The Consumption of Hegemonic Masculinity: Understanding Gender Patterns Through Computer-Mediated Communication

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Abstract

This project focused upon exploring elements of hegemonic masculinity which participants have consumed (or otherwise) in a context of Facebook profiles in order to create their social self-expression. At the same time this study recognised the consumption of ideological aspects that underpin participants' personal understandings of manhood.

The first phase of the research focused upon content analysis of eighty-nine Facebook profiles (Chapters 7-9). The aim was to capture masculine traits that participants symbolically consume and conceptualise in their social environment on a daily bases. The second phase of the research used an analysis of thirty-one open-ended questionnaires (Chapter 10). It explored the consumption of personal experiences of being a man which were also compared with participants' social self-presentation. Both parts of the research aimed to obtain a complex view on contemporary masculinities in order to understand why some aspects of hegemonic masculinity are consumed and valued on a daily bases while others are discarded by participants.

In short, gender identity was a main focus of this research. Masculine identities were shown to be underpinned by social, cultural and media messages as well as individual reflexivity. This thesis argues that looking at the concept of masculinity through the new lens of symbolic consumption allows both the identification of people's self-expression in a social context and the hearing of individual voices and the experiences of men. This approach captures the multiplicity of masculinities and contributes to challenging the hegemonic facets of gender.

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Acknowledgement

Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature   _____

Printed name   _____

Chapter 1

Introduction: Origins and aims of the research

1.1 Ideological framework

This study creates a new understanding of gender issues by generating data regarding *consumption* of hegemonic masculinity. Currently research on gender relies heavily on studying *representations* of masculinity and femininity in the context of literature (e.g. novels, poetry, and plays), printed media (magazines, tabloids), broadcast media (film, television, radio) or other visual forms such as paintings, photography or advertisement (Beynon, 2002). The importance of investigating representation is that it identifies stereotypical constructions of men and women that strengthen and legitimate inequalities of class, race and gender. Myriad media promote men's position of authority and sexualised control over women influencing the way in which women understand themselves and their femininities (Usher, 1998). However, David Gauntlett (2008) demonstrates how media can distort many aspects of men's lives and their experiences. He argues that men's magazines often imply that 'real men' are independent, unemotional and in control. Manhood is also achieved through physical representations, aggression and strength. Ironically, as Gauntlett (2008) points out, at the same time, magazines can convey contradictory meanings, presenting men as being insecure, fearful of intimacy and lost in the modern 'feminine' world. This critique of media's fragmented representations highlights the need of recognising diversity and complexity of gender. Simultaneously, it attempts to find understanding of how mass media influence people's self-perception.

However, this investigation does not look at media representations *per se,* but seeks to examine what parts of hegemonic masculinity are consumed to be reproduced (or otherwise) in the wider social context. Through the symbolic consumption of particular gender meanings, people maintain their self-creation project (Giddens, 1991) that fulfils (to some degree) a sense of personal understanding and at the same time complies with the collective expectations (Goffman, 1959). Individuals (consciously or unconsciously) consume meanings that become representations of their manhood or femininity (Baudrillard, 1981). Within this study, consumption is not understood in the economic context of satisfying material needs (see Chapter 2 where consumption is discussed in

detail). Rather, it defines a symbolic process of assimilating specific concepts through which individuals express their gender identity. Consumption of gender might have different dimensions and relate to activities that people choose, roles they adopt or beliefs they follow. Consumption symbolically reflects and communicates how people understand themselves (Baudrillard, 1981). At the same time, there might be some undesirable concepts that bear negative connotations, either on personal or social grounds, which people do not want to reproduce and attempt to avoid. This is to say that also a rejection of particular meanings contributes to the construction of one's gender identity.

Currently, other popular and complex modes of researching gender are life histories (for example biography, autobiography, oral history) or ethnographic approaches. The former mode relates to individual experiences of being a man where the researcher's role is to illustrate what it is like to be a particular person (Seidler, 1989). The latter one is a powerful technique to explore the diversity of masculinities, men's behaviours, actions and relationships in a specific environment for example prison (Phillips, 2001) or Brazilian *favela* (Barker, 2005) at a particular moment. The importance of such investigations is that they recognise the multiple realities of men and do not treat masculinity in hegemonic terms. They capture a range of manhood in different contexts of political, cultural or historic circumstances. However, again, the focus is upon *constructions* and *expressions* of masculinity, rather than upon examination of what part of masculine representation is consumed in order to uphold the sense of own gender identity. What academics rarely discuss are consumption choices of products, activities and beliefs that people make in order to reflect their personal perceptions on gender, but also to place their gender identity within a realm of social expectations.

Looking at the concept of masculinity through the new lens of consumption allows both identification of people's self-expression in a social context and the hearing of individual voices and experiences of men. It examines the extent to which men's *self-conception* complies (or otherwise) with social expectations and captures which gender norms are consumed (or not) in order to sustain their own gender identity. Paul Kivel (2010) metaphorically explains that boys' lives are placed in a box of social expectations that precisely define the concept of a 'real' man. Boys are persuaded into thinking that they ought to be taught to have no emotions where maintaining their own position in a box means being in control of feelings, bodies, decisions, and relationships. Those who attempt to step out from the box are put back in their former place with nicknames like fag, wimp, bitch, gay and many others (Kivel, 2010). There is also a danger of physical abuse. Peers,

parents, teachers and mass media reinforce these ideas of being masculine enough. Kivel (1984) argues that men while being in the box might have an impression that they belong to the exclusive club where all men are equal. However, there are different relations of power and privilege among working-class, middle-class and upper class white men and men of colour seeking dignity and respect. The box creates an illusion of solidarity and equality that does not exist. It navigates and instructs boys on how to define their place in the world and consequently underpins their educational and cultural choices. Similarly, the process of understanding masculinity is also influenced by the mass media that continue placing individuals in the 'Act-Like-a-Man' box. Simultaneously, media-driven constructions promote the image of a 'New Man', emotional, sensitive and involved in domestic tasks, opposed to violence, respectful for women or supportive of gay and lesbian issues (Beynon, 2002).

Each categorisation of manhood attempts to fit men into a limited stereotype. The paradox is that individuals do not passively follow this externally imposed script of masculine behaviour but at the same time, they cannot completely detach themselves from cultural expectations since they communicate commonly shared symbolic meanings. Consequently, this study deals with contradictory pictures of manhood by exposing what gender representations are consumed by men. This approach does not place people into particular categories but allows the discourse between individual experiences and social expectations to emerge. In other words, this research documents the subjectivity of men along with the consumption of certain gender stereotypes.

1.2 Facebook setting

The fieldwork of this project is located entirely in the domain of Facebook, which for the purposes of this study (see Chapter 5) is understood as a form of real-life setting of communication (see Chapter 4). The use of social networking websites to investigate the notion of gender has a novelty value and introduces a new line of research. Facebook is a significant space that helps to communicate the self-creation project and reflect group associations. In the context of this research, the Facebook setting allowed tracing what ideas and topics men consume on a daily basis to sustain their gender identity and areas of gender identity that remain silent, being only noticeable by their absence (Chandler, 1998). Masculinity should not be regarded as an absolute and static concept, but rather as a subject of constant negotiation and re-interpretation. Perceptions on masculinity often contradict one another and reflect differences in understanding issues of for example

feminism, power, emotions or intimacy (see Chapter 2). It is difficult to find an agreement on what constitutes and defines masculinity because traditional social norms, personal viewpoints and ideologies of popular culture merge, creating a complex network of relationships. Masculinity is a fluid concept that changes considerably over time depending upon historical, economic or cultural transformations (Connell, 2002). Consequently, there is a need to move away from stereotypical traits of masculinity from the past and define consumption of gender in the light of contemporary life. In the context of Facebook, it is possible to trace what characteristics of manhood people currently consume or attempt to avoid in their social environment (see Chapters 7, 8 and 9). At the same time, Facebook provides an opportunity for obtaining more personal and individual accounts via e-mail communication (see Chapter 10). This is not to say that any Internet platform is an appropriate and meaningful research setting. However, Facebook and its complex socio-individual nature contribute to generating methodological innovations that can fulfil different research expectations.

1.3 Aims and research questions

The research aimed:

1. To obtain a contemporary understanding of masculinities;

2. To address cultural constructions of masculinity by exploring how manhood is 'consumed' and experienced by men;

3. To understand and analyse the relationship between men's social self-representation and individual perception on masculinity;

4. To introduce and test research that is located on the Facebook Networking Website so as to further develop the existing models of studying gender;

In pursuing these aims the following research questions were addressed:

1. How far do socially created conceptions of masculinity influence the construction of men's daily self-presentation?

   - What representations of masculinity are consumed and sustained by men?

