because it’s scary” (Jim, p. 2).*

Thus, my participants seemed to be uniquely situated in a place where they could critically reflect on the basic tenets of hegemonic masculinity, and express empathy for other men who, like them, didn’t fit into those ideals.

My participants’ responses to hegemonic masculinity, then, were context dependent. There is no doubt in my mind that being in therapy significantly affected their understanding of dominant ideals of masculinity, and especially their understanding of themselves. This is especially the case given that the BCSMSSA had an explicit focus on providing men with experiences of nurturance, empathy, and intimacy, often from and with other men – an experience that is clearly opposed to hegemonically masculine ideals of toughness and invulnerability (Wright, 2001). It would be interesting to see if male survivors who had not engaged in therapy also experienced a shift in their identities, from

emulating hegemonic masculinity to, in some cases, actively taking a stand against it. Unfortunately, given that this study was conducted with men who had sought the help of counseling for their childhood traumas, this is an aspect of the issue that I am unable to explore<sup>25</sup>.

### 3.3 Consciousness Raising Spaces

Early on in the women's movement of the 1970s, feminist activists recognized that women needed a safe place where they could go to recover from the traumas they'd experienced. At the same time, feminists saw these places as providing opportunities to raise women's consciousnesses with regard to how their experiences were symptomatic of the broader oppression of women under patriarchy. Consciousness raising spaces gave women an opportunity to connect their experiences to feminist politics, providing them with a context for understanding what had happened to them. Similarly, the participants I interviewed talked about the need for such spaces for men.

#### 3.3.1 Safe Places to Go

It is obvious that for many participants, having a place like the BCSMSSA to come to was a major factor in helping them understand that they not were alone as male survivors and that they could be accepted and cared for as vulnerable men:

*"I went into a recovery house three years ago, and, uh, that's when I sort of got a good realization that hey, I've been sexually abused here when I was a kid, and that issue kept coming up, you know, every time I tried to get, to move forward, that always seemed to stop me up... and then lo and behold, like five other guys in the recovery house were all going through this stuff that I had yet to start, right?... you know, I'm not unique here., you know, there's a lot of this going on!... And they started telling their stories, like in front of all the group of guys, you know, it just, like – that takes courage, man, you know what I mean? And, and, uh, they were breaking down and crying, and, and I just started crying and couldn't stop. I was just – and so I, what I just, you know, the one guy, I*

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<sup>25</sup> Indeed, this is a limitation with nearly all studies of child abuse survivors, since most are recruited through therapeutic organizations. Indeed, to recruit participants who had not engaged in therapy and then ask them about issues relating to their experience of child abuse is, in my opinion, unethical given the potential for psychological harm that such a study could create.

*pulled him aside and I said look it, man, I – and he introduced me, he told me about this place [BCSMSSA]” (Quentin, p. 8).*

It wasn't until Quentin found a place where sexual abuse could be talked about in a way that wasn't derogatory or disrespectful toward male victims that he was able to seek out the help he needed to work on his own problems. Indeed, it wasn't until he entered a recovery house for men with substance abuse problems that he even knew resources for men existed, which again speaks to a lack of discourse about male survivors. As well, Quentin's experiences underlined the importance of creating that discourse:

*“Knowing a couple of these guys for a few years, you know, in the same boat I was, you know, dealing dope and in jail and bla, bla, bla, and then seeing them, these guys had a year or two clean time and I had just come in, and they were doing good. They were able to say stuff that, in front of a group of people that I wish I could have said forty years ago. And that sort of gave me some incentive, and it gave me some willpower. And it's like, you know, that old adage, too, well, if he can do it, I can too, right? You know, so I mean, and I seen how the other guys in the group reacted to it, and people had it – and the guys there, they didn't talk. I didn't hear about it at the meeting down the road, you know, that sort of thing. So that kind of gave me some, gave me some hope that yeah, okay, I can talk to certain people about this stuff, knowing that I'm not going to have it brought up while I'm sitting at the dinner table with a bunch of people, you know what I mean?” (pp. 10-11).*

The respect with which he and his experiences were treated was the key factor that Quentin identified in describing the change in his belief system that he needed in order to begin healing from the trauma of his past. Other participants had taken a similar change in their understanding of gender and translated it into activism, raising consciousness around reconceptualizing masculinity and male victimization:

*“[When I became a peer counselor in jail,] they gave me a computer and a desk and an office about this size, and then people started coming to me. And people started talking*

*to me. And the next thing I know I'd have like a hundred guys... and some of the stuff that guys would come in, it was a lot to do with my life And you know, mainly all I really did was just sit here and listen, and just, uh, you know, I'd try to point out the obvious to them, right, because usually, you know, most people have their own answers... and, uh, after a while guys just accepted me for, this guy who just wanted to help, you know, and guys didn't call me names anymore, and guys didn't pick on my, and it was just, you know, this guy just wants to turn his life around and help, right? And, uh, so it was actually kind of weird when I left, because I actually was sad that I was leaving that network behind" (Don, p. 6)*

Indeed, it seemed that taking some kind of action to help others was important to many of my participants, who often mentioned talking to their friends informally about the possibility of men moving away from hegemonic masculinity, as well as describing more formal advocacy and activist work that they had done, such as Don's work as a peer counselor. Other studies have noted this as well (e.g. see Thomas, Nelson, & Summers, 1994).

### **3.3.2 Participants' Advocacy Work**

The BCSMSSA and the peer support program in prison could be considered consciousness-raising spaces, similar to the spaces in which feminism first developed and women first began to connect their experiences to larger social forces. For most men, however, such a large-scale politicization of men's trauma issues has yet to occur. Advocacy for male survivors (and indeed, for alternative understandings of masculinity more generally) continues to occur mostly in individual interactions with others. This was reflected in the kind of work for social change that my participants engaged in; it occurred mostly on an individual level, such as within the home, where they taught their children different beliefs than the ones they had grown up with:

*"[I] try to teach [my son] that every single kid in school feels the same in some way or another – that whenever you go into a class and you're terrified of a test, and, you know, the biggest bully is giving everybody a hard time about it – well, he's just as scared. He just doesn't know how to put it into words, and to me, that's one of the biggest*

*differences, is someone who believes in traditional masculinity couldn't talk his way out of a paper bag" (Fred, p. 7).*

In their experiences of advocating for new ways of talking about male survivors and masculinity, however, my participants also encountered resistance. Fred, for instance, told a story that illustrated how the work he was doing to teach his son about alternative understandings of masculinity conflicted with other messages the boy got about 'being a man':

*"The teacher he, not in so many words, but he suggested that, uh, why didn't [my son] basically defend himself against a bully? I said, 'pardon me? Don't you ever raise that point with my child without running it past me in the first place' ... you know, that's not what I'm trying to teach him... the teacher basically told him to go fight it out in the school yard... [my son] doesn't believe in that. You know, he believes in everybody treating everybody with respect" (p. 10).*

Similarly, other participants mentioned that women were also sometimes resistant to hearing the idea that men could be victimized:

*I knew lots of women, and I can say my present wife is one of them, whose husbands, the fathers of their children, basically had nothing to do with them for years and year and years... so her experience of a man was someone who ran up the bills, uh, he left her with the bills, and didn't mind his responsibilities to his children as human beings, or to the promise to support them. And so [it's] not hard to understand where she was coming from as a result. But it was really hard for her; it took years for her to process the idea that I, too, was a victim" (Walt, p. 13).*

My participants felt strongly that it was important to encourage others to explore alternative understandings of masculinity, but they felt frustrated with the resistance they encountered, and with their inability to find a broader social context into which they could place their experiences.

#### **4. Conclusion**

My participants spoke in ways that showed that masculinity was problematic for them; they could not contentedly participate in what they identified as ‘masculine’ and found themselves searching for new ways to understand gender that allowed more flexibility for the vulnerabilities and contradictions they experienced. All my participants, in fact, identified with something other than hegemonic masculinity, although all also told a story of first believing in dominant gender ideals and then slowly moving away from them as they grew into adults.

Relationships and violence were topics that my participants frequently discussed during the interviews. They explained that as men who had been victimized, they do not fit into dominant understandings of violence, which posit that men are the perpetrators of violence towards women and that violence serves the purpose of controlling women in a patriarchal society. Such a viewpoint, which gained political strength through the feminist movement, did not offer my participants much in the way of understanding their own experiences as victims.

Indeed, many of the men I interviewed articulated this as a problem. However, with the exception of one or two, all of my participants framed this problem as something they, as individuals, were required to deal with, as opposed to understanding it as a social phenomenon that could be challenged collectively. In the context of my interviews, this isn’t that surprising: I was asking individual men to reflect on their lives and their personal understandings of masculinity. What is surprising, however, is that this focus on the individual is prevalent in the academic literature on male survivors of sexual abuse, and indeed, on masculinity itself. Masculinity has been theorized to be “in crisis” (Connell, 1995) – but theorizing about gender often locates the solution to that crisis in individual men’s actions and experiences, rather than in a critical examination of the gender structures that contribute to a patriarchal society.

This realization led me to address a third question in this research: how can male survivors’ experiences inform theories of patriarchy? This question is taken up in the next section, where I explore some of the limitations of current theorizing on masculinity, as well as positing the implications of this for our understanding of patriarchy and oppression.

## Chapter Four: Analysis

One of the most sociologically interesting findings from my interviews was the lack of discourse around male victimization that my participants identified. They explained that they had trouble connecting their experiences with a broader understanding of why sexualized violence towards men occurs in our society. This lack of connection is a symptom of the marginalization of issues concerning the social control of men under patriarchy. Generally, theories of patriarchy center on the notion that men exert power over and enjoy privileges in relation to women. Such theories do not account for men's experiences of constraint in patriarchal systems. Connell (1987) notes that although men in general are advantaged compared to women, "nevertheless... there are costs for men in their social advantages, sometimes serious ones" (p. xi). The men I interviewed have identified some such costs, as reported in the previous chapter.

When I first started exploring this avenue in my research, I found myself increasingly dissatisfied with my inability to synthesize my findings into an understanding of men's lives in a patriarchal system. My first efforts at finding other research on which to ground my analysis left me feeling as though I was working in a void. I was quickly disabused of the notion that no one was working in this area. Further research revealed that men in academia have been writing about masculinity and patriarchy for decades, and that men's groups, similar to feminist consciousness-raising groups, had once been relatively prevalent. However, where feminist groups eventually gave rise to more formal organizing, political lobbying, and so forth, men's groups seem to have dissolved with limited effect on social change<sup>26</sup>. This leads to the inevitable question, first posed by Hearn (1987): Why has so little attention actually been focused on men as gendered beings, and on the conceptualization of men's lives under patriarchy as a social problem?

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<sup>26</sup> Although in certain areas, such as around fathers' rights, there has been a significant level of activism, both in terms of noncustodial fathers' rights to access to their children and in terms of changing legislation so that fathers, as well as mothers, had the right to paid parental leave.

## **1. Politicizing Men's Issues**

The simplest and most obvious answer to this question is that men's issues are not politicized in the way that women's issues have been. There may be a number of reasons for this; two that seem particularly salient are the lack of critical, anti-oppressive reflection on masculinity, especially amongst the general public and the role of feminism in directing political attention to women's issues rather than men's.

### **1.1 A Lack of Critical Reflection**

One of the reasons why work on masculinity has not translated into wide-scale change may be that men are not sufficiently motivated to examine their gender critically. As Connell (1987) notes, "in a gender order where men are advantaged and women are disadvantaged, major structural reform is, on the face of it, against men's interests" (p. 285). Men, as a group, enjoy an elevated status compared to women. They earn better wages, often are exempt from menial tasks such as housework or childcare (which are, not coincidentally, generally unwaged activities), and generally hold more positions of power, both in business and government, than women do (Edley & Wetherell, 1996). This power undoubtedly comes at a cost to men, especially with regard to their emotional wellbeing. However, the fact that patriarchy advantages men over women means that any effort to eliminate the costs of hegemonic masculinity will likely involve men relinquishing (at least some of) the privileges conferred to them by patriarchy.

Nonetheless, there are some very good reasons for men to get involved in such a movement and many men, academic and otherwise, seem to believe that dismantling patriarchy – and male privilege – would be beneficial for men as well as women. Both Connell (1987) and Hearn (1987) were able to come up with extensive lists of reasons why men might want to engage in precisely this kind of political activity. Between the two of them, they list reasons that range from empathizing with women's situation, through looking at the ways in which hegemonic masculinity is detrimental to men's physical and mental health, all the way to connecting patriarchy to the threat of nuclear war.

Furthermore, the monolithic construction of male privilege (that is, that all men are privileged) has already come under fire. For instance, activism by marginalized groups such as gay and black men has revealed that the privileges associated with

manhood are not distributed equally among all men (Morgan, 1992). Through this work, the category 'men' has been fragmented, so that it is clear that there are hierarchies amongst men, and differing levels of power. Men who have traditionally found themselves at the margins would indeed have a strong motivation to challenge patriarchy. Such reasons are compelling enough to suggest that it is not *only* because men do not want to give up their privileges that a men's movement has not taken root in our society.