- What activities, interests and roles are presented as appropriate to be consumed by men?

- Do current perspectives on manhood confirm or challenge gender stereotypes and generalisations? How?

2. How far do men produce their own meanings of masculinity?

- How do men feel about themselves within contemporary culture?

- What are the personal, social and cultural obstacles that concern men?

3. What is the relationship between the consumption of gender norms and men's individual understanding of their own masculinity?

- Are there any significant differences in the shape of social self-representation and personal conceptualisation of masculinity? If so, how might these be understood?

- In what ways does a social conception on manhood construct an individual understanding of gender?

4. To what extent is the context of Facebook profiles as well as the use of computer-mediated communication accurate and applicable to the social framework of this project?

- How can well-established research methods of studying gender be adapted to fit an online environment?

- What ethical issues should address the analysing of Online Social Networking Websites?

This research highlights a need to recognise a plurality of masculinities. Each person has his very own understanding of reality that is influenced by self-reflexivity as well as external factors such as age, class, ethnicity, sexuality or cultural influences. Consequently, treating gender in totalising terms appears to be an irrational practice. This investigation exposes new meanings and a complexity in symbolic patterns of gender consumption where questioning common assumptions about gender by making them unnatural and strange can challenge people's experiences and expectations. The awkward notion of masculinity is produced in two ways: by promoting hegemonic ideologies and by its

accidental and careless entering into the lives of young people. Thus, this research might be a stimulus for academics, teachers and students to unlearn stereotypical thinking and to grasp an alternative understanding of gender ideologies in order to negotiate homogeneous facets of masculinity. This process of unlearning what is familiar becomes an important aspect of developing new perspectives and knowledge. Many people do not see beyond the gender matrix, ignoring the possibility of differentiation and variation. Nowadays, people have to be encouraged to explore and critically think about alternative masculinities because treating gender in monolithic and totalising terms distorts understanding of social relations and self-identity.

This study is rooted in the theories of social justice and emphasises the case for social change. It draws attention to social and cultural aspects of stereotyping and investigates participants' individual engagement in construction of their own gender identities. Investigating the concept of gender and gender inequalities requires undertaking critical research standpoints and perspectives. Consequently, in the context of this study the researcher's task was to expose different constructions of masculinity in order to capture the diversity of human experiences.

It has to be acknowledged that a female researcher studying masculinity might carry strong ideological assumptions that focus upon criticising patriarchal culture or the formulation of women's sense of subordination in the contemporary world (for more discussion please see Chapter 5). However, in this study the research aim was to see beyond the hegemonic realm of masculinity. The research aim was not to silence individual experiences of men but to expose their multiple perspectives and feelings. From the researcher's theoretical perspective, the recognition of multiplicity and diversity of participants' experiences contributes to greater understanding of social inequalities.

Part One

The Review of Literature

The leitmotif of part one is the concept of gender identity that recurs in several thematic contexts. Gender appears to be a fundamental component of a human self-perception. It is the concept around which people create an understanding of their own personalities; it underpins their educational and life-style choices. This part commences with the examination of debates about gender issues. Chapter 2 presents diverse perspectives on constructions of masculinity and investigates how they have been studied and theorised to date. Expressions of gender identity are also embedded in the study of consumption. Chapter 3 discusses themes relevant to the analysis of modern consumption, such as alienation, habitus or sign-value logic, that are engaged to some extent in maintaining the sense of gender identity. Finally, as this research was conducted entirely in the online environment, Chapter 4 examines how the notion of reality, community and identity has been theorised within leading approaches to the Internet. The intention of this part is to present the complexity of theoretical perspectives in order to locate the study undertaken in a wider academic framework.

Chapter 2

Perspectives on gender: rethinking recent theories on masculinities

2.1 Introduction

This chapter theorises the main concepts of masculinity in relation to feminism and gender studies. First, historical perspectives are taken into consideration in order to describe how masculinity issues became an institutionalized subject of academic studies. Then the chapter considers possible relationships and distinctions made among sex, gender and sexuality to illustrate how binary categorisation influences the human perception of being a man or being a woman. It is also acknowledged that power relations have an impact upon both women's and men's experiences. The final section of this chapter examines the concept of a crisis of masculinity. Along with these fundamental themes, the focus is upon defining the ideas of hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy and male gaze.

2.2 Toward a new sociology of gender

The study of gender arose out of the women's movements mainly during the second wave of feminism which criticised academic disciplines for ignoring women as the subjects of research as well as for diminishing women's work and activities (Hanmer, 1990). Areas such as education, history, psychoanalysis, literature, economy, sociology and many more were argued to be biased and focused upon male culture. The publication of Betty Friedan's '*The Feminine Mystique*' (1963), Germaine Greer's '*The Female Eunuch*' (1970), Kate Millet's '*Sexual Politics*' (1970) or Dale Spender's '*Man Made Language*' (1980) opened discussion, polemic and debate that helped to establish scholarly work on women and their relations with men from the female perspective. Consequently, the challenge for the academic environment was to recognise women's scientific and intellectual achievements. Women's Studies meant to counterbalance the patriarchal culture and help in bringing women into a social context (Wharton, 2005). Thus, since the 1970s, universities in the United States and Britain have attempted to introduce courses such as 'The Sociology of Women', devoted mainly to feminism and femininity. It was an attempt to authorise and legitimate the experiences of women as positive and important values. Correspondingly, much more attention was put on topics related to a critique of

men and differences between women and men rather than variation within feminine group and masculine group (Wharton, 2005).

Women's studies accommodated knowledge about the system of patriarchy and promoted the second-wave feminists' slogan 'the personal is political' (Hanmer, 1990). Social structure, from a feminist perspective, was not only about an individual understanding of interpersonal relations or concern about femininity or masculinity; it was about a reproduction of women's marginality and subordination through politics and media. This movement tried to sustain the schematic image of masculinity where 'traditional' men were seen as agents of patriarchy and described through the lens of domination, sexual exploitation and violence. Carrigan, et al., (1985) argued that in the 1970s, as a riposte to women's liberation politics and women's studies, men developed their own liberation movements that became the first step toward a new sociology of masculinity. Its character was more psychological and supportive rather than political. Thus, in the United States and Britain a network of consciousness-raising groups and men's centres came into existence, developed into a therapeutic movement that involved elements of self-improvement. Seidler (1997) believed that the early stage of the men's liberation movement recognised and expressed concern about women's subordination and injustice caused by men. However, another important theme became the liberating of men. Jack Nichols's book '*Men's Liberation*' (1975) focused upon the oppression of men that is comparable to the social injustice of women. For him and for most left-wing, early liberation writers such as Farrell (1974) or Petras (1975) the real enemies are the male sex-role stereotypes that mould and destroy the 'real self' of both men and women (Carrigan, et al., 1985). They focused upon the unjust socialisation of boys, which eliminates the role of emotions and stresses the importance of competitiveness and public success. Feminism prompted men to rethink their own practice and personal lifestyles. Thus, 'old-fashioned' masculinity required reformation.

Messner (1997) observed that, ironically, men's liberation contributed to the creation of conservative, right wing movements that blamed feminism for new injustice and anti-male prejudice in society. It was a political backlash against equality of rights. The example of this anti-feminist ideology might be found in writings of 'fathers' rights groups'. A collection of articles '*Men Against Sexism*' (1977), edited by John Snodgrass or Goldberg's '*Hazards of Being Male*' (1976) started to point out disadvantages of being a man in for example divorce, child custody or sexual harassment prosecutions. This approach promoted men's victimisation and highlighted the costs of masculinity, such as

shorter life-span, health problems or military conscription. Men's right groupings advocated a reassertion of traditional understanding of masculinity where men ought to hold power over women in domestic and public spheres.