Another issue that contributes to the lack of politicization around men's issues is the difficulty that men's movements have historically had in finding a cohesive center around which to organize. While second wave feminism was initially able to organize around the notion that women were victims of oppression under patriarchy, men as a group cannot make that claim (Connell, 1987). Indeed, any anti-oppressive work that men wish to do must also contend with the fact that under patriarchy, men can and do act as agents of the oppression of women (sometimes simply by not challenging the status quo). Any theory that hopes to explain the way in which men are victims of violence based on gender, for instance, must also explain the way in which they are perpetrators:

Men's violence to women remains a key difficulty for men's theorizing and men's theorizing of men, since men's gendered practices, particularly those of hegemonic masculinities, are so deeply implicated in the use, generation, threat, and reproduction of violence (Hearn, 1998, p. 782).

As a result, anti-oppressive activists who are men may find themselves turning their attention to other issues, where this degree of conflict does not exist. Newton (2002) certainly found this to be the case; she quotes one scholar who had been involved in both anti-sexist and anti-racist movements:

When it came to sexism, he recalled, in a moment of genuine openness and self-reflection, he had felt 'tremendous pressure' and a division of 'head and heart', but when it came to racism he 'never felt that same kind of contradiction' because 'your head and heart generally merge around... issues where you feel you are in effect a victim... as opposed to a victimizer' (p. 184).

Thus, a tension exists between men's desire to explore the way their lives are socially constrained under patriarchy and their acknowledgement that women's lives are even more constrained in a patriarchal system.

Men who want to critically engage with hegemonic masculinity and talk about the tensions they experience in living with the expectations of hegemonic masculinity may resist doing so because of their fear of judgement by other men (Newton, 2002). In her work with male academics, for example, Newton (2002) discovered that some academics hesitated to engage with critical gender studies because they worried about “losing one’s edge” or being perceived as “soft” by other male academics (p. 184). Just like schoolyard bullies, men in academic and activist settings can function to police gender, ensuring that the men around them are complying with hegemonic masculinity.

It is not only men who have something invested in keeping hegemonic masculinity in ascendancy, however. Women also play a role in maintaining these structures. For instance, several of the men I interviewed mentioned that they’d had experiences with women who wanted them to be hegemonically masculine men – to be strong, protective, not too emotional, and so forth. Further, Hearn (1987) notes that women often contribute to patriarchy indirectly, by participating in patriarchal institutions, including the family – in effect, by playing the role that patriarchy requires of them. Indeed, in many cases, women themselves believe that gender roles are appropriate (for instance, see Allen & Hawkins (1999) study on mothers, which found that many women inhibit their partners’ involvement with children because they believe that men are ill-suited to childcare). Whether through direct reinforcement or complicity, it is important to acknowledge that women, as well as men, help maintain patriarchal structures and the discourses of gender that sustain them.

## **1.2 Differences Between the Feminist Movement and Men’s Activism**

Fear of the disdain of other men is not the only barrier to a ‘men’s movement’, however. A further complication resides in the fact that feminism itself contributes to discourses of masculinity in ways that tend to reinforce hegemonic ideas. In fact, the feminist movement has *relied* on images of masculinity that emphasize men’s aggressiveness, dominance, and potential for violence in order to make their case for women’s liberation (Wiegman, 2002). Radical feminists use slogans such as “all men have oppressed women” to garner support for women’s issues, making explicit the fact that there is an ‘enemy’ against which feminists are fighting, and this enemy is male

(Gardiner, 2002, p. 3). In so doing, they rely on essentialist understandings of masculinity that reinforce dominant discourses about men, which describe men as being more aggressive and lustful by nature.

It is important to acknowledge that there are many strands of feminist thought, of which only radical feminists tend to find it politically expedient to portray men and women as fundamentally different. Liberal feminists, for instance, rely on the opposite argument – that women and men are basically capable of performing the same duties, and should therefore have the same rights - to carry their platform focusing on legislative reform. However, what is of importance here is the discourse about masculinity that became publicly accessible. Indeed, Gardiner (2002) comments that “second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s... is frequently represented by the rhetoric of the most vocal, if not the most populous of its perspectives, that of a radical feminism” (p. 3). The feminist discourse most accessible in public domains, then, is one that relies on notions of masculinity that emphasize hegemonic characteristics such as power and dominance. By doing so, feminism has contributed to a discourse on masculinity that suggests that these are, in fact, the defining characteristics of men’s gender (Shepherd, 1998).

This creates an interesting dilemma: in order to present women’s issues in a way that could be understood and supported by the public, feminism had to present men as the oppressive gender group (Wiegman, 2002). To do so, feminists mobilized discourses of masculinity that were, in fact, hegemonic, inadvertently reinforcing the idea that masculinity should and does ‘look that way’. By reinforcing hegemonic masculinity, they built up one of the foundations of patriarchal society, instead of dismantling it. In the process, they also alienated many men whose own experiences seemed to have little to do with the aggressiveness, dominance, or power that feminism was ascribing to them.

In reaction to this, some of the most public work on men’s issues has been done to counter feminist discourse on masculinity, as opposed to developing out of a desire to further men’s liberation. Authors like Warren Farrell (e.g. see Farrell, 1994) and Robert Bly (e.g. see Bly, 1990) could be said to epitomize a backlash men’s movement, whose purpose is not so much to help men free themselves from the constraints of patriarchy as to argue that men’s ‘oppression’ is feminism’s fault<sup>27</sup>. Backlash discourses argue that

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<sup>27</sup> For instance, both Bly (1990) and Farrell (1994) talk about the ways in which feminists have ‘manipulated’ the current political situation in order to secure jobs for women, supposedly by taking them away from men. Because they see this as systematically disadvantaging men, they argue that women are

women do, in fact, have power over men, particularly in domestic relationships. As a result, men feel powerless, especially those who are engaged in work that lacks rewards and is possibly harmful to their health, who feel they have very little political power, and from whose perspective feminists seem to be making political gains at their expense (Gardiner, 2002).

Backlash theories about men's oppression tend to suffer from an assumption of symmetry. They assume that however the gender order works to control and restrict women's lives, it must also work to control and restrict men's lives in the same way. It is this assumed symmetry that explains the notion that men are somehow victims of women's oppression. Assuming symmetry between men's and women's lives under patriarchy also assumes that oppression operates equally along the same axis for both – that is, based on sex/gender as opposed to other attributes. Hearn (1987), however, points out that this is not the case:

Women do oppress others, including men, but not by their sex/gender, and thus not as women. They do not do this routinely, but may oppress in capacities such as adults over children, as owners and managers over workers, and so on. Women may also form part of patriarchal institutions and so contribute to indirect oppression (p. 88).

In fact, the distinction between oppression based on other characteristics and oppression based on sex/gender is an important one. It applies to the case of men oppressing men as well. The ways in which some men are oppressed by other men according to class, race, and other characteristics have been well documented (e.g. see Connell, 1997; Metcalf & Humphries, 1985). The ways in which some men are oppressed by other men based on sex/gender characteristics have been less well attended to, with the exception of homosexual men (Hunter, 1993). Indeed, as Hunter (1993) points out, there isn't even a language to talk about how heterosexual men who do not fit into hegemonic masculinity are oppressed; he resorts to calling himself a 'heterosexual sissy' in an effort to distinguish himself from those who have oppressed him because of his gender. The feminist movement, in contrast, has hinged on developing a discourse

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thus oppressing men. Whether or not men, as the gender group systematically advantaged by patriarchy, can be 'oppressed' is a matter of considerable debate. While some theorists argue that men can be oppressed by the gender order, others claim that the social constraints placed on men's lives under patriarchy do not constitute 'oppression'. For a discussion on the implications of different definitions of oppression for men's lives, see New (2001).

with which to talk about women's oppression based on sex/gender, and feminists' ability to create this language accounts, at least in part, for their success.

Another important difference between men's and women's activism is the reason that each movement developed. Rather than being symmetrical, they are actually responding to somewhat different concerns. Feminist organization developed out of a growing awareness that society was organized around structures that systematically disadvantaged women. Organization around problematizing men's lives under patriarchy developed in response to feminist critiques of masculinity and men's social privilege (Morgan, 1992). In fact, "the search for men and the recognition of their activities as the activities of gendered individuals rather than of ungendered representatives of humanity has been initiated by women" (Morgan, 1992, p. 2). It was feminist theorizing about patriarchy and about men's dominance over women that put masculinity "on the agenda" in the first place (Morgan, 1992, p. 2). Thus, it is important to consider that any organizing on men's part takes place within the context of feminist theorizing about men – and will have to contend with what feminists have to say.

This fact is important in considering another aspect of the way in which men's and women's issues are constructed dichotomously. As with many dichotomies, the two movements are often viewed oppositionally – that is, that men's issues are seen as necessarily detracting from women's, and vice versa. Arising from this is the fear, as expressed by some, that to do so would somehow undermine women's experiences. New (2001) argues that this fear arises from taking a "zero-sum" position on oppression, whereby "oppression is a relationship between groups, in which the oppressor group acts in ways that harm or disadvantage the oppressed, in order to gain corresponding benefits" (p. 731).

When men's issues are understood to be in competition with women's issues, feminists with years of experience in organizing and achieving results may be unwilling to support those men who are trying to organize, for fear that they might lose what they have fought for on behalf of women (Wiegman, 2002). This fear goes beyond a simple concern for material resources:

There is a danger that [men's studies] may appropriate funds and resources, already scarce, that might otherwise have gone to feminist, women's or gender studies; [but there is also] the fear that it might, once again, marginalize the theories and writings of women in favour of a newer and largely masculine canon;

[and finally], there is the fear that it might develop into yet another men's club with all the unfortunate consequences that might follow from that (Morgan, 1992, p. 207).

These are legitimate concerns. Nonetheless, this zero-sum conception of men's and women's interests contributes to the lack of support for examining men's issues. This has consequences with regard to the discourses about men and victimization that my participants were seeking. Opportunities to develop public discourse around these issues are relatively rare. Feminist discourses about violence, which posit that men perpetrate violence against women as a means of maintaining and ensuring their power, gained popular acceptance through exposure. What is generally accepted today – for instance, that violence against women is an expression of male power - was considered revolutionary three decades ago (Chasteen, 2001). One thing that advocates for men's issues lack is that same exposure; their lack of a political presence, coupled with pressure from the feminist movement to keep the attention on women's issues, has kept critical scrutiny of masculinity in the margins. Thus, the problem is not so much that the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy has not been articulated. Rather, the issue is that this articulation has not become an easily accessible discourse that men can mobilize to understand their own experiences. This is not surprising, given that there is not even an easy way to talk about activism for men:

Significantly, there is no single word for this seriously structural, intensely personal project for men – 'masculinism' is an obvious parallel to feminism, but has been appropriated by the right; 'effeminism' is appealing but stereotyped, perhaps undialectical (Hearn, 1987, p. 186).

It is not surprising that a movement that can't even be named would be less supported than the backlash movement, which appears more straightforward simply because it has an 'enemy' against which to organize. Anger at feminists for taking power away from men is much more easily expressed than a heartfelt desire to dismantle patriarchy because it eliminates the tension between men's recognition of their oppression and their recognition of their role as oppressors. Men who are looking for a way to understand their experiences of oppression, but who do not share the anger against feminism that backlash discourses express, find little to reflect their interests, because it is backlash discourses that have gained exposure in public opinion (Connell, 1987).

## **2. Current Theorizing about Masculinity and Patriarchy**

Not all theorizing about masculinity has been done in the context of a backlash movement, however. In fact, considerable progress has been made in understanding the way in which men and masculinity fit into patriarchy, though it seems to be taking a long time for this information to move past the academic world into a broader social context.

### **2.1 Masculinity 'in Crisis'**

First of all, the recognition of masculinity as a social construction is, in itself, an important theoretical accomplishment, for it allows us to begin questioning how and why masculinity comes to be defined as entailing some characteristics and not others.

Wiegman (2002) points out that examining the way in which hegemonic masculinity is produced as 'natural' allows us to glimpse the power structures embedded in gender, as they operate on men as well as women:

The seeming naturalness of adult masculinity – heterosexuality, fatherhood, family governance, soldiery, and citizenry – [can] be viewed as a set of prescriptive norms that contain potential contradictions within and between men. These norms repress the male subject's constitution along multiple lines of the social: race, class, and sexuality in addition to gender. In unleashing masculinity from its assumed normativity and reading its function and structure as the product of a contested and contradictory field of power, [one can see the potential] to intervene in the practices of patriarchal domination while locating the possibilities for men to challenge their constitution as men (p. 43).

As a result, hitherto taken-for-granted ideas about masculinity come under fire – which Connell (1995) identifies as a 'crisis' in masculinity<sup>28</sup>. Connell's (1995) basic argument is that the naturalized and normative definitions of what it means to be masculine, while on the surface appearing stable, have become disrupted as our understanding of gender becomes less essentialist and more pointedly focused on its

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<sup>28</sup> It is important to distinguish between Connell's understanding of a crisis and the backlash movement's use of the word, which invokes a discourse of masculinity in crisis to illustrate the ways in which modern forces, especially feminism, are threatening to destroy traditional masculinity. Backlash movements use the notion of a crisis to signify the need to return to traditional understandings of masculinity, "instead of seeing dominant masculinity, which subordinates women and distributes power unevenly among men, as *itself* a cause of men's problems" (Gardiner, 2002, my emphasis). Connell's (1995) understanding of masculinity in crisis, however, refers more to the symbolic deconstruction of the concept.

socially constructed nature and on power as an important dynamic. As Frosh (1993) explains, “the apparently monolithic nature of masculinity begins to fragment as soon as one investigates it” (p. 46).