A Christian strand represents a similar anti-feminist (and anti-homosexual) agenda (Beasley, 2008). Its narrow perspective on gender relations includes the approval of biological determinism, implying that biological factors and genes mediate human behaviours such as cultural preferences. Similarly, men's violence is seen as an inborn aspect of character that should be controlled by society. From a Christian perspective, society fails to decree levels of violence and does not succeed at overcoming the crisis of the family (e.g. high divorce rates, lesbian and gay parenting, moral panic about inadequate mothering of full-time working women) caused by Women's Liberation movements. The answer to these problems lies in Christianity and Christian views that advocate traditional masculine authority in family and community. Similarly, fundamentalist religious groupings such as Promise Keepers or Nation of Islam are concerned with upholding men's traditional, god-given roles (Messner, 1997). In October 1995 African-American men led by Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam organised the '*One Million March'* in Washington D.C. and called upon the restoration of men's leadership and authority over women. Correspondingly, the Promise Keepers led by Bill McCartney carried '*Stand in the Gap: A Sacred Assembly of Men'* event at the National Mall in Washington D.C. in October 1997, which aimed to re-establish men's proper leadership roles (Beasley, 2008). Another, spiritual perspective, the so-called mytho-poetic men's movement, postulated against the feminisation of men. Feminist ideology was seen as a campaign against men's personal liberation that limited their connection with the inner self. Real manhood was associated with archetypal myths or the Middle Ages and could be regained only through rituals of male bonding such as hunting or sports. Consequently, isolated places, without the presence of women were believed to serve best to cure 'wounded' masculinity. Thousands of men joined mytho-poetic writer Robert Bly at men's weekends in the woods to rediscover their natural manhood (Messner, 1997).

Finally, there is a group that shares the feminist agenda; namely, pro-feminist men. Like feminists, they are concerned about the unequal nature of social institutions and they are negative about the privileges of masculinity. Messner (1997) distinguished two strands within this category: a radical and a socialist movement. The former is also known as a New Left and like men's liberation movement initially highlighting the costs of masculinity. Nevertheless, great importance was given to the unequal (for women) nature

of the patriarchal system and an examination of men's lives through the lens of their personal feelings. Radical pro-feminist men were criticised by feminists and prompted to move away from theorising about the disadvantages of being a man. Consequently, the New Left focused upon power and privileges that men obtain in a patriarchal society. This excessive altruism towards women contributed to the politics of guilt (Messner, 1997).

The socialist-feminist men like radical pro-feminism group gave emphasis to gender inequalities. Above all, class inequalities became significant terrain of analysis. Patriarchy brings profits to all men, however, some social classes benefit more than others. Thus, masculinity was not seen in the liberal movement as a personal attitude, but regarded in terms of structured power. Socialist feminism brought recognition of inequalities among men and acknowledgement that different men pay different costs of masculinity. From a social feminist point of view, masculinity in patriarchal capitalist society has been shaped by greed, competitiveness and a focus upon wages (Whitehead, 2002). Nowadays men are still networked in groups such as NOMAS (National Organisation of Men Against Sexism) in the USA, the White Ribbon Campaign in Canada or MASA (Men against Sexual Assault) in Australia in order to support pro-feminist ideology (Beasley, 2008, p. 189).

Overall, in comparison with women's liberation or gay movements, men's liberation ought to be described rather as an activity that had no significant political effect (Carrigan, et al., 1985). However, it contributed to the institutionalisation of the study of men and masculinities. Brod (1987) at the end of 1980s created a conceptual framework for "Men's Studies". His programme presented manhood in traditional terms as universal and solid construction to acknowledge the inequality of gender relations. At the same time, the attention was put on the costs of being a man. Nevertheless, it was not a radical men's rights perspective that presented men equally or more disadvantaged than women in patriarchal society. Within Brod's ideology, there was attentiveness of men's power within private and public domain or awareness of men's violence towards women. Brod (1987) explained his standpoint as being critical of manhood, but willing to support men. He offered the development of Men's Studies that ought to focus upon men and manhood practices and identities and above all ought to become a separate unit from Women's Studies. Some feminists took this perspective with scepticism. Canaan and Griffin (1990) or Modleski (1991) argued that Men's Studies that exist in opposition to Women's Studies rather than as a part of Women's Studies could reinforce the notion of asymmetry between sexes and bring back the picture of men's domination and women's marginalisation. Moreover, studies on men qua men could become a passage into reinforcement of

conservative, anti-feminist politics by allowing men to speak for feminism excluding women.

Connell's '*Gender and Power*' (1987) became a theoretical insight offering a new point of view about masculinity and gender. The author attempted to refer to gender without placing himself in the role of speaking for feminists and at the same time created theoretical insights into masculinities. Being against the patriarchal ideology, he points out that masculinity cannot function as political activity because it sustains unequal gender relations. The gender order has been questioned by revealing all its limitations in the form of privileges accessible to men such as privileges of employment or higher earnings. His theoretical frame for Masculinity Studies, on the contrary to Men's Studies, recognised the importance of variation within masculine and feminine groups and highlighted that gender issues should not be studied in isolation from each other. Nowadays there is a growing volume of literature on masculinity and men. It is, important to recognise differences in authors' political and theoretical assumptions (Richardson and Robinson, 2008). For example, for some (Farrell, 1974, Petras, 1975) the priority might be to present men as victims oppressed by their social roles. For others (Connell, 2000, Whitehead, 2002) the interest is put on commonly called 'traditional' masculinity that does not reflect true faces of men, but increases competitiveness and dilemmas as many men cannot be a match for 'mainstream' images. Nevertheless, the recent terms Women Studies and Masculine Studies, have been replaced by the umbrella expression Gender Studies, as being a woman also requires understanding and recognition of what men are and vice versa. Significant for the study is that this change in conceptual thinking and an acknowledgement of male problems in a society became the source of the sociology of gender. Gender, next to race, social class or sexual orientation became a foundation for understanding social life and individual identity.

2.3 Sex versus gender

Defining main concepts within the field of Gender Studies ought to begin with a distinction between sex and gender, first made by Robert Stoller in 1968. This American psychiatrist and psychoanalyst worked with individuals whose biological sex was in conflict with their inner sense of themselves. Thus, he found the distinction between sex and gender helpful in describing this situation. Sex referred to a biological category of male and female. The sex assignment was based on the identification of external genitalia. It was gender that

indicated social and cultural idea of being a woman or a man. Gender was also about an individual perception of own feelings, identity and personality traits that were associated either with men or women (Wharton, 2005). Following Stoller's classification, Oakley (1972) introduced biological maleness and femaleness and social masculinity and femininity into grounds of feminist theory to highlight that masculinity and femininity are historically and culturally dependent rather than fixed by nature. Currently, there is still no agreement among scholars of gender how to relate and use these two terms. As a result, some ignore the construction of sex and refer only to gender. Some follow the conceptual split between terms and treat them as separate entities, for others sex and gender are overlapping constructs (Wharton, 2005).

Post-modern feminist Judith Butler (1990) pointed out that sex-gender division is inadequate as there is no difference between these two categories. First, both are fluidly linked as behaviours and attitudes of women and men reflect female or male category. Secondly, biological sex is also socially constructed. In '*Gender Trouble*' (1990) she conceptualised gender not in the light of personal attributes or identities but as repeated performances, everyday life practices and social interactions. It is commonly assumed that a person acts in a particular way because that person is a man or a woman. Butler's understanding is the opposite; it is the performance that produces the notion of gender. Continuous process (not a single performance) of 'doing gender' gives the illusion of stability and categorises identity as fixed structure. However, Butler questioned the notion of gender identity as a 'natural' feeling, claiming instead that a person becomes gendered through performances that are regarded as feminine or masculine. Similarly, there is no 'real' sexuality, thus, the category of gender serves as a 'matrix' for compulsory heterosexuality. What for one might be a 'natural' heterosexuality, for Butler would be a process based on repeated performances and routines that sustain sexual attraction to people of the opposite sex. Similar arguments about 'doing gender' might be observed in the work of social psychologists, such as Kessler and McKenna (1978). They argued that first, there is an assimilation of social understanding of what it means to be a boy or a girl and then people refer it to sex. The markers such as body appearance, behaviours, manners or language are assessed in order to assign sex category. From birth, people categorise themselves as males or females, which produces and sustains gendered forms of behaviour. Then, gender markers also become the ground for sex identification.

Nevertheless, Butler (1990) used Derrida's post-structuralist assumptions to criticise the ideology of binary opposition between sex and gender. Jacques Derrida in '*Structure, Sign,*

and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences' (1966) argued that human thoughts and human acts operate within centring perspectives such as God, man, fact, truth, essence that promise to some degree the certainty of existence. Derrida did not attempt to replace these existing ideas with a new model. He pointed out that the process of focusing upon particular concept highlights the model, which is a binary opposition to the first concept. At the same time, the model, which is a binary opposition to the first concept, has no autonomy but exposes the meaning of the superior term. Derrida (1976) called this practice a 'violent hierarchy'. For example, in a binary opposition such as man/woman, 'man' is a term whose superiority is defined through the existence of a negative (opposite) term 'woman'. In other words, man is classified as the antithesis of woman, namely as logical, independent, objective, or unemotional. This system of polar categorisation is oppressive as it creates expected forms of human behaviour. Similarly, to name someone black or white is to make them perform in a particular way (Bradley, 2007). For Derrida (1976), people have to eliminate systems where certain concepts can become a privileged meaning. This perspective is a first step toward the Derridean philosophy of deconstruction. Dichotomies cannot be characterised without 'violence' as they push people into accepting mainstream, often unequal conditions. Binary thinking excludes experiences that are located in between the polar systems and does not take into consideration the possibility of behavioural change or existence of identity doubts (Bradley, 2007).