Part of this deconstructive process involves the rising voices of men whose experiences do not fit with the basic tenets of hegemonic masculinity: men who are homosexual, who are working in the helping profession, and men who are victims are all part of a growing number of men who do not see themselves reflected in hegemonic discourses of masculinity, as are men who are passive, nurturing, gentle or who otherwise express characteristics considered ‘feminine’ by mainstream society. These are men who are disenfranchised from the ideals that they are supposed to embody, and they stand as evidence that those ideals are not normal or natural, but are in fact socially constructed and discursively produced<sup>29</sup>. The result has been that more and more men are struggling with the recognition that they cannot live up to the standards of masculinity that hegemonic discourses of gender produce. For individual men, the implications may be feelings of low self-esteem, as their inability to live up to hegemonically masculine standards leads them to perceive themselves as therefore unmasculine.

Connell (1995) identifies three main strategies by which men might respond to the ‘crisis’ of masculinity:

One is to redouble efforts to meet the hegemonic standards... another is to reformulate the definition of masculinity, bringing it closer to what is now possible, though still pursuing masculine themes, such as independence and control. The third is to reject hegemonic masculinity as a package – criticizing the... stereotypes, and moving toward a counter-sexist politics (p. 55).

Connell (1995) notes that the delineation of these responses was originally suggested in a study of men who had become physically disabled, but they appear equally applicable to other men who, for some reason, find themselves ‘disqualified’ from hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, the strategies my participants used in response to feeling as though they didn’t ‘fit’ into hegemonic masculinity are remarkably similar, as explored in Chapter Three (section 1.2). My participants tried enacting hegemonic masculinity in other areas of their lives (displaying what the psychological literature

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<sup>29</sup> For example, a nurturing man disproves the theory that men are essentially unfeeling; a passive man disproves the theory that men are essentially aggressive, and so forth.

refers to as ‘hyper masculinity’), found that this did not make them feel like they were sufficiently ‘masculine’, and so turned to other strategies. Some chose to redefine masculinity, while others chose to redefine the importance of masculinity – to reject it ‘as a package’. Regardless of the strategy chosen, when it comes to ‘masculinity’, Connell (1995) notes that “the one thing none of these men can do is ignore it” (p. 55). The standards of hegemonic masculinity must be contended with in some way.

## **2.2 Standards of Hegemonic Masculinity**

Given that so many men feel that they cannot live up to the standards of masculinity presented to them, one central aspect of theorizing about masculinity has been to examine the question of why such images persist. Connell (1987) argues that the assumption that men could actually achieve hegemonic masculinity is an incorrect one:

It was often pointed out by ‘men’s movement’ writers in the 1970s that most men do not really fit the image of tough, dominant, and combative masculinity that the ideologists of patriarchy sell. That image is not intended to fit. The celluloid heroism of a John Wayne or a Sylvester Stallone is heroic only by contrast with the mass of men who are not. The justifying ideology for the patriarchal core complex and the overall subordination of women requires the creation of a gender-based hierarchy among men... as gay liberation points out, an essential part of this process has been the creation of a negative symbol of masculinity in the form of stigmatized out-groups, especially homosexual men (p. 110).

Hegemonic masculinity, then, is a necessary part of patriarchy, because it provides the standard against which men are able to compete for power and the means to exert it over other men. In other words, it provides a way for men to ‘rank’ each other, establishing hierarchies of power in the place of more egalitarian relationships.

Under such a framework, the lack of discourse around male victimization begins to make sense. Acknowledging the sexual victimization of males in a way that did not call their masculinity into question would be tantamount to questioning the validity of the “fantasy figures” (Connell, 1987) of hegemonic masculinity. This, in turn, would risk calling into question the very structure of patriarchy. The conclusion that is drawn from such a framework is that male survivors cannot be acknowledged as ‘proper men’ without fundamentally threatening the current gender order. Regardless of what some men are saying and doing to dismantle patriarchy, the fragmented nature of theorizing

about masculinity and the lack of politicization around men's issues suggests that our society is not yet ready to challenge this structure, and the result has been that thirty years of thinking about it has brought us very little progress with regard to resolving the 'crisis' in masculinity. Indeed, this situation has led some to question whether any anti-oppressive resolution is possible at all. Morgan (1992), for example, asks:

If men have been involved in the construction of a world that is simultaneously a world of and for men and a world which allows men to disappear into an undifferentiated humanity, how can these self-same men subject this world to critical enquiry? And if they do engage in this kind of enquiry, is there not the danger that this will become another construction, part of the continuous outpouring of men into a man-made world? (p. 2).

The entrenchment of hegemonically masculine images is so pervasive that hegemonic discourses appear impossible to overcome. However, it is not through deploying these images alone that hegemonic masculinity is maintained. Men are encouraged to attempt to emulate these images, but through the explicit or implicit threat of violence or harm should they do so, they are also simultaneously discouraged from attempting to disassociate from hegemonic masculinity.

### **2.3 The Role of Violence**

While hegemony is differentiated from tyranny by virtue of the fact that violence is not required to maintain the former (i.e. that dominant ideas gain and maintain ascendancy through consensus, rather than through force), violence is certainly not excluded from the mix (Connell, 1987). Indeed, Weinberg (1999) points out that violence against males serves a specific social purpose under patriarchy: it reminds men of the consequences of failing to participate in hegemonic understandings of masculinity. The males who are the most frequent targets of violence are those who fail, for whatever reason, to properly emulate the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. For instance, gay men obviously violate the dictate that hegemonically masculine men are heterosexual (Metcalf, 1985). Similarly, boys who do not participate in sports, or whose appearance is not sufficiently 'masculine' may be targets of bullying and harassment (Weinberg, 1999, see also Hunter, 1993).

On a broader scale, abuses such as the sexual victimization of men are essential to the continuation of patriarchal structures. Connell's (1987) arguments regarding the use of out-groups to define what is 'in' are significant; it is not enough for men to be dominant over women. They must also be dominant over other men, who because of some characteristic or other are defined as not-men, or less-men. The continual need to compete with other oppressors for dominance acts as a disincentive for men who might otherwise choose to disassociate themselves from hegemonic masculinity. Men in occupied nations, men who have been downsized from large corporations and men who are victims of crime, including sexualized violence are offered as object lessons to others: failing to express hegemonically masculine attributes may result not just in marginalization, but in actual harm at the hands of other men.

That so much work goes into preserving the boundaries of masculinity, but not of femininity, speaks once again to the asymmetry upon which patriarchy rests. For instance, we have now reached a point where a woman displaying traditionally 'masculine' characteristics is not (usually) ostracized or marginalized. Indeed, even within the category 'feminine', Connell (1987) notes that there is no hegemonic femininity. There is what he calls 'emphasized' femininity, embodying those characteristics that we might think of as traditionally feminine (caring, nurturance, fragility, childlikeness, and so forth), but this form of femininity is no longer hegemonic, if it ever was. That is to say, society does not, on the whole, insist on women's conformity to a standard of femininity in a way parallel to the insistence that men conform to a standard of masculinity<sup>30</sup>. Indeed, men receive an explicit warning that to step away from hegemonic masculinity may be to step away from any claim to 'masculinity' at all.

In some ways, then, it could be argued that men challenging hegemonic masculinity represents an even more fundamental threat to patriarchy than the feminist movement does (Hearn, 1998), since the continuance of patriarchy relies on the polarization of gender. Without a clearly defined, separate category of 'masculinity', and a correspondingly opposite 'femininity', patriarchal systems would collapse. Exploring the ways in which the boundaries between these two categories get blurred in individual

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<sup>30</sup> This is not to argue that standards of femininity do not constrain women's lives. However, the extent to which it now 'matters' that women express a certain form of femininity seems to be less than the extent to which it 'matters' that men express hegemonic masculinity.

experiences, then, is an important step in an ultimate project of dismantling these oppressive structures.

An important question then becomes how we can develop discourses that men like my participants can access in order to connect their experiences to broader social forces. How can we recognize and acknowledge the realities of violence, including sexualized violence, against men?

### **3. Moving Forward**

In examining this question, it has become increasingly clear to me why work on masculinity and patriarchy continues to be fragmented and marginalized. It is difficult to imagine synthesis developing out of such a mess. However, the fact that research like mine can even take place is evidence that things have, indeed, shifted. The existence of a counselling centre for male survivors of sexual abuse is itself evidence that we have moved forward, since only a few decades ago psychologists were nearly united in arguing that such traumas just didn't happen to boys (Wright, 2001). Perhaps there will never be a 'men's movement' equivalent in impact to feminism. Given that the gender system is asymmetrical, it may be foolish of us to assume that there should be; feminism may be an appropriate response to women's oppression; the way in which men's lives are constrained under patriarchy may require a different analytic – and activist - response.

#### **3.1 Listening to Marginalized Men's Accounts**

Part of this response entails creating spaces in which the voices of marginalized men can be acknowledged. Such accounts can provide a powerful critical reflection on the ways in which the gender order is enacted in men's everyday/everynight lives. Indeed, the potential for sexual abuse survivors to take on a leading role in activism for deconstructing hegemonic masculinity certainly exists. Seinen (2000) explains:

Just as the abuse of women has been a catapult for women's issues, the experiences of males who have been abused need to be raised to change social discourse and attitudes that allow the practices of male abuse to flourish (p. 7).

These attitudes are embodied in patriarchy. Of course, an important question remains unaddressed by Seinen's (2000) work. How are men's stories about abuse to be told, given that we continue to live in a society in which vulnerability of any kind is prohibited for men? My participants pointed out that many of their attempts to come forward regarding their experiences were met with disbelief, dismissal, and in some cases, even revulsion towards the male survivor in question. They talked about the extent to which they, as victims, were held responsible for their victimization<sup>31</sup>, even in interaction with professionals, such as psychologists and social workers. Being able to hear marginalized men's stories, then, requires that preconceived conceptualizations of masculinity, such as the idea that men are better able to protect themselves than we expect women to be, are called into question.

### 3.2 Challenging Discourses

While I am not at all certain what this response might fully entail, I do believe that an important first step would involve looking at the discourses that are currently available to us regarding men's vulnerabilities. In considering male survivors of sexual abuse, very few such discourses exist. However, there are two that might now be common enough to be considered generally accessible. The idea that boys who are sexually abused as children grow up to be abusers as adults is one of them. This 'cycle of violence' discourse is a good illustration of what's lacking in our understanding of men's lives. While it certainly acknowledges that men may be vulnerable ("boys who are sexually abused as children"), it immediately takes that vulnerability and insists that it disappear, transforming into aggression, as men grow older and presumably gain 'masculinity' along the way (as they "become abusers"). Another relatively mainstream discourse with regard to male survivors is that boys who are sexually abused as children either are, or grow up to become gay. The implication in this case is that there is no way for these boys to 'regain' hegemonic masculinity – instead, they are forced into a marginalized identity that is explicitly not (hegemonically) masculine.

What is lacking is a way to talk about the vulnerabilities that men experience that *does not need to engage with hegemonic understandings of masculinity at all*. This

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<sup>31</sup> I wish to acknowledge that the phenomenon of blaming the victim for their victimization is hardly limited to male survivors; indeed, the attribution of responsibility to the victim of sexualized violence is an issue that female survivors must also contend with far too often.

discourse might say something like, “boys who are sexually abused as children can grow up to be courageous, empathetic adults” – a discourse of ‘the survivor as hero’ that is common in feminist discussions of female survivors (e.g. see Bass & Davis, 1994). In talking about how we can contribute to the dismantling of patriarchy, which involves the deconstruction of gendered difference, the creation of such discourses may be one fruitful direction. Through such discursive activities, we may begin to open up a space in which men can, indeed, express vulnerability without facing the threat of being marginalized.

Another important starting point may be simply acknowledging that there is more to men’s lives than what can be understood through the lens of hegemonic masculinity. In particular, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that there are good things to say about men. In talking about his own work in this area, for instance, Morgan (1992) writes:

[I am] pro-feminist and gay affirmative. However, this critical stance does not mean that men are simply to be seen or understood negatively. On the contrary, an important part of an accurate study of men and masculinity is an appreciation of the positive features of men’s lives, and especially the variety of men’s lived experiences (p. viii).

Indeed, in order for progress to be made, it is necessary to recognize the ways in which men are constructed as a relatively homogenous group – and the way in which this is and is not reflected in their own experiences (Newton, 2002). For some, this is a key way in which masculinity studies can contribute to theories on gender, because they provide “a profound intervention in the tendency of feminist theory to celebrate the diversity and fluidity of femininities and women while over unifying and sometimes demonizing the categories masculinity and men” (Newton, 2002, p. 181). This does not reflect the varied reality of men’s experiences:

The numerous masculinities in every society are contingent, fluid, socially and historically constructed, changeable and constantly changing, variously institutionalized, and recreated through media representations and individual and collective performances” (Gardiner, 2002, p. 11).

Some theorists engaged in critical gender studies have questioned whether it is appropriate to talk about a positive sense of manhood; after all, masculinity (in its hegemonic form, at least) is often conceptualized “as itself a social problem antithetical

to feminist goals” (Gardiner, 2002). What could possibly be accomplished by reclaiming that? Other researchers, however, explain that a positive sense of gender is an essential precursor to men’s being able to seriously engage in an anti-patriarchal struggle:

Men studying masculinities... often reclaim the identity ‘men’ as something to affirm without automatic shame or guilt...more than one profeminist scholar/activist has testified to the futility of embracing self-hatred or outright rejection of masculinity as a basis for long-term profeminist work... The view that insofar as men can do feminism or be feminists, they must leave their masculinity behind... fails to provide a basis on which men can sustain the energy for profeminist politics over the necessary long haul... what enables men to do feminism effectively is a vision of men and feminism in which their feminism is inseparably linked to their positive vision of themselves as men (Newton, 2002, p. 180).