Nevertheless, Butler's (1990) viewpoint about the impracticality of a sex/gender distinction is problematic as it opens the possibility of explaining gender through an anti-feminist, biological perspective. Socio-biologists believe that human roles and relationships between sexes are shaped by biology and for that reason they are timeless and universal (Wharton, 2005). From this perspective, sex is prioritised over gender. This biosocial standpoint sharply highlights differences between the male and the female as conditioned by genetics and physiology. On these premises, it has been acknowledged that it is sex that limits the construction of gender. Male physique and hormones shape men's dominant roles in society as well as their aggressiveness or competitiveness. However, at the same time socio-biologists do not deny that sex categorisation is socially agreed or that gender becomes the marker of sex. Nevertheless, the sexual dimorphism, the belief in physical and genetic distinctiveness of males and females is questioned by the existence of the 'third sex' category (for example Thailand's *kathoeys* or the *fa'afafine* of Samoa Island) (Wharton (2005). Moreover, some people are born with genital, hormonal or chromosomal abnormalities that do not fit into male or female standards. For example, hermaphrodites are individuals born with ambiguous sex organs, inter-sexuals have

genitals that are different from their internal reproductive system. The notion of biological sex does not naturally determinate personality (gender) or sexuality. A sense of being female or male might be inadequate to one's external sex or sexual orientation (lesbians, gays, transvestites). Other people (eunuchs or transsexuals) change their genitals in order to confirm their sexual and gender identities. Bearing in mind less unique grounds, many women adopt behaviours that are socially described as masculine; likewise many men expose attitudes that are socially regarded as feminine (Bradley, 2007).

Kaufman (1994, p. 163) observed that feminists who accept the division between sex and gender sometimes confuse terminology writing about 'two genders' or 'the other gender' rather than 'two sexes' or 'the other sex'. Correspondingly, talking about 'male violence' instead of 'men's violence' indicates that aggression and brutality are genetic and have nothing to do with social environment, as the word 'male' belongs to a biological category while man' refers to a gender category. Beasley (2008) argued that academics working in the field of Masculinity Studies rarely refer to a category of 'males' to avoid connotations with biological sex. In order to highlight social and cultural construction of gender, terminology relates to either 'men' or 'masculinity'. For some (for example Connell, 2000) the latter expression that has been in use since the mid-1990s within theoretical writing, is more categorical than the former one in demonstrating distinctiveness from biological determinism. Moreover, 'masculinity' questions to some degree a term 'men' which is also gender related, but a homogeneous category. Before this approach, most scholars (Brod, 1987, Segal, 1990, Seidler, 1994) instead of Masculinity Studies employed a term Men's Studies in order to describe university programmes. Nevertheless, even nowadays for some 'masculinity' seems to be unclear and vague terminology. For that reason some advocate bringing back the name Men's Studies into use. As Beasley (2008) pointed out, the preference of language expressions reflects men's perception on politics of masculinity, which is, as discussed above, differently understood and explained by, for example anti-feminist right or pro-feminist left. In comparison, in the Polish language there is only one expression to cover sex and gender- *płeć*. The qualifying adjectives have been used to reflect the difference in meaning, namely, *płeć biologiczna* (biological sex) and *płeć społeczno-kulturowa* (social and cultural sex). It has to be pointed out that for the purposes of this study the terms 'men', 'male' and 'masculinity' are used synonymously. Similarly, the term 'manhood' is used interchangeably with 'masculinity'. Manhood is understood as a set of qualities, roles and behaviours that defines what it means to be a man. Men can negotiate these multiple dimensions and develop their own gender identities both according to and beyond traditional canons of 'appropriate' social norms. Consequently,

the conceptions of manhood might vary with age, nationality, sexual orientation or, for example, personal life experiences.

Nevertheless, for some researchers biological sex and socially created gender ought to be understood as separate and distinct concepts. It is difficult to account transsexuality for example, without separation between body and identity. The differentiation of concepts and terminology helps to explain gender relations, thereby, gender inequality. It is a crucial tool for understanding and explaining social differences both in European or American countries where the illusion of equality is spread, but factual power is held by hegemonic masculinity and for the Third World countries where gender awareness is very low.

2.4 Sexuality

Sex and gender discussions are closely linked with the issues of sexuality that are people's sexual choices, interests and desires (Cranny-Francis, et al., 2003). The biological standpoint presents sexual orientation as genetically and hormonally determined. Thus, individuals are able to hide real identity, but eventually this identity they are born with (gay, lesbian, transvestite, man or woman) will be revealed. On the other hand, the social constructivism theories highlight the role of environment and life events in formation of sexual identity. From this perspective, society and culture produce and set appropriate norms of sexual preferences. Drawing on these assumptions, the predominant number of heterosexual men and women could be tied up with social pressures and expectations of appropriate and inappropriate sexual identity. For example, in many societies male homosexuality is perceived in terms of the antithesis of men as it is perceived to undermine 'true' masculinity. Similarly, in the realm of social beliefs a 'real' man or a 'real' woman can be defined only within heterosexual structures. This is an assumption that places gender as a coherent part of sexuality (Richardson, 2008). Within feminists' understanding of sexuality one can distinguish two different approaches. The first one presents gender as more important than sexuality. Concepts of sexuality are grounded in notions of gender, more specifically, defining ones' sexual desires or classifying person as a gay or lesbian is not possible without knowing the gender. The second perspective relates to priority of sexuality over gender. Individuals learn about being for example a man or a woman through the experience of sexuality (Richardson, 2008).

Like Butler, Jacques Lacan (1977) rejected the 'biological' construction of femininity and masculinity and focused upon social production of sexual differences. His diagram

illustrates two images of doors (signified) that are named as 'ladies' and 'gentlemen' (signifiers).

Figure 2.4 Jacques Lacan's doors

LADIES   **GENTLEMEN**
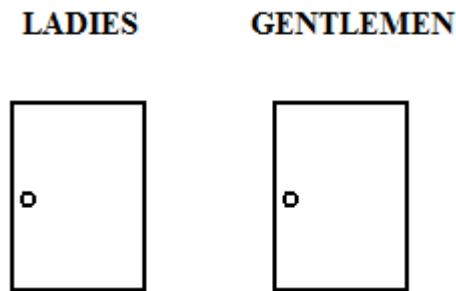
(Adapted from Jacques Lacan, 1977 p. 167)

The language description makes identical doors either a men's or women's rest-room. This is a signifier that represents and gives sense to the signified. However, by putting attention only to signifiers 'ladies' and 'gentlemen', without the images of the door, the meaning becomes more subjective and equivocal. For example, 'Ladies and Gentlemen' might relate to an audience or could be an introductory part of a speech, depending on the subject's interpretation. Thus, it is impossible to capture a perfect, neutral meaning.

Moreover, for Lacan (1977), human subjects enter the world of already existing signifiers. People's position within the social and personal relational system (male/female, husband/wife, brother/sister) becomes shaped by the signifiers not vice versa (Selden and Widdowson, 1993, p. 138). For Lacan, a language acquisition ascribes children into the dominant social order. Lacan (1977) characterised this 'Symbolic order' as phallocentric, based on binary oppositions. The signifier is more powerful than the human subject, and consequently becomes the phallus that places each individual in front of the either 'ladies' or 'gentlemen' door. Here the phallus links Freud's theory of the power of the penis with the social system. However, in Lacan's view both sexes experience the castration complex because phallus, a determinant of fullness and completeness is beyond reach. For women the sense of 'lack' might be supplanted by heterosexual relationships. Men's loss is seen through the lens of Oedipus complex. Consequently, men's total richness can be achieved by behaviours that reassure their masculinity, which are often violent or aggressive (Bradley, 2007). Lacan's theory of sexual distinctiveness indicates the subordination of female sexuality (Gallop, 1982). Nevertheless, at the same time Lacan questioned the anti-feminist biological determinism. It is a signifier, or in other words, phallus that contributes

to the formation of gendered people. Thus, rest-room doors become a symbol of the pre-existing phallocentric order of cultural values and gender stereotypes.

2.5 Stereotyping

Stereotypes simplify and reduce a particular class or group of people to general characteristics (Cranny-Francis et al., 2003). In other words, it is identifying the whole community on the basis of a few traits what has its political dimension. Assumptions about a particular group are made from the outside of the group, thus are often irrelevant to reality. However, this knowledge is presented as taken for granted fact, widely circulated and finally treated as some kind of cultural database. Then also stereotyped people start regarding themselves through this oversimplified perception (Perkins, 1979). The level and effectiveness of stereotyping depends upon cultural requirement and needs to spread short cut thinking.

Stereotyping is not only about differentiation and distinctiveness of cultural groups (Hall, 1997). It creates frontiers between normal and atypical, acceptable and unacceptable as well as produces a notion of appropriate and inappropriate social practice. This kind of cultural shorthand, as Lacan (1977) observed, often relates to gender. Women's image is usually associated with emotionality, sensitiveness, delicacy or protectiveness. The old Latin saying '*Tota mulier in utero*' (Woman is nothing but a womb) indicates that women are natural mothers, have predispositions to raise children and take care of the home environment (Selden and Widdowson, 1993). Sex-based division of labour and sex-based division of interests reinforce this biosocial point of view. Women's assignment to domestic sphere and to the role of a housewife is maintained by giving them low- paying and low-status jobs. Interestingly, women in Britain during First and Second World War were encouraged to work for example in ammunition factories, hospitals or offices (Mayer, 2002). The Government appealed to women to volunteer for war work through posters of 'Rosie the Riveter', an attractive, young girl with hair tied back, doing factory work. Women proved to be as capable as men in almost every field. Nevertheless, it counted for little as in 1942 the Government passed a Restoration of Pre-war Practices Act to ensure that after the war women doing men's job would leave. The propaganda was in place to persuade women that for them the greatest achievement is to be perfect wives and mothers (Mayer, 2002). This is an example of how a stereotype might be used to manipulate certain groups of people and become a political practice. However, stereotypes apply not only to subordinated groups which often receive negative labels. Powerful groups are also

described in the realm of positive stereotype that functions within the society as a norm (Cranny-Francis et al., 2003).

Robert Brannon in '*The Forty-nine Percent of Majority'* (1976, pp. 1-45) illustrated the stereotypical code of masculinity.

1. No sissy stuff: eliminate feminine behaviours.

2. Be a big wheel: success and wealth are indicators of masculinity.

3. Be a sturdy oak: keep emotional distance, masculinity cannot be affected or influenced by sentiments.

4. Give 'em hell: masculinity is about taking risks, dangerous performance and aggression.

These four rules were presented as a mainstream and traditional image of manhood. However, different groups of men based on age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or even men with similar backgrounds, white, heterosexual, middle-class might interpret the code in various ways. In fact, this mainstream masculinity might correspond to characters of a small number of men. It might be assumed that opinions on masculinity of a forty-year-old gay man in England would be different from the views of a Polish, heterosexual, eighteen-year-old boy. Thus, as Connell observed (1995) gender ought to be discussed in plural forms such as masculinities. The pluralising of expression highlights distinctive views on what it means to be a man among different groups of men. Currently the sociology of gender attempts to capture this diversity within male and within female groups (Wharton, 2005). As multiple masculinities and femininities have been recognised it became clear that some forms of male/ female behaviour are culturally more valued than others. Consequently, different kinds of masculinity are defined against each other, creating relations of domination and subordination between men.

Connell (1995) highlighted, that masculinities and femininities are shaped by specific time and articulated by local, regional or national arena. Thus, they become unstable and changeable. There are various facets of being men, however, hegemonic masculinity refers to that which is expected and praised in particular society. Connell (1993) argued that the notion of 'perfect' masculinity is dependent on the context. Euro/American expectations that are dominant in nowadays world do not fit into gender realms of all cultures. For instance, a contemporary example of contradiction between customs is drawn by Harriet Bradley (2007, p. 52). She recalled a story of Venezuelan explorer Charles Brewer-Carias who lived with the Acuana tribe in the Amazonian rainforest. He had no skills how to

survive in a jungle, how to build a shelter, hunt, recognise edible or medicinal plants. For the local people the ability to control the environment they lived in indicated a 'true' masculinity. A perception of ideal manhood might sharply differ among societies bearing relationship with time scale. The dominant image is usually shaped by the economic, social and simply speaking, real-life possibilities of men (Kaufman , 1994). The story of Brewer-Carias questions the category of hegemony and indicates that gender ought to be discussed in relation to variables such as race, age, social culture, class or sexual orientation.

The early works on sociology of men, were written from the perspective of white, middle-class, heterosexual masculinity and placed as standards (Kimmel, 1990). Consequently, masculinities of non-white, working-class or gay men were compared with normative construction and regarded in terms of the non-traditional that triggered the mechanism of subordination and marginalisation. Connell (1993) stated that the hegemonic approach to masculinity is an oversimplified perception as assumptions and statements that are based on only a few facts or one group of men should not be applied and set as a model to all men. Nevertheless, recently the growing awareness of variation among men and among women, recognition of power relations and social hierarchy enabled revelation of this inadequate framework for understanding gender. Hegemonic forms of masculinity encapsulate the system of patriarchy that refers not only to women's subordination but also to power and hierarchy relations aggregated among different groups of men (Kaufman, 1994).

2.6 Patriarchy

Traditionally patriarchy related to the primacy of the father in a family system, as well as to an authoritarian but at the same time paternalistic form of government that included the rule of the elders, power of the older men over younger men, fathers over daughters, husbands over wives (Remy, 1990). Since the Second Wave feminist criticism, the term 'patriarchy' was understood as men's power over women and replaced the previously used word 'sexism', which shifted the meaning from a personal prejudice to the role of institutions in creating and sustaining gender oppression (Cranny-Francis et al., 2003). Nevertheless, different feminist perspectives offered slightly different definitions of gender inequalities.

In the circles of radical feminists of 1970s and 1980s the word patriarchy has been used to describe the general subordination of women and systematic domination of men that might

take various forms across all countries and historical periods (Hines, 2008). Kate Millett's '*Sexual Politics*' (1970) became a powerful critique of patriarchal culture. Sexual politics is a practice that helps to establish men's dominance over women in a private domain such as family and public spheres such as work organisations, schools or churches. This hegemony in power relations is sustained by the fact that social, economic and political institutions are mainly governed by men. Millett (1970) emphasised that images of women implemented by fiction also support the belief in masculine power. Male authors are named the cultural agents of patriarchy who shape literary values and conventions of literature. For Millett (1970) patriarchal ideology creates false pictures of femininity and its inferior status through the usage of force. The force could be understood as a lack of political rights as well as it might be related to rape and pornography. Later feminists such as Dworkin (1981) or Griffin (1985) argued that, mass media became another product of culture, which insistently treats women as objects, exposing feminine sexuality and feminine pleasure. Public depiction of sexual images of women is created, controlled and consumed by men and is another form of women's oppression and subordination. For radical feminists, the system of patriarchy has to collapse in order to bring to an end this social victimisation of women. From a Marxist feminist point of view, capitalism is a source of social, political and economic inequality. Marxist feminism attempted to capture complex relations between gender and economy (Selden and Widdowson, 1993). However, men's power was still seen, like in a radical approach, hierarchically located and oppressive, but the gender inequality served to maintain the interests of the ruling class. For this reason, the subordination of women was sustained by their unpaid domestic labour and limited access to the public labour market. Finally, the ideologies of liberal feminism centred around male domination in relation to gender stereotyping and gender division of labour (Hines, 2008). Equality for women was seen as a gradual process that has to incorporate social and legal reforms grounded in democratic foundations. To sum up the concept of patriarchy might refer to social, cultural and economic dominance of men in relation to women. As one can observe, this term has been in continued use by feminists' scholars for nearly forty years, what indicates that 'female subordination is systematic' (Cockburn, 1991, p. 6). Nevertheless, recently the patriarchal framework has been discussed in the light of limitation and inadequacy.