The same caveat applies for men engaged in anti-sexist work that is not explicitly profeminist – i.e. work that aims to provide men with a greater variety of choices in terms of how they will understand themselves as men, that aims to acknowledge men’s vulnerabilities in an affirming, rather than demoralizing way, and that aims to dismantle the constraints placed on men’s lives by patriarchy. None of these goals is necessarily incompatible with the goals of feminism, and the two movements could conceivably work side by side.

### **3.3 Going Beyond Victims and Perpetrators**

Indeed, an important project within anti-oppressive theorizing is to examine the ways in which feminist and masculinity studies can complement and inform each other. Through such collaboration, scholars have identified another important direction for future work: “they critique the limited binaries within feminist theories and masculinity studies of oppressors and victims, of difference and dominance, and of hegemonic versus alternative masculinities” (Gardiner, 2002, p. 12). The notion of moving beyond the victim/oppressor discourse seems particularly intriguing. Just as people who have been abused are encouraged to move beyond the idea that they are just ‘victims’ – perhaps, to move into a ‘survivor’ identity instead (e.g. see Napier-Hemy, 1994) – so, too, does it seem important that theorizing about patriarchy be able to move beyond a discussion of who is victimized, by whom, and in what ways. This is an important step in moving beyond reductionist explanations:

This rejection of a simplistic binary between victims and oppressors facilitates analyzing the subtle complicities of both women and men in upholding inegalitarian institutions; it does not invalidate investigations into dominance. Rather, differences between genders, within genders, and outside of the standard gender binary need always to be articulated with reference to social hierarchies (Gardiner, 2002, p. 13).

In other words, it is essential to move past the idea that analyzing patriarchy must be centred on the analysis of victims and oppressors. Part of such a project is to examine the way in which, depending on context, any particular person or group of people may be both oppressed and oppressive. The men I interviewed are a perfect example. Most of them described ways in which they were able to lay claim to pieces of hegemonic masculinity: they played sports, engaged in 'traditionally masculine' activities like hunting and fishing, were virile and sexually active, ran businesses, worked in the military, and were involved in 'bad boy' activities like crime and biker gangs. However, seen from a different angle, they explained how they saw themselves as automatically disqualified from hegemonic masculinity by virtue of having been sexually abused as children. Thus, it is not possible to simply call them victims or oppressors in the gender order. Instead, interrogating their experiences leads us to a more sophisticated exploration of patriarchy.

#### ***4. Conclusion***

Although the men I interviewed explored discourses of masculinity and violence in the context of their lives as individuals, connections can be drawn between those everyday/everynight understandings and broader socio-political theories. That these connections remain under-explored in gender theory is an important finding in itself. The isolation that my participants expressed in describing their attempts to contextualize their experiences is not surprising, given the lack of politicization around men's issues in general.

However, despite the lack of discourses of masculinity or violence that are inclusive of male survivors' experiences, there has been a progression of theorizing over the last thirty years. Recognizing masculinity as a social construction and exploring the constraints that patriarchy places on men's lives – including delineating hierarchies of power between men – have been important steps. A growing awareness of the need for

activism around men's issues, such as their experience of sexualized violence, has led to the development of agencies such as the BCSMSSA. On a discursive level, the willingness of men to speak about the ways in which hegemonic masculinity fails to represent their experiences opens up a space in which men can act in more authentic ways. Research projects such as this one, dedicated to providing a space for men's voices, contribute to the broader political project of masculinity studies. In this way, it also contributes to the creation of discourses of male survivors that are grounded in their own experiences. It is my sincere hope that this research will contribute to the "meaningful collective action in the struggle for gender justice" that both feminists and men's activists have been calling for (Gardiner, 2002, p. 15).

## Chapter Five: Reflexive Account

It must be acknowledged that my participants were not the only people involved in this research. I was there as well. Who I am and how I made decisions about the project have definitely influenced the outcome. Marcus (1998) writes about “the need to explore the ethical, political, and epistemological dimensions of... research as an integral part of producing knowledge about others” (p. 393). Indeed, I believe that a part of my ethical responsibility as a researcher involved examining the way in which I, as an individual, acted during the project. Obviously, I cannot explore everything that I discovered over the course of this project, or this section would be longer than the report of the project itself! However, there are areas that I feel are necessary for me to comment on.

Walsh (1995) provides a particularly useful framework for reflexive accounts, which I have chosen to adopt here. He divides reflexivity into four dimensions: the personal, in which we are reflexive about our own attitudes, expectations, and assumptions; the interpersonal, in which we reflect on the relationship between the researcher and the participants; the methodological, wherein we become aware of the limitations of our methods; and the contextual, which refers to the socio-cultural and historical factors that create a context for the research (Walsh, 1995).

In Chapter Two, I have already commented on ethical concerns and the practical limitations of my methodology. In this section, however, I wish to be more thorough in my exploration of these issues, focusing on the story that I have to tell, as a researcher, about the process of the research.

### ***1. Personal Reflexivity***

One of the most fundamental areas in which reflexivity can inform our research is with regard to critical self-reflection. While much of this thesis has been devoted to an analysis of an ‘other’ (i.e. men who have been sexually abused as children), it is equally important that at least some attention be placed on “the subjective [and] the experiential” (Marcus, 1998, p. 395). There were two areas in which I felt personal reflexivity was

important to explore: the location of myself in the research, and the process by which I selected this topic in the first place.

### **1.1 Locating Myself in the Research**

Qualitative research takes an important step away from the idea that we can somehow observe and report on social phenomena without imbuing them with our own perceptions, biases, and judgments. Instead, such research operates from the premise that “there is no dividing line between empirical research and the process of theorizing” that we as researchers engage in (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p.189). Part of this involves locating ourselves as actors in the research we conduct. Each of us brings our life history to our particular projects, and who we are shapes our work as much as what we do.

In common with many qualitative researchers, I believe that research is value-laden, and should be (e.g. see Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Esterberg, 2002; Oleson, 1998). It is my belief that social research can and should be undertaken to achieve certain aims – in this case, to make a contribution to understanding the ways in which men’s lives can be constrained under patriarchy. I set out with this goal in mind, although when I began it was very much a personal goal. I saw my research as being one way in which I, an academic who has never experienced child abuse, could contribute to explaining and addressing politically the issue that I had once witnessed a partner struggle so much with in my personal life.

It is also important to address the fact that I am a sociologist. I am not interested in producing a document that records the psychological effects of childhood sexual abuse on men; these have been well-documented elsewhere (e.g. see Prendergast, 1993; Mendel, 1995). It is also not within my scope to comment on healing strategies for male survivors (these have also been explored by other authors, for instance, see Crowder, 1993). Instead, my focus is on sociological theory, and the contribution that male survivors’ voices can make to it. Thus, I have aimed to connect my findings with a broader analysis of discourses and theories of patriarchy, an area in which I want to make a contribution.

### **1.2 Selecting a Topic**

I have been the partner of a male survivor of childhood sexual abuse. I have witnessed the effects of childhood victimization not through the eyes of a distanced research agenda, nor through the trained professionalism of a counselor or therapist, but in my everyday/ night experience as a lover, partner, and friend. My knowledge of the role that hegemonic masculinity plays in the difficulties some men face came not through research but through watching the man I was with struggle with his own sense of himself as a man.

Because this is a topic that I came to know intimately through supporting my partner, I found that I sometimes came across obstacles in trying to connect my personal knowledge to the kinds of information (and ways of presenting that information) that are considered necessary by my discipline. I felt that through knowing my partner, I had access to a wealth of information about male survivors, the effects of sexual abuse on men, and issues with hegemonic masculinity, that I did not know how to draw upon. It was frustrating to have to search for research that supported what I believed, when deep down inside, I wanted to write that I “just knew” because I lived with a survivor, and I loved a survivor, and intimacy is its own kind of research.

This experience led me to a greater understanding of the idea of bifurcation of consciousness (Smith, 1990), a concept that I had hitherto avoided because of my resistance to standpoint theory. I realized that what I was experiencing was, in fact, the discord between the way in which knowledge is constructed and structured within the discipline of sociology, and what I had learned as an individual interacting in emotional relationships with other human beings<sup>32</sup>.

I resolved, however, to value what I had learned through my personal relationship regardless of whether I could frame it in sociological terms. As Coyle (1996) points out, there is a “potential for ‘insider’ knowledge of a research issue to enrich research work” (p. 79). I believe that having some knowledge about what mundane, everyday life might look like for a male survivor was a benefit to me in my research; knowing my partner gave me insight into the kinds of things survivors might consider important, for one thing, as well as helping me empathize with my participants when they told me their stories, because I know how difficult it can be to share such stories.

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<sup>32</sup> I still, however, reject the notion that it must be women’s standpoint that addresses this bifurcation, or that women are in a unique position to experience bifurcation.

## **2. Interpersonal Reflexivity**

Of course, the fact that I was able to empathize with my participants did not mean that conducting my research was unproblematic. In fact, there were a number of things that I realized during the course of the interviews that I think should be mentioned here. First of all, there was the simple fact that I was privy to sensitive information, both a great honor and a great responsibility. However, there were times when I heard things I did not want to hear, and I had to find a way to come to terms with that as well. Finally, there is the simple fact that I am a woman and my participants were men; gender reactivity is an essential issue to address.

### **2.1 Hearing Men's Stories**

The most personally rewarding aspect of this project was conducting the interviews and hearing men's stories. There were times during the course of these interviews when I felt a great sense of privilege at being able to hear the experiences of the men I spoke to. I was impressed with their courage, knowing that much of what they were telling me was intensely personal and potentially shameful. I felt great empathy for the pain that my participants expressed. Having seen first hand how difficult it is for people to heal from childhood sexual abuse, I thought much of the time that it was an honour for me to take part in the interviews, and I admire all my participants for their willingness to do the work necessary to heal.

I feel very strongly that my role as a researcher is not to speak for my participants. At the same time, however, I am operating from an analytical framework that participants may not agree with. While I recognize the constraints on authenticity that deciding to use discourse analysis may present, it is still important to me that I not misinterpret what someone believes or distort their opinions. In this vein, I feel a sense of obligation to my participants to honour the spirit in which they shared their stories with me. There were things said in some of the interviews that I strongly disagreed with, but it is important to me not to be critical of the men who expressed them. This is an important reason for my using discourse analysis – it is the discourses about masculinity that I want to engage with, not the individual men who may have voiced them..

I have also reflected on my own reactions and thoughts about the research as I have conducted it. As Skinner (1998) points out, “researchers who recognize and reflect on the issues which they bring to the research encounter are able to give greater voice to their respondents” simply by becoming aware of the presence of their own voices (p. 536). It is my hope that I have recognized the places where my interests diverge from those of my participants so that I can clearly show my claims as my own.

## **2.2 My Reaction to “Disagreeable Things”<sup>33</sup>**

That being said, however, I do want to acknowledge that there were things said that I found incredibly difficult to hear. Two interviews in particular were hard for me to participate in. The first was one of my earliest interviews, with Richard. The second occurred toward the end of my interviewing, with Walt. The issues that arose for me in these two interviews were different, but equally troublesome.

Richard spent a significant portion of the interview talking about men’s sexuality. He spoke for quite a long time about pornography, explaining that he couldn’t help but be attracted to it because he was male, and had a “male sexual orientation” (Richard, p. 6). He talked explicitly about the fact that he saw women as sexual objects, describing different features, such as breasts, hips, and buttocks, that men might see as attractive.

There were two main difficulties that I had in participating in the interview. First of all, while as a researcher I could understand that he was truthfully answering the questions I had asked of him (I’d asked him about some of the differences between men and women as a way of getting at the unique qualities of masculinity), as a woman it was very uncomfortable to sit in a small room with a man who was larger than I was, listening politely as he described his attraction to women’s breasts. I remember at one point being very grateful that I was wearing a loose sweater, and I found it difficult to make eye contact during that part of the conversation.

The second problem I encountered in my interview with Richard was that I fundamentally disagree with his opinion about why men look at pornography, and I find his belief that men can’t help it because of testosterone to border on the offensive. This

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<sup>33</sup> When I initially discussed these interviews with my thesis supervisor, Dr. Alison Thomas, she responded by acknowledging the awkward position that we, as researchers, can find ourselves in when we hear “disagreeable things” from our participants. It is on her suggestion that I have decided to write more extensively about these two interviews here.

was very similar to the issues that I had during Walt's interview. Walt has been involved in a father's rights group for several years, and he had very strong opinions about the role of feminism in men's oppression. For instance, in talking about losing custody of his children when he got divorced, he described the experience as assaultive, saying "she raped me financially" in reference to the fact that he was required to pay child support to his ex-wife. Again, I found myself in a fundamentally oppositional position on the issues in question.

I continued the interviews and did not argue with Walt or Richard about their beliefs, instead asking questions about how these beliefs related to their understanding of masculinity and their experiences as survivors. I found their opinions disagreeable from a personal perspective; from a research perspective, however, I believe that both of these interviews were important, as they brought to light two discourses of masculinity that I had not yet heard, or had not heard as strongly, in other interviews. Although I find it personally disturbing that such discourses exist, the fact is that they do, and I would rather be able to address them in my research than to have never heard them at all.