Barbara Ehrenreich (1995) believed that patriarchy does not reflect the life situation and expectations of men in European or American culture. Decline of patriarchal attitudes is reflected by the fact that men are no longer interested in keeping women as full-time housewives. Moreover, the traditional role of a husband and a father has been postponed

by many by rising age of first marriages and by male support for abortion rights that is greater than that of women. Men's lower wages and women's wide access to the public labour market caused the patriarchal power based on the ideology of bread-winning to be an option for very wealthy men. Moreover, men no longer need women to confirm their social status as consumer culture, which is heavily targeted at men offering anything from cars, mobile phones to cosmetics, provides new materialistic forms of fulfilment. Consequently, economically dependent wives or girlfriends are not seen as an asset, but as an agent limiting the degrees of freedom. Also, the belief that women require protection has been questioned by many who strongly advocate recruiting women into the military. As Ehrenreich (1995) pointed out in 1993 sixty-four percent of Americans gave support for women in combat. However, is this decline of patriarchy, as Ehrenreich named it, a form of mature masculinity?

Remy (1990) pointed out that the current social order might be identified as androcracy, a system of men's domination that apart from patriarchy can take a form of fratriarchy. According to Oxford Dictionary (2000) a word 'fraternity' refers to a group of people that share the same profession, interest or beliefs as well as to feeling of friendship and support that exists between the members of the group. Remy (1990) highlighted that values and assumptions of fratriarchy do not share common grounds with patriarchy. The former one is not about being a head of the family, food provider or moral guardian. Instead of paternal wisdom and instincts, fratriarchists are self-centred and focused upon the reflecting needs of the group of men they belong to. They are mainly young men who are not married and have no family responsibilities or loyalties. Consequently, for them the indicator of having a good time is the freedom to do as they wish. Ethical postulates of family (patriarchy) and fraternity are in conflict. Nevertheless, men who also have duties towards family might feel obligations towards their fraternity 'fellows'. As Remy (1990) summed up, they are either psychologically trapped in the fratriarchal ideology or simply do not want to grow up. The term fratriarchy, is approximate to 'male bond' or 'rule of the brotherhood'. For men, being a member of a group (the more elite the better) gives them a sense of belonging (Whitehead, 2004). Masculine superiority can be sustained by identification with university, city's gentlemen club or local film club.

Remy (1990) believed that the main source of power in androcracy is the men's hut, also called the men's house. This is a place where men meet, talk or work. This expression might also refer to the association of men itself. The level of power they possess depends on the character of their organisational activity, but also on material status or ethnicity. The

group can be at the top of the social and political ladder, for example in the United Kingdom House of Lords, or in the United States Senate or the House of Representatives. The ideology of the men's hut is embraced by the Freemasons, male-dominated secret societies whose members support and help each other. Similarly, the development of a Masculine Studies department could be regarded in terms of creating a boys' own club within the academic field. On the other hand, the men's hut may well refer to men who obtain their male identity from being supporters of the football team or members of more dangerous groups such as youth or criminal gangs (Whitehead, 2004).

The principles of patriarchy have been criticised for a narrow perception on men (Anne Cranny-Francis et al., 2003). The patriarchal approach was useful to capture domination of men in social, cultural, political or economic structures. However, the twenty-first century Connell's (1995) term of 'hegemonic masculinity' functions better than a shorthand conception of patriarchy, as it indicates that patriarchal relations are not unfamiliar to men either. This is not to ignore the 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell, 2000, p. 46) the profit (for example higher wages, better labour opportunities or sexual and cultural privileges) that men are entitled to even without being directly involved in oppression of women. Nevertheless, scholars on masculinity, as discussed above, highlight the importance of variation within men's groups and women's groups, examining masculinities and femininities in plurals. Nowadays more complete understanding is required where gender relations are not perceived as unchangeable, stable in time or oppressive in equal measures. Moreover, apart from gender, the system of hierarchies ought to be applied to variables such as age, race, nationality, sexual orientation or social class. Nonetheless, the focus upon existence of mainstream masculinity enables men to characterise themselves in the light of oppression and enforces the image of men as victims of the social structures (Beasley, 2008). It is a reproduction of binary oppositions this time not between boys and girls or masculinity and femininity but between prevailing men and subordinated men where women are seen as a rather homogeneous group. For Seidler (2007), the idea of hegemonic masculinity makes it difficult to understand and theorise the relationship that might exist between subordinated masculinities within a particular culture. Moreover, the concept relates only to power relations, thus, is limited in its scope as does not include other important aspects such as emotional life or anxieties. He suggested that more complex and psychological understanding of masculinities is required. However, Whitehead (2002, p. 90) emphasised that the concept of hegemonic masculinity 'achieves what patriarchy fails to achieve: it offers a nuanced account of femininity-male power

while staying loyal to the notions of gender and sexual ideology, and male dominance' (Whitehead, 2002, p. 90).

However, power relations do not have to be seen in hierarchical or repressive terms like in the case of patriarchy, fratriarchy or hegemonic masculinity where privileged group of people dominates over subordinated one. For Foucault (1980) everyone is involved in the structures of power simultaneously being the subjects and the executors of this power. Ideological discourses construct human perceptions and knowledge in forms that are regarded as normal in a particular time. Disciplinary regimes such as politics, education, art or science produce controlling texts that prompt particular thinking and distribute knowledge through a 'net-like organisation' (Foucault, 1980, p. 89). Foucault dismissed the notion of absolute truth, objectivity, autonomy or completely free society (Selden and Widdowson, 1993). For Foucault, people are caught in the regimes of truth (Faith, 1994). They are unconscious about the power relations that govern the system of knowledge of their own era. By acquiring 'truth' they become the subjects of power whose behaviour or life- style choices are framed by discourse, social codes and institutions. Thus, power is not located or attributed to certain individuals or certain groups. Nevertheless, the ideas and 'fabricated' truth that are followed by people in one era are changed or replaced with the passage of time. Thus, power like truth is not motionless or static.

For Foucault, the crucial element that allows power to operate in society is resistance (Faith, 1994). Through creating the points of resistance, power is not only disrupted but also becomes popularised and spread in the culture. Surprisingly, Foucault did not perceive power as a negative but as a productive force, that makes things possible. For Foucault in order to find a new understanding of the world people ought to resist the ways in which they have been categorized by discourses (Sawicki, 1991). Then the power of discourse enables things to happen, prompts redefining and rejecting regimes and governing rules. Foucault (1980) presented power as relational and managed to explain how people are trapped in networks of power, avoiding umbrella explanations of power and patriarchy. Nevertheless, he fails to answer the question of whose interests are sustained by the production of dominant discourses.

2.7 Crisis of masculinity

Next to power relations, another important theme within the sociology of gender, recognised not only by theorists, but also by media and popular culture, is gender oppression where for a change masculinity is seen as being in crisis. Within the last twenty years the subject of 'man' and 'maleness' became an explicit topic of political, educational, academic and media debates (Hearn and Pringle, 2006). Men were often positioned in the centre of public as well as private agendas. Power and authority appeared to be taken-for-granted, unquestionable and natural elements of male identity. Nevertheless, this line of reasoning is now changing as the context of public discussion on masculinity has a new dimension. Particularly, there is a growing awareness that masculinity can be as gendered as femininity. Recent press coverage explores and conveys the moral panic about boys. Examples of newspaper headlines from the last four years include: *'Why boys have trouble being boys'* (The Sunday Time, 2006, June 4), *'A sad tale of little boys lost'* (The Times, 2006, November 15), *'Don't cry, guys'* (The Sunday Times, 2007, June 17), *'Half of men spend three hours a day gaming'* (The Times, 2008, February 9), *'Men are redundant, but let's keep them anyway'* (Daily Telegraph, 2009, July 8). There is a widespread agreement that boys have a problem to adapt to pressures and the complexities of modern life (Singleton, 2007). If newspaper' headlines are to be believed, boys are facing difficulties within socio-economic and socio-psychological areas such as education, health, personal relations, employment or criminality. Nevertheless, this publicly expressed concern about male disadvantages is also grounded in academic research.