### **2.3 Gender Reactivity**

My experiences in these two interviews emphasized the importance of considering reactivity in my research, especially with regard to my gender. Gender reactivity – the tendency of respondents to take the researcher's (apparent or stated) gender into account when considering what or how to share in the research study – is indeed an important consideration in research such as this. I am a woman who interviewed men about a subject that is both personal and specific to men; namely, masculinity, and how men understand masculinity in the context of their personal lives. To say that gender reactivity is not an issue would be to ignore an important dynamic in this research.

Briggs and Hawkins (1996) identified this as an issue from "anecdotal evidence that the men would be reticent to disclose matters involving homosexual acts to... young females" (124). While Wright (2001) points out that many male survivors actually prefer to speak with women rather than men, I believe that there were times when the men I talked to framed their accounts in certain ways because they were talking to a woman. In

discussing the difference between women and men in the workplace, for instance, Martin had the following to say:

*“I’ve noticed, in my, in my opinion, that women tend to, they can really think critically, they’re really smart, I’m in love with women, don’t get me wrong. [But] they just seem to attach a little bit too much emotion involved when you’re dealing with a business, or whether you’re dealing with them in a relationship, it just seems that they perhaps overreact in a way” (p. 5).*

The number of stops-and-starts and the use of qualifying statements (“I’m in love with women, don’t get me wrong”) suggests that Martin was concerned about my reaction to his opinion, probably because I am a woman. I suspect that if I had been a man, Martin would have expressed this view quite differently. That being said, however, in many other instances Martin appeared to be speaking as freely as other participants did.

Gender reactivity in research projects where women have interviewed men has been addressed by other qualitative researchers (e.g. see Arendell, 1997; Padfield & Proctor, 1996; and Williams & Heikes, 1993). Although this may have constrained me in some ways, because some forms of information were inaccessible to me, I do not believe it posed a significant obstacle to the research study. Rather, it was my perception that my participants generally felt free to express themselves; for instance, that Richard and Walt felt able to talk about things that were uncomfortable for me to hear (as a woman) suggests to me that my gender was not a barrier to their being forthcoming or honest. In fact, as Phoenix (1994) describes in her own research, I think it likely that for the most part I was seen as a ‘non-person’; that is, my status as ‘interviewer’ overshadowed my status as ‘woman’ in all but a few instances, and most of the men I interviewed related to me as though my gender temporarily did not exist.

### **3. Methodological Reflexivity**

Part of my decision making process as a researcher involved deciding what methodology I planned to implement to gather my data. Of course, this was closely linked to who I am and what my purpose in starting this project was; as Carolan (2003)

points out, “the researcher’s philosophy and values, and the context of the research, may affect the chosen methodology, and ultimately, the interpretation of findings” (p. 9).

Selecting one method over another has consequences for the direction of the research. I learned this when I began the project intending to use Q-sorts, and found that I had to switch to interviewing instead. In this section, I consider both of these methods in turn.

### **3.1 The Q-Sorts**

My methodology was also an area in which I have learned a great deal and want to spend some time reflecting on it. I began with an ambitious project that had three stages, two major methodologies, and two respondent groups. My original plan was to conduct initial interviews, from which I would formulate my statements for the Q-sorts. The Q-sorts were to be the main focus of the research, allowing me to understand how men sifted through a myriad of images and ideas about masculinity, and these were to be distributed to both clients and counselors.

I put an incredible amount of time, energy, and emotional investment into the Q-sorts. I faithfully consulted sources that represented a variety of different ideas about masculinity, even reading through articles and books that I found offensive in order to encapsulate a full range of ideas. I piloted the Q-sorts with men I knew to ensure that there was an appropriate distribution of statements that men could agree and disagree with. I edited and re-edited, working closely with my thesis supervisor to ensure that each statement was clear, purposeful, and concise. Then, I piloted the Q-sorts with the counselors, and incorporated the feedback from the five counselors who had agreed to pilot the instrument into the final version.

I distributed several copies of the final versions, along with brochures and posters advertising the project, and instructions for counselors to administer the sorts as per our agreement, to both the Victoria and the Vancouver offices. I then happily left town to backpack around Europe for a month, thinking that there would be at least some responses when I returned.

There were none. The Victoria office informed me that they hadn’t even distributed the packages yet, because they had been renovating. My box of Q-sorts had sat in a closet the entire time I was gone. The Vancouver office had distributed 17 of the 50 they had received. Another month went by, and four Q-sorts were returned from the

Vancouver office. None were returned from the Victoria office. I was deeply disappointed.

By the time Christmas of 2002 rolled around, I was afraid that my project might have officially fallen apart, and that it might not be salvageable. My thesis supervisor assured me that this was not the case, and at length I called the counselors to arrange a meeting. It wasn't until January of 2003 that we had an opportunity to meet; they explained why they were unhappy with the Q-sorts, and asked me to do something different. After I agreed to return to interviewing, they were more than happy to help me find participants, and indeed, found 15 men to talk to me within a matter of weeks.

The most important thing I learned from this was the value of good, consistent communication. The agency had had researchers come in before, but the methods they had used had been quite different. Either the researcher had been a counselor of some kind, who was actively involved in the day-to-day activities of the agency, or they had used anonymous surveys, which could be left in a pile in the waiting room, and returned to a box when completed, without any involvement from the counselors themselves. I realized in retrospect that I was asking the counselors to do a lot more than I ought to have: first, I asked them to buy into the project, including the Q-methodology. Then I asked them to administer the sorts and explain them to their clients. Finally, I asked them to be responsible for collecting the packages together in the end. This was more than they were able to do on top of their regular working days. To my credit, part of the difficulty lay in finding a way to administer the Q-sorts without violating participants' anonymity. Indeed, this was the reason that the counselors had agreed to administer the sorts in the first place – that way, I would not know who the participants were.

I also discovered that issues of reactivity may have come into play in my relationship with the counselors as well as the clients. For instance, being a sociologist in a counseling setting meant that the way in which I approached the issue of male survivors and masculinity was very different from the way in which the counselors, who were acting as gatekeepers to the project, were thinking. As a result, I encountered a lot of difficulty in trying to articulate what my goals were; these counselors were not used to thinking about discourses, or about the social maintenance of patriarchy, for example. They necessarily approached their work from an individualistic perspective,

concentrating on the particular lives of their clients and focusing on how they could best help that individual man.

I thus believe that part of the problem I encountered with trying to administer the Q-sorts had to do with an inability on my part to persuade the counselors that the research served a useful purpose for their clients. Counselors could not see the benefit for their clients of completing a Q-sort; indeed, many of them told me that they thought it was inappropriate for men who were engaged in therapy, since they were already used to examining different images and ideas and would likely have a hard time finding items that they neither agreed nor disagreed strongly with. Ultimately, differences in the way our disciplines examined an issue accounted for some of the counselors' reluctance to discuss the Q-sorts with their clients, which contributed to the methodology's failure.

Another factor that contributed both to my 'outsider' status and the failure of the Q-methodology had to do with my place of residence. For the quantitative stage of the study, I was relying on the bulk of the participants to come from Vancouver, which, with a larger office and more staff, sees more clients than the office in Victoria. However, I do not live in Vancouver. Living in a different city meant that my contact with the counselors, and by extension, the clients, was limited. Since I did not have an ongoing relationship developed with those people involved with the Vancouver office, I believe it also made the contact that I did have with them seem more intrusive. I often came over only on days when a staff meeting was held, for instance, as it made it easier for me to speak to all the counselors at once. However, this meant that regular business for the agency had to be set aside to make space for me. As a result, Vancouver counselors were less interested and less familiar with the project.

What I learned was that not every methodology can be applied to every situation. Given the sensitivity of the project and the resources I had to work with, the Q-sorts may not have been feasible – although, ironically, I had originally thought that the sort, which can be completed alone and in private, would make it ideally suited to a sensitive issue such as this. It was disappointing, but I learned important lessons about research in the real world – it doesn't go according to plan, there is no such thing as the perfect research design, and compromise is inevitable, especially when the research project involves collaborating with others, as mine did. This is not to say, however, that I have lost my enthusiasm for Q-sorts; on the contrary, I am now more determined than ever to find a

project where one can be meaningfully used! In this case, however, I am pleased that I ended up returning to interviews in the end. I discovered things that I did not consider before, and my research has gone in an entirely different direction. As well, I had the opportunity to speak in depth to a number of men about their experiences, which was very rewarding on both an academic and a personal level.

### 3.2 The Interviews

Much of what I felt it was important to reflect on with regard to the interviews has been addressed in the section on interpersonal reflexivity. However, I do want to briefly comment on the interview as a method, especially with regard to what my participants seemed to believe the purpose of the research project was. I had made up a brochure detailing the study, and also had information about what I was looking at in the consent form that participants had to sign. However, most participants were recruited through their counsellors, and did not see the brochure. Although I went through the consent form with every participant, most did not really pay attention. Some had even signed the form and put their copy away before I'd finished talking through it. In several instances, I looked up from the paper I was reading to confirm they'd understood a point, and my participant was waiting expectantly for me to finish talking and turn on the tape<sup>34</sup>. As a result, the purpose of my study was interpreted differently by different participants.

Walt, for instance, clearly had his own purpose in participating, and it was obvious that he saw me as a potential supporter of his political ideals. He related to me as a sympathizer and it didn't seem to occur to him that I might disagree with his opinions. We had initially made contact with each other via email, and after the interview, he began sending me emails from a men's rights listserv, which had a clearly anti-feminist agenda. His stated reason was that he thought the information contained in the emails might help me with my research on men and masculinity. The emails came so frequently that I eventually had to ask him to remove my email from his mailing list.

Don, too, had a clearly different idea of what I was intending to achieve with the interviews than I had. When we met, he explained that this was the second research

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<sup>34</sup> Despite the necessity of the informed consent process (and thus, the requirement that consent be reviewed with the participant prior to starting an interview), other researchers have also found consent forms to interfere somewhat with the establishment of rapport (e.g. see Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000.)

project he'd participated in through BCSMSSA. While in prison, Don had founded a self-help group for incarcerated men who were survivors of childhood sexual abuse, and the first researcher had been very interested in those experiences. Don assumed that this was the experience I was also primarily interested in, and so directed the conversation to these activities. I approached my research questions from a different angle, asking less about men's experiences as male survivors and more about their understanding of masculinity. As a result there was some mismatch in our aims.

That being said, however, I want to reiterate the fact that all my interviews provided me with unique information that contributed to my understanding of the issues at hand. Don and Walt were both far more active in advocacy work (Don with male survivors and Walt with non-custodial fathers) than other participants appeared to be, and this level of activity may have had an effect on what they expected from the interview. Although this meant in both cases that they had less to say on masculinity per se, both Don and Walt had plenty to offer me, and their greater experience meant that they could articulate ideas that became very important to my analysis later on.

This is not to say that other men did not approach the interview with a specific set of expectations. In fact, I believe they did. In particular, I think that most of my participants viewed their participation as a way of giving back to other male survivors (i.e. by sharing their experiences, they felt they could contribute to a project that might help other men down the road). As well, it seemed that my participants appreciated a chance to tell their stories. Hiller and DiLuzio (2004) refer to this as event validation: the interview provides a venue in which participants experience their accounts as being important and significant, part of a greater whole as opposed to isolated events.

While Hiller and DiLuzio's (2004) discussion of event validation took place in the context of studying an issue that people might not otherwise think to share with others (especially in a therapeutic setting), I believe that the idea is equally applicable to my research. Male survivors live in a world in which very few people acknowledge their existence as victims of abuse, let alone validate their feelings and experiences. In therapy at BCSMSSA, the men receive that validation from their counsellors, in a very personal way. This is, however, very different from receiving some kind of public acknowledgement – therapists are supposed to understand; it is what they are trained (and paid) to do. My research project represented an interest that was not connected to

individual therapy, but to a broader social agenda, and I believe that my participants saw it as a way of receiving some acknowledgement from the larger social world around them. Because I was not involved in the day-to-day activities of the counselling centre, I was perceived as an outsider. While this created issues of reactivity in some aspects of my project (such as my initial gate keeping negotiations with counsellors), I also feel that it was an asset. The men I interviewed may have interpreted my 'outside' interest as validating in that it represented the concern and recognition of the world beyond the therapeutic context<sup>35</sup>.

### ***3. Contextual Reflexivity***

According to social constructionism, at any given time, ideas are organized in such a way as to allow certain questions to be asked, and certain kinds of answers to be given, while preventing these from being framed in other ways (Burr, 1995). As such, consideration of the greater social context in which this research takes place should be made. There are many social factors that I could discuss in this section, but I feel that two are particularly salient. First, the fact that theorists such as Connell (1995) maintain there is a 'crisis' of masculinity means that an interrogation of the idea that masculinity is fixed, homogeneous, and essential to all males is possible. Secondly, there can be no doubt that feminism has influenced gender theory, as well as affecting our understanding of violence and victims of violence. These two issues will be attended to here.

#### **3.1 Possible Images of Masculinity**

The social context of this research is relatively straightforward in many respects. For instance, the necessity of the existence of BCSMSSA is obvious; had no such agency yet existed in Victoria, this research project would have been very difficult to carry out, and would have looked quite different in the end. Similarly, in the past decade there has been considerable media attention given to 'high profile' cases of the sexual abuse of boys, such as the Mt. Cashel trials. These cases have certainly helped raise awareness about the existence of male survivors, which has in turn directed academics to consider the issue as one important to engage with. At the same time, however, such cases

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<sup>35</sup>That being said, however, I should also acknowledge the possibility that the men I interviewed related to me as they would their therapists, not seeing my interests as being outside those of the BCSMSSA at all.

contribute to the popular understanding that male sexual victimization occurs only in institutions and is a relative rarity in other settings, which serves to maintain men's invisibility as victims except in extreme (but unusual) circumstances.

Similar to this, there were certain events that were important to consider with regard to the kinds of images and ideas about *masculinity* that men were able to discuss. First of all, the issue of fathers' rights is an important one in Canadian society today. In many provinces, organized movements designed to increase fathers' custodial access to children have developed in reaction to a perceived bias favouring mothers in Canadian family law. While Walt was particularly interested in this issue and talked about it at length, it was also important for other men who were fathers; for instance, Fred mentioned that when he gained custody of his children in 1996, only 6% of all custody cases resulted in the father being the custodial parent. His role as a single father was of particular importance both to his understanding of his masculinity, and to his views on how to create social change.

Similarly, in some instances, current events had an effect on what the participants talked about with regard to masculinity. Rene, for instance, spent some time talking about the image of the military man, explaining how this was an important image of masculinity to him. This discussion arose when he mentioned that there was a war going on, referring to the American invasion of Iraq. Had the interview been conducted at another time, this image of masculinity might not have been as salient for Rene as it was.

More broadly, this research took place in the context of Connell's (1995) 'crisis' of masculinity. That is to say, masculinity has become a topic of contention, worthy of academic interrogation; men's gender (and indeed, men's understanding of and relation to their gender) is not taken for granted, but can be analyzed, deconstructed, theorized about and reformulated. Had the work of other researchers not taken place in this regard, the subject 'masculinity' would have never been available to consider as a research question.

### **3.2 Feminism**

A final context that needs to be discussed is the feminist movement. For many men, their understanding of masculinity was stated in opposition to what they believed to be 'the feminist position' on men and masculinity (i.e. that all men are potential rapists,

or that men are responsible for the oppression of women). In fact, this theme came up so strongly in my initial interviews that I began making a point of asking participants how they felt about what feminists had to say about masculinity.

It is important to note that it is not feminism or feminists per se that the men I interviewed were reacting to, but rather what is popularly known, assumed or understood about feminism. My participants had encountered over-simplifications of what feminists were saying, and were responding to these discourses. A social context in which certain feminist ideas have become mainstream discourses about men is clearly of weight in a study about masculinity.

As well, the notion of what makes a feminist was something that I found myself reflecting on during the course of this project. I believe that for the most part, my participants did not see me as a feminist; perhaps the fact that I, a woman, was studying men disqualified me from that category in their minds. It was clear, however, that other academics expected I would be a feminist; some were surprised, and one even angry that I would choose to devote my attention to men's issues in their own right, and not as some way of exploring men's lives ultimately as a way of improving the lives of women.

In 2003, I attended the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association annual meeting to present a paper. While there, I attended a session on qualitative research, and the discussion eventually meandered on to the topic of how we as researchers respond when our participants say things we disagree with. I recounted my experience with interviewing Richard, and the session organizer responded with a comment about how in interviewing men we may hear things that offend our 'feminist sensibilities'. I was surprised, because I didn't identify myself as a feminist. I realized that the organizer was assuming I was a feminist because I'd expressed a dislike of pornography.

Clearly, a social context in which feminism exerts a major influence affected not only my participants, but me as well. In qualitative research in particular, many of the methods, ethical considerations, and theoretical stances (for instance, the notion that research is necessarily and should be value-laden or the idea that our representations of participants deserve close reflection) can be traced back to a feminist beginning, and these principles did guide my actions as a researcher. In that way, I suppose, I could be seen as a feminist, even though my research is explicitly about and for men, as opposed

to researching men as a way of ultimately improving the lives of women. At any rate, an unexpected outcome of this research has been to create new questions in my mind about what feminist research is and isn't, and who a feminist is.

#### ***4. Conclusion***

The requirement of writing a thesis for a graduate degree is designed to ensure that students gain practical experience in conducting academic research (and that they can successfully do so). I can say without a doubt that this has been a learning experience. Reflecting on the research has allowed me to learn many lessons about what it means to be a researcher, as well as learning about masculinity and male survivors. As well, by ensuring that an ethical standard is maintained, I hope to leave the BCSMSSA with a good impression of academic research, preserving an atmosphere of trust and respect between them and the academic community, should future research opportunities arise.

Being faced with unanticipated problems taught me not to expect things to work out exactly according to plan; indeed, through the failure of my original methodology, I discovered an entirely new direction in which to take my research, finding along the way that research can be an adventure as well as work.

I gained extraordinary insight into the dilemma of trying to separate my own thoughts and ideas from what my participants were saying, which taught me the importance of active listening, reserving judgement, and willingness to be open to new ideas. Finally, I am left with a sense of the profound responsibility that academic research represents, not only to those who participate, but to society at large. Despite my own sometimes contradictory experiences of power, my concern about representing my participants in good faith led me to realize that I do get the 'final say' in what is produced in my research, which means that I have the final responsibility to ensure that my analysis is accurate, respectful and meaningful.

In the end I have developed an analysis that I can be proud of, which contributes to sociological knowledge about masculinity, and which after critical reflection does stay 'true' to the information my participants gave me and to the spirit in which it was given. More importantly, I can feel proud of the process I underwent during this project; it seems that not a moment was wasted, and I learned my lessons well.

## Conclusion

My original aim in conducting this research was to explore the ways in which male survivors understood and related to ‘masculinity’. I was interested in what masculinity meant to them, both on a conceptual level and in terms of their everyday/everynight lives. My initial reason for choosing male survivors to interview for this research was a personal one; however, I also believed that they were a group of men who might be in a position to critically reflect on the assumptions of hegemonic masculinity, given that I thought (based on reading other research on male survivors and on the knowledge I gained through knowing a survivor) that their experiences of child abuse would have implications for their gender identities.

My expectation was that male survivors would not see themselves as ‘fitting’ into conventional understandings of masculinity; this was the case. However, while previous research on male survivors and masculinity has focused on the negative consequences of this lack of fit – for instance, in terms of men’s self esteem – the men I interviewed expressed their lack of fit as generally positive. Participants certainly talked about feeling ambivalent about ‘masculinity’, sometimes feeling as though their inability to express hegemonically masculine identities represented a loss. For the most part, though, they stated that the identities they had developed through the process of coming to terms with being abused (a process that often involved critically examining their beliefs about masculinity) were better than the identifications hegemonic masculinity had to offer them. Many expressed derision for men who still acted out hegemonic ideals, or who felt like they had to do so in order to be ‘a real man’.

Thus, the potential I saw for male survivors to be critically reflective about masculinity was realized in my participants’ understandings of their own identities; however, they did express a feeling of isolation in their struggle to come to new understandings of themselves. The men I interviewed explained that they found it difficult to understand their ‘place’ in the world; they didn’t see an acknowledgement of their experiences reflected in popular culture, in resource allocations for community services, or even in their interpersonal relationships. In fact, most participants talked about not being believed when they tried to tell friends, lovers, and even helping professionals that they were male survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

This lack of understanding is symptomatic of a lack of discourse around violence that is inclusive of male victims as well as female ones. Hegemonic discourses of masculinity, which help shore up patriarchal structures, and discourses of violence emerging from feminism, which has as its goal the dismantling of patriarchy, both rely on a similar image of masculinity as entailing aggressiveness, independence and invulnerability in order to accomplish their respective political goals. Hegemonic discourses of masculinity valorize these characteristics while feminism casts them in a negative light. Neither, however, challenge the notion that these attributes are synonymous with 'masculinity'. Male victims, who were vulnerable, the recipients of others' aggression and unable to stop the abuse on their own, are not reflected in these images. Thus, there is little for male survivors to connect to, in terms of over-arching discourses about gender and violence in society, that will help them make sense of their experiences.

Providing a forum for male survivors to share their stories, then, contributes to the creation of new understandings about the role of violence against men in patriarchal societies. Indeed, this thesis is a part of a growing body of theory that suggests that men's lives are also constrained (some would even say men are oppressed) by patriarchal structures. Just as violence is used against women to ensure that the hierarchies of power that support patriarchy are not disrupted, so violence against men is used to ensure that men stay 'in their place' – that is, that men do not challenge hegemonic masculinity. Male survivors' experiences can be transformed into a site of critique from which patriarchal ideals can be deconstructed; in doing so, greater understanding of the ways in which men, too, are vulnerable can be fostered.

This research aims to contribute to such a project; it does not claim to have achieved it. By exploring the experiences and opinions of the men I interviewed, I have sought to make connections between their personal struggles and broader social issues related to hegemonic masculinity, its role in maintaining patriarchy, and its implications for men's lives. Further research needs to strengthen these connections, however, or masculinity studies will continue to exist at the margins of gender theory as they have up until now.

One way that this can be accomplished is by devoting attention to other groups of men who have experienced vulnerabilities. One of my interviewees, for instance,

mentioned that his work in the military involved helping men who had suffered traumatic experiences while serving as international peacekeepers. He mentioned the struggle that these men had in trying to get adequate compensation, despite the fact that they had been effectively 'injured on the job'. There are many other such instances: men with mental health concerns, unemployed men, "heterosexual sissies" such as Hunter (1993), disabled men, and so forth could all contribute to the creation of discourses that actively resist hegemony by arguing that experiencing vulnerability does not need to have implications for gender identity.

The construction of masculinity within feminism is another avenue that warrants further investigation. Through my interviews, my review of existing literature, and my own personal experiences, it became clear that the feminist movement is an important consideration in any study of post-modern masculinity; therefore, it would be interesting to delve further into an exploration of what feminist discourses are saying about masculinity, and the extent to which these discourses are or are not generally accessible outside academia.

Finally, the idea that we need to move beyond examining perpetrators and victims (or oppressors and the oppressed) is intriguing. My study has certainly shown that relations of power are complex, sometimes tenuous, and situational, for example. Men who in some ways can make strong claims to hegemonic masculinity are in other ways excluded from the category. Similarly, women are oppressed under patriarchy, without a doubt, and violence is definitely used as a means of continuing that oppression. However, the perpetrators of abuse can sometimes have a woman's face, as some of the men I interviewed can attest to. By restricting our analyses to dichotomies such as perpetrator/victim or oppressor/oppressed, we are limiting our ability to conceptualize the 'whole picture'. Instead, theories get locked into polarized binaries (i.e. perpetrators = bad, victims = good) that are no longer informative. No doubt attempting to move away from these dichotomies means having to move into messy grey areas where nothing is clear, and claims are hard to make. However, if such areas can be navigated, our theorizing will be better for it.

At any rate, that is a challenge for another project. It is enough for this research to merely get to the point where such questions can be pondered. It was important to me that I create a space where male survivors' voices could be recognized, while at the same

time connecting those voices to sociological theories about gender, violence and power. Not only have I met these goals, but I believe that this research, and the possibilities that arise from it, have made a contribution to my field of study of which I am proud.

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## **Appendix A**

### ***Brochure Announcing Research Project at the BCSMSSA***

**Note: Formatting for the brochure has been altered to match the formatting of this document.**

### ***What is the project about?***

I want to know how male survivors understand and experience masculinity, and explore the extent to which male survivors and their therapists challenge traditional concepts of masculinity in their healing work together. This is important because research suggests that men healing from the experience of sexual abuse have to cope with the tension between the experience of victimization and traditional understandings of masculinity that involve images of powerfulness and aggression. Since this often results in difficulties with feelings of shame and inadequacy among male survivors, it is important to discover how men and their therapists are addressing this issue.

### ***Why are you being asked to participate?***

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a male survivor who has been attending counseling sessions at the BC Society for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse (BCSMSSA). The BCSMSSA has agreed to act as a third party in order to help me make contact with participants for this study. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to read a number of statements about masculinity, and sort them according to whether you agree or disagree with them. This can be done in private, at your own pace.

### ***Who is involved in this research?***

The research study is being conducted by Kristin Atwood. I am a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Victoria. This research is part of the requirements for a Master of Arts degree.

### ***Who can I contact for more information?***

You may contact me if you have further questions by calling 250-885-0234, and you may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Alison Thomas, at 250-721-7580. In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice President Research at the University of Victoria (250-721-7968).

### ***What do I do if I want to participate?***

If you are interested in participating in this research, please speak with Frances at the BCSMSSA office. She will give you the research package, which contains the statements you are being asked to look at, instructions and a recording sheet, and a consent form that is important for you to read. If you do not feel comfortable speaking with Frances directly, you can ask your therapist to pick up a package for you.

***What about my anonymity?***

Your anonymity and confidentiality is of the utmost importance to me. The reason that I am not contacting you in person is so that I do not need to know who you are – your participation can be completely anonymous. When you have completed the project, simply place your answers in the envelope provided, seal it, and leave it in the box marked “Masculinity Project” in the lobby of the BCSMSSA office. I will pick the packages up from there.

***Thank you for your consideration!***

I hope you will consider participating in my study. Your participation will be very helpful in understanding the role that ideas about masculinity plays in healing from childhood trauma, and I hope that it will also be helpful to you in understanding and dealing with your past experiences as a survivor.

**Thank you so much for your time!**

## **Appendix B**

### ***Interview Guide***

## Interview Guide

The following questions are designed to facilitate a discussion around ideas, images, and understandings of masculinity.