The language of crisis is mostly linked and applied to boys and their underachievement at school. Throughout the twentieth century, there were patterns of gender differences in achievement where girls were often regarded as academically less able than boys (Francis, 2000). This belief was commonly held in the 1970s and 1980s. Studies by Spender (1982) or Fennema and Sherman (1977) illustrated mathematics and sciences as masculine subjects as boys' mastery of it was superior to girls. However, Madden (2000) pointed out that the Education Reform Act 1988 in England and Wales introduced crucial changes such as compulsory curriculum and standardized testing in order to equalize the gender opportunities, to improve girls' abilities in the field of technology or science. Since then every year, one can observe girls' improvement in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) results. Moreover, girls began started to surpass boys in terms of educational achievements both in 'masculine' and 'feminine' academic subjects (Madden,

2000, p.45). The latest figures for England (http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000880/SFR272009_v2.pdf) show that for the last five years girls continue to outperform boys at GCSE examination, particularly at the higher grades A- C. In 2008/09 74.2% of girls achieved five or more grades A- C (including English and Mathematics) in comparison with 65.5% of boys. Situation is similar in Scotland where in 2009 the Higher examination figures showed that '26% of girls passed three or more Highers, compared to 20% of boys' (The Herald, 2009, 23 September). Ironically, as Eleanor Mills (The Sunday Times, 2009, 15 November) reported, boys are at the top of statistics on exclusion from schools. For example, in England in 2008, 4,720 white and 250 Afro-Caribbean boys were permanently expelled from schools. In Scotland in 2007/2008, the overall of 39,717 pupils were excluded from local authority schools (99% of them temporary). Nevertheless, 79% of all exclusions were male pupils. This situation appears to be stable since 2002/2003 (http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/01/23135939/1).

The male crisis is also attributed to issues of men's health such as heart diseases, cancer, excessive smoking or drinking (Whitehead, 2002). Moreover, mortality rates indicate that men's life expectancy is about seven years shorter than women's. Messner (1997) among other costs of masculinity pointed out men's shallow relationships, poor mental well-being and lack of life balance. Many research studies (Mansfield and Collard, 1988; Duncombe and Marsden, 1993) specify that men avoid emotional commitment, are unresponsive to emotional intimacy and do not discuss own feelings or needs. According to Scottish Public Health Observatory (http://www.scotpho.org.uk/home/Healthwell-beinganddisease/suicide/suicide_data/suicide_national.asp) in Scotland in 2008, 630 men and 213 women killed themselves. It seems that three out of four suicides in Scotland are male. Stephen Platt (Scotsmen, 2009, August 7), the director of the Research Unit in Health, Behaviour and Change at the University of Edinburgh argued that the highest suicide rates are among working-class men from deprived areas of Scotland who have no educational qualifications and live in poverty. Moreover, terminology of crisis is applied to teen violence as the levels of crime and criminality are very high especially among working-class young male (Whitehead, 2002, p. 53). They are often defined and regarded by society as 'dangerous others'. This idea of 'otherness' is mostly linked with black males and their 'natural' tendency to commit crime. However, it is worth pointing out that for example all killers in high schools' massacres in the United States (Littleton, Pearl, Paducah, Springfield or Jonesboro) were middle-class white boys (Martino and Meyenn, 2001).

If masculinity is in crisis, who or what is responsible for this existing status quo? Connell (1993) pointed out that confusion and uncertainty about what it means 'to be a man' has been attributed to the impact of feminism. Women's radical quest for justice and equality of gender undermined the traditional form of male power and superiority. More specifically, this cultural dislocation is due to the growth of feminist research on gender and 'sex roles'. The sex role theory, recognises models of social behaviour and places: masculine *versus* feminine, objective *versus* subjective approach, public *versus* private, realistic *versus* imaginative, impersonal *versus* personal, independent *versus* dependent, theory *versus* personal experience. Beliefs that 'healthy' society is based on dichotomous features and myths about gender predestination are present in almost every culture (Ortner and Whitehead, 1981). Parsons (1964) believed that biological differences between man and women have to be associated with family, occupational and social performance. According to Parsons, the male sex role is orientated toward instrumental action that involves engagement with external environment, while female expressive action is linked with internal integration. Thus, men are expected to be the family breadwinners while women ought to maintain the home and take care of children. In the realm of the role theory, to achieve the sense of belonging individuals have to assimilate their behaviour with 'appropriate' and 'desired' social role. Conversely, those who undermine a traditional and natural state are regarded as outsiders. Eagly (1987) developed Parson's ideas by claiming that men's occupational roles require 'agentic' behaviours such as competence and independence. On the other hand, women's communal ways of behaviour should be depicted by emotional expressiveness and concerns about others. However, Eagly, unlike Parsons, does not recognise the gender theory as essential to the functioning of the society. Sex role theory indicated that through learning processes such as observation or imitation as well as agents of socialization (for example parents, teachers or mass media) children learn social meanings of being a boy and being a girl and develop socially desired behaviours that are 'appropriate' for either men or women. It is a process of becoming gendered (Richardson, 2008). For Connell (1993) the asymmetry between sexes is inadequate and superficial perspective for understanding gender issues. It does not include dimensions of emotional complexities or emotional contradictions, however, above all ignores the possibility of differentiation (class, ethnic, sexual or racial) within the masculine or feminine group.

Pro-feminist men, for example Connell (2000) or Whitehead (2002), attempt to look at the nature of masculinity through the lens of feminism without denying that their position as

men has been constructed on gender inequalities. They are sensitive to both historical and present accounts that define women as a subordinated group. For them, theories of feminism called for revision of manhood. This testing of masculinity is seen by pro-feminist men as a contribution to their own growth and development. Men themselves, in order to recognise their own emotional needs as well as establish more equal gender relations, have to redefine and revise the traditional notion of masculinity. Nevertheless, more frequently within the research on masculine crisis, men's political and private position toward feminism is antipathic. Glider's (1973) conservative perspective reproduces biological and moral frameworks claiming that traditional gender roles should not be shifted. Disruption of evolutionary rules and society's order imply deconstruction and confusion of biological patterns. This anti-feminist opinion and its erratic nature seems to be adopted also by Robert Bly a member of the mythopoetic movement. Spiritual perspectives of mythopoets are rooted in Freudian and Jungian theories where masculinity is presented as an inseparable part of men's psyche (Whitehead, 2002). In *Iron John* (1990) Bly argues that feminism has a negative influence on men by 'feminising' them. Men lost their own direction and individuality as their fathers preoccupied with work fail to initiate young boys into manhood. Thus, boys grow up at the mercy of their mothers, female teachers and TV, disconnected from deep masculinity.

To sum up, there are distinctive ways in which men respond to feminism. Many white, heterosexual men from lower socio-economic backgrounds do not engage in critical gender discussions. For them gender is often unseen and incomprehensible factor. Men with cultural capital such as academics hold either a positive attitude toward feminism as they are not ontologically or materially threatened by feminism (Whitehead, 2002, p.81) or simply ignore the challenges set by Women's Liberation or Gay Liberation movements.

Apart from feminism, the development of democratic capitalist societies and the scientific-technological revolution in the West in the 1980s and 1990s challenged traditional notions of masculinity (Seidler, 1997). Knowledge rather than traditional skills became the main productive force and redefined the nature of jobs. There were fewer traditional jobs such as shipbuilding or mining that could sustain working class man in a position of family's breadwinner. Moreover, routine production jobs in autos, steel or rubber industries were significantly reduced. General economic decline, which started in the late 1980s contributed to substantial cuts of both blue as well as white-collar employees (Arnowitz and Fazio, 1994). Nowadays, as the *Sunday Times* (2009, November, 8) reported, prospects for getting good jobs are turning down as the number of out-of work graduates has increased from 70 000 in 2008 to 100 000 in 2009. Layers of qualified labours are made

redundant, moreover, educational qualifications cannot promise future employment. "The competition for jobs is illustrated by companies such as the budget retailer Aldi, which received 22,000 CVs for 130 graduate places this year. PriceWaterhouseCoopers, the accountants, saw a 35% jump in graduate applications with 12,000 vying for 1,000 jobs." (Sunday Times, 2009, November, 8). According to the Office for National Statistics (http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/labour-market/people-not-in-work/unemployment/index.html), in September 2009 unemployment for 18-24 years-olds reached 746,000. Nearly 500,000 were men. The current economic situation might undermine one's self-perception and destabilise a sense of ambition. Connell (2000) argued that masculinity is shaped by historical, economic and social circumstances that do change. Consequently, gender relations are dynamic and have to be constantly redefined and reconstructed.

Some academics (e.g. Bradley, 2007 or Segal, 1990) questioned the moral panic about the crisis of masculinity. Nowadays, men (particularly white and heterosexual) still control most of the world's political parties, media, companies and corporations. Therefore, their image is strongly associated with cultural prestige, authority and power. The *Human Development Report* (2004, p. 221) calls attention to the labour market in 177 countries and presents a percentage of seats in parliament held by women as well as a percentage of women working as legislators, senior officials and managers. For example, in 2002 in the UK 82.7%, the USA 86%, in the Russian Federation 92.0%, the Czech Republic 84.3% and in Poland 79.3 % of parliament members were men. Meanwhile, at the same time only 31% of women in the UK and 34% of women in Poland worked at the management level. Other studies such as *Equal Opportunities Commission Survey* (EOC 2004) or *Labour Force Survey* (ONS 2004) secure rather than undermine male dominance. Women are involved in jobs that are regarded by society as inferior and less rewarding. This 'gendering' of work maintains the pay gap between men and women. Earnings of full-time female workers are 18% lower than those of full-time male workers (EOC 2004). As, observed it is also common, that women, who work in the same occupations as men, earn substantially less than their male co-workers (Bradley, 2007). Another aspect that sustains material and economic inequality is the fact that nearly 44% of women and only 10% of men work on a part-time basis. Thus, within the family when one person has to stop working in order to raise children it is usually a lower-paid partner (Bradley, 2007).