1. What comes to mind when you think of the word 'masculinity'?
2. What kinds of things make a man "masculine" and "unmasculine"?
3. What are some of the general characteristics that men you would consider to be "really masculine" have?
4. What's the difference between masculinity and femininity, as far as you're concerned?
5. What do you like about being a man? What don't you like?

## **Appendix C**

### ***Consent Form***

## **Consent Form**

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled “Male Survivors’ Understandings of Masculinity” that is being conducted by Kristin Atwood, a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Victoria. You may contact her if you have further questions by calling 250-885-0234. This research is part of the requirements for a Master of Arts degree and it is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Alison Thomas. You may contact the supervisor at 250-721-7580.

The purpose of this research project is to discover the ways in which male survivors and their therapists understand and construct masculinity, and to explore the extent to which male survivors and their therapists challenge traditional concepts of masculinity in their healing work together. Research of this type is important because research suggests that healing from the sexual abuse of males involves coping with the tension between the experience of victimization and traditional understandings of masculinity that involve images of powerfulness and aggression. This often results in difficulties with feelings of shame and inadequacy among male survivors. It is important to discover how men and their therapists are addressing this issue.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a male survivor who has been attending counselling sessions at the BC Society for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse (BCSMSSA). The BCSMSSA has agreed to act as a third party in order to help the researcher make contact with participants for this study. If you agree to take part in this research, your involvement will include participating in a semi-structured interview about masculinity that will last approximately 1 hour.

Because masculinity is sometimes a difficult subject to talk about, there are aspects of this research that you may find uncomfortable, and you may find that some of the statements trigger memories of experiences that are upsetting. These risks have been minimized by scheduling your participation in this research near to your regularly scheduled appointment with your therapist at BCSMSSA whenever possible.

Participating in this research will give you an opportunity to reflect on what masculinity means to you, and may be helpful to you in understanding and dealing with your past experiences as a survivor. It will help the researcher comprehend the ways in which men view their own masculinity, and may help identify the role that men’s sense of their masculinity plays in healing from traumas such as sexual abuse.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. Your decision to participate, or not to participate, will affect neither your therapy nor your relationship with BCSMSSA. Your decision will not be communicated to anyone other than the researcher. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation needed. If you do withdraw from the study your data will be destroyed and will not be used in the analysis of this research.

Your confidentiality is very important, and every precaution will be taken to ensure it. Neither your real name nor any information that could identify you will be made public.

Your confidentiality will be protected within the BC Society for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse as well, so that the information you provide cannot be associated with you by any of the staff or other clients of the organization.

Data from this study will be kept in a sealed box in a locked office until analysis is complete (for a maximum of five years), after which it will be destroyed. Computer data will be erased, audio recordings will be erased, and paper information will be shredded. This consent form will be kept separately so that your name cannot be associated with the data, and it will be destroyed with the rest of the materials.

Findings from this study will be presented as part of a Master's level thesis in Sociology. They may also be published in journal articles and presented at scholarly meetings. Further, a summary report will be given to the BC Society for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse for inclusion in their library and for their reference, and you may obtain a summary report of the results by requesting one from the researcher, if you so wish.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher and her supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice President Research at the University of Victoria (250-721-7968).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

---

Participant Signature

---

Date

---

**A copy of this consent form will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.**

---

## **Appendix D**

### ***Two Case Studies***

Please note that the following case studies are not verbatim copies of the interview transcripts. Rather, these are working documents that were developed out of the transcripts as an initial stage in my analysis of the interviews, and have been included in this thesis as an illustration of that stage of the analytical process.

## **Fred**

Fred identified a number of characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity, but he did so in a derisive manner, expressing irritation and distaste for each. Despite his negative feeling toward the things he identified, however, he never expressed any doubt that these aspects were, in fact, masculine characteristics. Instead, he seemed to express a dislike for the categorization as a whole throughout the interview.

One of the first characteristics that Fred associated with masculinity was the idea of competition. He began our discussion about masculinity by recounting his history in the military, noting that the military culture was an incredibly competitive one, a fact that he found disconcerting:

*"I found the rivalry just disgusting. It was pointless... I'm a harassment investigator, and even in that environment, the training environment, they're still competing with each other, being competitive, you know, one-upping each other. Like, how can you be one-up in mediation? Like, it's, it's win-win!" (p. 3).*

When I asked him what he thought all that competition was about, he replied:

*"Being first is very highly valued in all cultures. Number one, in a lot of different things, like, you know, in sports, or even in politics" (p. 4).*

Although he saw this as something that women were beginning to participate in more and more, he still primarily associated competitiveness and the desire to be dominant with a masculine military culture.

Sports images were also salient to Fred's conceptualization of masculinity. As with images of competitiveness, he expressed disbelief at the way certain men are accorded status because of physical prowess:

*"A million dollars going to some idiot who can slap a puck is just beyond me, when we have, you know, healthcare crises and education, things that are actually important. But some sports superstar?"*

Associated with sports images, Fred discussed the way in which violence was celebrated in traditional masculine culture. He recounted a story about watching his stepson play hockey with another father:

*“The play was done, and this guy’s son came and crosschecked [my stepson] from behind after the play, and he watched for the referee to turn around to do it. So it was, there couldn’t be anything more deliberate, and [the father] started cheering. He thought it was the greatest thing... I was livid. It wasn’t just the act itself but his support of it, and just, that he thought it was great” (p. 9).*

Fred associated this acting out – and cheering on – of violence as “purely male, as pure as the driven rain” (p. 9).

Finally, Fred discussed the idea of role differentiation – men’s work versus women’s work – as important in articulating what masculinity was. In particular, he pointed out that the traditionally masculine man:

*“doesn’t wash dishes... doesn’t do shopping, couldn’t do housework to save his life, doesn’t know how to turn on the washer much less wash his clothes” (p. 2).*

Again, he discussed this characteristic of masculinity in a derogatory way, putting down the men who believed in the differentiation between men’s and women’s work. His claim that “the more masculine they are the less self-sufficient they are” (p. 2), however, indicates that although Fred considered these qualities negative, he did not question that they described masculinity.

Given his negative orientation toward the characteristics that he associated with masculinity, it was not surprising that Fred did not care to associate himself with a masculine gender identity. When I asked him if he felt like masculinity had any place in his life, he said, “I don’t even want it. I don’t want to be defined by gender in any way” (p. 4).

The ideal gender identity, for Fred, was androgyny:

*“As far as my belief system, I, uh, probably believe more in 50/50, right down the middle, masculine and feminine are balanced, strike a balance between both... I think everyone should acknowledge their masculinity and femininity inside” (p. 2).*

However, Fred explained that this idea of a balanced gender was not something he had valued all his life. He identified his ‘starting point’ in terms of developing a sense of himself as a gendered person:

*“Uh, hard line, gay bashing, the whole works. I grew up in a small community... with an extremely bigoted adopted father. Like he’s just the ultimate stereotypical male...and to*

*some extent [he had an influence on what I thought about masculinity] – on my initial beliefs on it, but also my desire not be like that” (p. 2).*

Fred had a clear sense of how he chose to take on or reject different images and ideas about what it meant to be a man as he grew older. He talked about learning “along the way to pick and choose what [he] thought would work” for himself (p. 5) and had no problem identifying where his ideas about the identity he had developed had come from:

*“Mostly behaviors, characteristics. Things that I appreciate, and that, things that I understand from talking to others, studies, general knowledge, what other people appreciate. And, uh, along the way I learned to do what I’m comfortable with” (p.5).*

More specifically, Fred identified post-secondary education as helpful in clarifying the kind of identity he wanted to have:

*“I first learned of androgyny in university, and I thought that was just a fabulous concept, and I thought it was something more appropriate for our culture. I think we’d be in much better shape if we did that. Less egos... I find that more masculine guys have threatened egos” (p. 8).*

For Fred, at least, moving to a more gender neutral identity did not mean losing the confidence or self-assuredness often associated with hegemonic ideals of masculinity, which may help explain why he was so easily able to be critical of those ideals.

Fred grounded his rejection of hegemonic masculinity in his experience of victimization as a child:

*“Just because of my past, and the abuse, it’s just been a lifetime just trying to deal with that, which is probably why, why I’ve abandoned [traditional masculinity] in my life, because it’s been people who epitomize stereotypical masculinity who were the abusers in my past” (p. 4).*

Fred’s childhood experiences were instrumental in shaping his relationships with other men as well. Like many survivors, he recounted feeling more comfortable and having more friendships with women than with men:

*“I was taken away from my family at a year old, and put into the wonderful... foster system. They put me in 22 different foster homes. Uh, that’s where the abuse happened, until I was about four and a half when I was adopted. So I spent a lot of time bouncing, not really gaining any sense of family or belonging any place. It was hard to identify with anything or anyone...I found that I feared men. My abusers were all men when I was younger, and that left me with a very big fear of men in general. My closest friends*

*are still women...I still have a lot of male friends, people I play sports with and whatnot, but as far as confidantes, there's maybe one or maybe two that are men, maybe four in my whole life" (p. 3).*

Fred recognized that his difficulty with intimacy and sharing was not unique to himself, or even to male survivors. In fact, he was able to connect the struggles he had with healing from his childhood trauma to other men's struggles with different emotional issues. As an example, he told me a story about a friend of his who had served a term in Yugoslavia, commenting:

*"It was just overwhelming to him. He couldn't even conceive of talking to anybody and telling anybody he was having problems with his tour. It's just – that's his career...He spilled the whole works to me, which – I could see why he had nightmares. There's a lot of stuff that happened to him, so... But there's only one thing that you can do, which is talk about it. Otherwise you might as well go back home, tell your wife goodbye now, and get it over with, say goodbye to your wife and kids, 'cause that's what's going to happen... you can't deal with that. Your partner can't deal with that. You can only go through so much" (p.12).*

Through his experiences, and the experiences of other men he knew, Fred was able to identify the way in which characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, such as the idea that men should not need to ask for help in dealing with their life experiences, was adversely affecting those men who did need help. For Fred, this was more evidence of the insufficiency of hegemonic masculinity as a way of organizing his understanding of himself.

Fred was highly critical of discourses on masculinity that celebrated traditional characteristics such as violence, independence, or invulnerability. He saw such discourses as incredibly narrow-minded:

*"You know, I went over to a friend's place, and he's single parent as well, of two boys, and I didn't want to go past the screen door 'cause I could just see beyond it, you know, how could you keep a house like this? You know, it's a wonder they weren't all sick on the floor 24 hours a day from living in such squalor. We both have similar responsibilities at work, we're both Captains, essentially, and our homes are two different places, as different as they could be. And his boys are the same way. They're good boys, but they think it's funny as hell that one of them is failing, and to me that's just – I'll pull [my son] out of any sport going if his school is affected. No way; that's just not acceptable. And this guy is the other way around; it's 'well, he's good at hockey'. Okay, but what's he going to do if he breaks a leg and never makes the NHL cut? Well, there's the local lumber store. There's not a lot of ambition. To be typically*

*masculine is very limiting. It's an excuse almost as much as a cultural belief" (pp.15-16).*

This idea that masculinity was “the easy way out” was one of Fred’s central critiques of hegemonic discourses of masculinity (p. 15). He argued that traditional gender roles were “just plain excuses to not look any further beyond themselves” (p. 16). The implication of this, however, was that those who chose to buy into traditional masculinity were doing so at the expense of their own self-sufficiency. Fred pointed out that traditional masculinity couldn’t stand on its own – it required the polar opposite of traditional femininity to fill in the gaps. Without it, he related, there could be serious consequences:

*“I mean, they can’t even wash a load of clothes... guys who have no idea what to do with things use naphtha, like a highly flammable fuel to take grease stains out of combat clothing, and then thought that they could throw it in the drier to dry it off afterwards. And they blew up two laundry rooms” (p. 5-6).*

Thus, for Fred, discourses on hegemonic masculinity were closely tied with actual behaviors, and many of those behaviors left something to be desired.

Discourses that celebrated hegemonic characteristics were not the only ones that Fred mentioned as problematic to him. He also discussed coming up against feminism, in the context of his sociology of gender course:

*“I had one [woman] ask me to leave... in front of the professor, in front of the whole class. [She said] ‘what are you doing here? Get out!’. [I said] ‘Well, I paid for this one, too’... her reasoning was that they wouldn’t feel open to discussing certain issues...and, you know, if that’s the case, you’re never going to be, you know, open to discussing the issues. She didn’t leave the class and neither did I” (p. 13).*

Fred disagreed with some of the tenets of feminism he encountered, such as the idea that a man couldn’t comprehend a woman’s experience, or that woman-only spaces were required for safety reasons. However, despite admitting to feeling discouraged by some of the things he heard about masculinity (i.e. that men were aggressors, potentially dangerous, and so forth), he did have insight into why some women thought that way:

*“I don’t blame them, I can’t blame them. We went through the same thing, [sexual abuse], how can I?... I support feminism completely. Not radical, because I don’t support radical anything” (p. 14).*

Fred's insight into how his experiences shaped his understanding of gender allowed him to be understanding of how some feminist discourses about masculinity and male violence had developed, and to separate those things from his own understanding of himself.

That being said, however, Fred expressed frustration over not being able to find space for alternative ways of thinking about gender. For instance, when we talked about the idea of androgyny, he argued that it had not gained any significant level of acceptance as a legitimate discourse of gender identity:

*F: Um, there really is no middle of the road along masculinity.*

*K: Well, there is in gender. I think that androgyny is as middle of the road as you can get.*

*P: Yeah, but then you kind of lose in both worlds, because women expect you to be 'male', and so do men. So you end up not talking to either.*

*K: Do you find that the way that you understand gender affects your relationship with women?*

*P: With both. It's very isolating. But it's my belief" (p. 14).*

Fred envisioned a society where gender had little impact on the way in which human beings related to each other. More immediately, however, he expressed a need for acceptance around male vulnerability and traumatization. As an example, he said that the military was still treating the *victims* of traumatic experiences as the problem, rather than the trauma:

*"Anyone with posttraumatic stress disorder, or any kind of mental illness, depression, stress – you're a second class citizen and you're on the way out. As soon as you're diagnosed with something to do with stress, you're going to get chopped" (p. 10).*

However, Fred saw hope for change and, indeed, was proactive about changing the way that masculinity was conceptualized for his children:

*"[I] try to teach him that every single kid at school feels the same in one way or another – that whenever you go into a class and you're terrified of a test, and you know, the biggest bully is giving everybody a hard time about it – well, he's just as scared. He just doesn't know how to put it into words, and to me, that's one of the biggest differences, is someone who believes in traditional masculinity couldn't talk his way out of a paper bag" (p. 7).*

Fred went beyond identifying areas in which new ways of understanding masculinity were needed, and talked about the ways in which he was actively involved in creating them, whether it involved bringing his baking into work, or teaching his children about equality. For him, it was the idea of choice that was particularly salient:

*“If you still want to be perfectly masculine, go ahead. But you don’t have to be. And that’s what I’m trying to teach my kids, is you don’t have to be...I think everything’s a choice... I don’t just choose, I believe in doing what I’m comfortable with... that’s just me” (p. 8).*

Fred implied, thus, that part of the importance of creating new ways of talking about gender involved making those choices conscious, and informing those who might not be aware of the possibilities beyond hegemonic masculinity that those choices did, indeed, exist.

## Walt

Walt identified characteristics of masculinity by talking about male roles. He noted, first of all, that men had a specific role within the family, which was “to be the provider, to be the aggressor, to be taking the lead” in romantic or sexual relationships (p. 2). Equally important was a definition of men’s activities, such as hunting and fishing, which Walt associated with an abstract concept of masculinity. He also talked about men’s roles in friendships, comparing them to women’s friendships:

*“Men’s friendships, I think, tend to be a little thinner unless they’re doing things together. Whereas women can have friendships in which they’re exchanging their views of what’s going on in the world, and what’s going on in their lives, and things like that...even amongst long friendships in men, the majority, I don’t think, share very much about their interior life. Or even, yeah maybe not so much [about] the mega things that are going on in their life, you know, they’ll be sort of keeping up this front of being powerful and capable and so and so forth” (pp. 2-3).*

Thus, instead of being places where men could express their emotions, Walt saw men’s friendships as places in which struggles for power were carried out. This idea that men struggle for dominance over one another was also a salient aspect of masculinity for him:

*“I think that’s, that’s really important, um, I would say for shallow relationships with mature men, and for a lot of the relationships for younger men, in their teens and twenties, where, uh, heavy drinking and bad driving and bad behavior in relationships, and, uh, and violence are all a part of that establishing the top dog” (p. 6).*

For Walt, however, the traditional ways of understanding masculinity were not the only ways. He also saw the potential for alternative ways to conceptualize masculinity, especially with regard to the use of power:

*“Like, being able to be open about their love, and they have to be affectionate, to, um, to have compassion. Uh, to me, strength without compassion is a distortion, and whatever power that we have, for men or women, whatever power we have I think needs to be used responsibly. And there are lots of ways that we have power over one another. Sometimes it’s the organizational structure and sometimes it’s just having power over the other person in the relationships in some aspect, and, so I try to be thoughtful about the power that I do have and not abuse it” (p. 9).*

While in many respects the way in which Walt described masculinity as an abstract concept was in keeping with the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, he also believed strongly that in some areas, at least, masculinity could, and should, be conceptualized alternatively. This was, he said, because “parts of traditional masculinity are kind of destructive to men” (p. 9). Walt conceptualized of masculinity in alternative ways, not only for his own sense of self, but as an abstract idea as well:

*“I took a lesson from feminism in this, I guess, in that, uh, there was a trend for a period of time where feminists weren’t very feminine, like there really was a problem with the definition of the word feminine, and they had to expand the definition of the word feminine, and they had to expand the definition of femininity to not say that women who, um, wanted some education or have careers, and so on and so forth, were not feminine. So, for men the same thing, although it’s the other way around. Men can be masculine and, and, uh, be much more open, warm, and emotional and all sorts of things than our fathers or our mentors were. We need to change our conceptions of it” (p. 1).*

Walt described the ways in which having been sexually abused had influenced his beliefs about masculinity. Near the beginning of the interview, he explained that being a survivor had implications for his behavior in friendships with other men:

*“You can have a buddy relationship involved in doing things together and camaraderie, uh, but it’s sort of based on the supposition that, before you start, that I’m okay... and that’s really where I’ve had difficulty because a lot of times I haven’t felt okay... I mean, got very good at putting on a front, but there’s this huge dissonance between what I felt inside and what I was portraying” (p. 3).*

Sexuality was another area in which Walt described his experiences as a survivor of abuse as being particularly salient:

*“You know, someone who is a survivor, a male survivor, I think whether they’re victimized by a male or not but especially if they’re victimized by a male, has all kinds of problems with, um, sexual identity, that it’s just not the assumed thing that it is for most other people. So I mean I went for a decade after the last series of assaults when I was a teenager, I didn’t date at all. And I—has this guy made me homosexual? And, uh, and still I’m working things out, all these years later” (p. 14).*

Sexuality and sexual abuse were related in other ways as well. Walt explained that being a survivor meant that the physical act of having sex was sometimes difficult, and since sexual prowess was an important tenet of masculinity, this had consequences for his self-esteem:

*“Well, I’ve been in abuse therapy for, um, three and half years, and, uh, I certainly have had a lot of partners, but even as recently as this last fall I was having problems with being present in the moment during sex without dissociating, or having performance anxiety and being unable to perform, and at either event producing sexuality which was unsatisfying to me and probably unsatisfying to my wife, and trying to talk about this, to say well, no sweetheart, you’re not the problem. I mean there are things that you can do to help, um, but it, you know, it’s part of being a survivor, and it makes me really angry that as a survivor I have to put up with this, and this is 34 years later” (p. 14).*

While he talked about the difficulties that being a survivor created in his understanding of himself as a man, he was also able to reflect on his experiences, which gave him the ability to be a support for his step-son, who was also a survivor:

*“I would often share things with him, and he wouldn’t say a word. When I was driving him into town or something like that, and he wouldn’t say a word but I knew he was listening. And I could tell sometimes that it really bothered him, but I hoped that just by talking about things from my perspective as a man that he would have some understanding and start to question his, um, fundamentalist idea of masculinity” (p. 7).*

Questioning conventional understandings of masculinity seemed to be a recurring theme in Walt’s life. Although he did believe that there was a biological aspect to masculinity, he mostly discussed the way that it was socially a result of learning from the social environment:

*“In certain cases [masculinity] is a role that you take on somewhat consciously. But I think that for a lot of people it’s just, like, automatic, it comes out of culture and family and everything you’re raised through” (p. 3).*

He believed that masculinity could be reconceptualized, both on a personal and social level. However, Walt did not see the kind of masculinity a man took on for himself as being merely a matter of personal choice:

*“Defining what is masculinity for you is not something you define entirely for yourself. It’s something that comes out of [social interactions with family and peer groups]” (p. 5).*

Perhaps because of the belief that alternative conceptualizations of masculinity were not something any man could simply pick up and start emulating, Walt was involved in activities where he was placed in an educational role, teaching men about different ways of being masculine:

*"I certainly encourage men as much as they can to break out of [traditional masculinity] and to be able to share more deeply with other men and with their wives exactly what's going on for them. And educate them as to the difficulties they're in, in terms of the way minds work, and different expectations of relationships and stuff" (p. 9).*

Walt had a history of involvement in men's groups, bringing speakers to town, writing newsletters, and so on. One of the discourses of masculinity that he'd been significantly engaged with through this work rose out of feminist commentaries on gender:

*"Well, I react kind of negatively to the, to the kind of feminism that, uh, talks about toxic testosterone. That's like telling your child of divorce that their mother is a bad person and they internalize that as part of me is terrible. Well, no. Testosterone is a, is a natural thing in men and women, to a greater degree in men" (p. 4).*

Walt expressed a recognition that there were different forms of feminism, and professed that he didn't believe that all feminists were excessively hostile towards men. Nevertheless, he did think there were anti-male sentiments among many feminists:

*"There's a core leadership in feminism, uh, which basically is hateful towards men... and denies me that humanity. But that doesn't mean that I have problems with all women or all feminisms. So I've moderated my vision. For a while I was way over-reactive" (p. 11).*

In the same vein, he was also critical of the men's movement:

*"There are some men in the men's movement, very unorganized as it is, who, um, uh, I don't think they have a very balanced view. They know there's some injustice, but they don't really have a vision for the way things should be in terms of how we relate as human beings. And that there needs to be some changes in men as well as some changes in women, so that for instance when we're arguing for issues, I would speak harshly to men who did not live up to the responsibilities to be a father, including paying support. Basically the men are out of line. This is your obligation to your children. They are your children. At the same time speaking harshly to women who abuse that" (p. 13).*

For Walt, then, part of his vision for the world included deconstructing ideas about traditional masculinity wherever they played out, whether they were being purported by feminists, or whether they were being reinforced by the actions of men.

There was one area, however, in which Walt's criticism of discourses of masculinity focused specifically on feminism, and that had to do with the way in which interpersonal violence was described in feminist discourse. Walt was critical of the way

in which feminism tended to describe men as aggressors and women as victims. His anger around this issue, he explained, came out of his experience as a man who had also been a victim:

*“That’s a huge issue for me. Because I have felt very powerless, and yes, I have an awful lot of women who can’t see that it’s possible for a man to be powerless, and a victim. I mean, I don’t like to use the word victim, but, um, feminism had taught them that they’re victims, um, so they can’t see their own power, and they can’t see that men can be victims as well. Men or women can be victims; in fact, you know women are probably victims and abusers in different aspects all at the same time. And that, to define yourself or to define the other as an abuser... diminishes both... in the exercise of humanity, we have to stop those kind of roles. I think that’s the kind of excessive feminism that needs to turn back” (p. 10).*

Walt felt that the discourse of violence that feminism maintained created two distinct roles, the male abuser and the female victim, that played out in a variety of ways. He felt that this discourse was especially damaging because it masked the reality of many men’s lives:

*“That’s a very negative aspect which made me extremely angry. You know as a male victim of violence, um, I get extremely angry at the, even at Take Back the Night and all these kinds of things, because it ignores the fact that somewhere around 80% of the victims of violence are males. And that males, uh, are assaulted just as often as women in relationships. So I have no problem supporting the fact that women should not be assaulted in relationships. But I have a real problem that this means that all men are bad, all men are abusers, all women are victims and powerless. ‘Cause that’s not true” (p. 11).*

Walt noted that there were many ways in which men felt powerless in their lives, not just in their experiences as victims of violence. As an illustration, he recounted a story about his divorce:

*“Walt: My marriage fell apart and I was stunned to find out how little fairness there was in family law. And that I was raped financially, that she could deny me access to my own children while throwing me in jail if I didn’t pay maintenance. All kinds of things, I mean, basically I felt that she was using the court system in an extremely abusive manner. She was abusing the power that society had placed in her hands in order to supposedly make her equal. But if you have a vindictive, abusive person who will abuse power, no matter what their gender is, in a bad situation – so here I was, I was a victim of abuse, legal abuse because I was male. Simply because I was male and there was nothing I could do about it. So I felt absolutely powerless.*

*Kristin: Kind of re-traumatizing.*

*Walt: Yeah, yeah. And meanwhile getting the message from everybody around that males are all abusers and bad and powerful and women are the meek little victims. This is not right” (p. 12).*

Walt clearly felt the need for new ways to talk about men and women in relation to each other, and for new discourses on masculinity that opened up the possibility of men being victims as well as abusers. Of course, he was also calling for an understanding of women as potential abusers as well as victims. However, he acknowledged that there were many difficulties in creating this discourse, not the least of which was that his experiences of victimization seemed at odds with women’s experiences of male abuse and neglect:

*“I knew lots of women, and I can say my present wife is one of those, whose husbands, the fathers of their children, basically had nothing to do with them for years and years and years....So her experience of a man was someone who ran up the bills, uh, he left her with the bills, and didn’t mind his responsibilities to his children as human beings, or to the promise to support them. And so not hard to understand where she was coming from as a result. But it was really hard for her; it took years for her to process the idea that I, too, was a victim” (p. 13).*

Primarily, then, Walt was looking for a way to talk about victimization that wasn’t necessarily gendered, that allowed for many possible combinations of the male and female roles and the victim and aggressor roles. Creating this discourse, he believed, would make a significant positive contribution to the society in which he lived. Although Walt did not expect that his efforts would change his own life directly, he was hopeful that the work he did would have some impact, saying, “I’m probably not going to change anything for myself – it’s too late. But hopefully I’ll make a difference for you fifteen years down the road” (p. 13).