Moreover, the 'male gaze' is still strong (MacIness, 2001). The term 'male gaze' was first used by Laura Mulvey in her article *Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema* (1975) and

referred to the satisfaction that male viewers take from watching movies. According to Mulvey's argument, the plot of movies is centred around men and their extraordinary tasks such as solving mysteries, fighting with enemies, exposing villains or rescuing women. Women's role, on the other hand is to add beauty and glamour. Nevertheless, the process of watching films involves also the look of the camera and the perception of the viewer. Camera techniques that engage realistic narration create the illusion so that audience feels as watching the film through their own eyes. The existence and the work of the camera are invisible for the spectator. Similarly, there are no explicit references to the presence of audience (Cranny-Francis et al., 2003). The film industry is distinctly male, directors, producers, editors are mostly men. Consequently, women are constructed as objects of male desire. In movies, woman's posture is presented in sections where camera zooms in on parts of her body (Holliday, 2008). Also women's sexual point of view is ignored as many sex scenes are captured looking down or up on the women but usually from men's perspective. Mulvey (1975) called it 'male gaze' and relating to Freud she argued that men acquire 'scopophilic' pleasures from looking. For Freud, scopophilia was a pleasure that male infants derive from looking at their mother's bodies (Holliday, 2008). Nevertheless, one might ask questions about how female audience perceive a movie. Mulvey (1975) stated that women cannot watch films as women since the act of looking is through lenses of male camera. Moreover, gazing is purely masculine attribute, she said, thus, women watch movies in a transsexual way.

Ussher (1997) in '*Fantasies of Femininity*' argued that media promote men's position of authority and sexualised control over women. Its powerful techniques influence the way in which women understand themselves and their femininity, as well as relations under which they live. The concept of the attractive appearance is promoted and widespread among women as a fundamental determinant of success. Through such ideologies, women are brainwashed into thinking that to be beautiful is more advantageous than to be clever and certainly more desirable by men. The beauty industry could be regarded as a new form of patriarchal control where girls should be nothing more but sexually interesting objects for men. Similarly, pornographic imaginary is accepted by the mass media and popularised among traditional audiences (MacIness, 2001). Those are magazines with pornographic stories (*Vogue, Cosmopolitan, Seventeen*, etc.), advertisements, audience-discussion programmes often about sexuality, as well as 'page 3' pictures of nude women, which are used to increase the sale of newspapers. Snitow (1983) argued that, the majority of pornography is about the public depiction of sexual imagery of woman that is created, controlled and consumed by men. Pornographic imaginary appears to be escalating in the

degree of violence where female body is exposed and denigrated and images of women are connected with pain and injury. In Andrea Dworkin's *Pornography - Men Possessing Women* (1981), pornography is discussed as a genre that celebrates and justifies male power. In this theoretical framework, the major component of male identity is sexual violence, and the purpose of pornography is to direct all of this violence against women. Male sexual obsession is blamed for all the brutality recorded in recent history. Nevertheless, it has to be pointed out that feminist's critique has never been limited to violent pornography. Feminists have always asserted that all pornography teaches the inferiority of women as a class. The major social problem of our time is legitimisation and cultural agreement to sexual and physical violence (Whitehead, 2002). More specifically, media, social and state organisations sustain the concept of male brutality and the belief that the use of the female body for sexual or reproductive purposes is a natural right of men. Thus, girls are more likely to be abused than boys. In America a woman is raped every two minutes. In comparison about 110 000 men are raped every year (Wakelin and Long, 2003). 45% of women and 26% of men experienced at least one incident of violence during the lifetime. However, in the realm of ongoing domestic or sexual abuse 89% of victims are women (Wakelin and Long, 2003). The existing status quo sustains hierarchical construction of gender where power and authority are seen as attributes of manhood. This is not to say that masculinity or femininity remains predictable or conventional.

Connell (1995) remained sceptical whether it is accurate to describe men as being in crisis. Apart from the fact that on a large number of socio-economic measures, males still do better than females, Connell argued that:

> 'a theoretical term 'crisis' presupposes a coherent system of some kind, which is destroyed or restored by the outcome of the crisis. Masculinity (…) is not a system in that sense. It is, rather, a configuration of practice within a system of gender relations. We cannot logically speak of the crisis of configuration.'

(Connell, 1995, p.84)

If there is a crisis, it is a crisis of gender order. That is why, Connell's line of reasoning focuses upon a 'problematic' nature of being a man. Nowadays, there are strong ideological pressures that seem to work against masculinity. Codes of gender performance carry costs not only for women, but also for men. Men are also limited by their social roles. The image of power that patriarchal society had provided them, sustains the belief that men should not have emotions and feelings (Seidler, 1997). 'Feminine' attributes are seen as the threat for male identities. Aspiring to socially appropriate roles, men might be confused and torn by an inner conflict. The fear of rejection pushes them to live up to the homogenized vision of masculinity. Thus, the contradiction in men's life is caused by an

attempt to maintain forms of 'natural' masculine behaviour. Girls who adopt the masculine persona of a 'tomboy' are not socially stigmatised. They may be admired in the school setting or within the street environment. However, a boy who is 'soft' brings general social disapprobation. Being a man is about being 'taught' and there is no room for sentiments (Bradley, 2007). Nevertheless, it is crucial to avoid binary thinking, where for a change girls' success is juxtaposed with boys' failure and where boys' interests are defined in the light of a victim syndrome (Cox, 2007). In order to better understand and interpret shift in gender patterns one has to recognise power relations between different men, rather than just between men and women.

As Whitehead (2002) believed, the idea of a 'crisis of masculinity' put attention into masculinity in the singular, particularly, white, middle/upper-class, heterosexual man. This statement is in line with Connell's (1995) theory of hegemonic masculinity. The concept of 'hegemony' relates to circumstances where power and leading position in social life is won and held by a particular group. Correspondingly, hegemonic masculinity defines a group of men who accept, legitimate and reproduce patriarchal aspects within the society. This dominant position of particular males and subordination of females is sustained, as discussed above, through mass media, advertising, commercial television or pornography as well as division of labour into men's and women's work. Nevertheless, 'hegemonic masculinity' actually corresponds to natures of a small number of men (Carrigan, et al., 1985). There is a conflict between collective expectations and men's real lives. Consequently, hegemonic masculinity (femininity) is constructed in relation to marginalised and subordinated masculinities (femininities). It is a narrow perspective to discuss and distinguish only one, 'right' pattern of what it means to be a man, without looking at variables such as race, ethnicity or social class. The experiences and privileges of for example women and men of colour, gay or lesbians will be remarkably different from white, heterosexual, middle-class people (Messner, 1997). Nevertheless, multiple masculinities, as Connell (2000) argued, cannot be limited to diversity within multicultural societies. It is also a differentiation within a given setting, school or workplace where construction of masculinity is not universal.

2.8 Conclusions

The traditional notion of masculinity, roles, practices and models have been undermined by social, economic and political changes. Nowadays, it is not easy to be a boy/man, however, striving for social justice and equality cannot be discussed and regarded in terms of crisis.

Despite women's increased presence in employment, education or politics, men continue to dominate the world's political parties, media, companies and corporations. For that reason, Connell (1995) rejected the idea of male crisis and stressed that concepts of man and masculinity are problematic. It is a personal problem, for a large number of men, to define and characterise themselves in a contemporary world, where men lost some of their power, authority and advantage over women. Thus, there is a need to create new models of masculinity, but models that will not identify boys/men as the other sex or victims of feminism. It is also a social dilemma to recognise not only problems that men create, for example criminal behaviours such as violence towards women and children, drug-taking or fighting, but problems that men can experience, for example social exclusion of particular group of men. Such recognition could help people to understand and negotiate heterogeneous facets of masculinity.

Men themselves have to agree to a more androgynous world where 'being a male' cannot exist in the opposition to 'being a female' (Bradley, 2007). Men, while identifying their own experiences and perceptions, attempt to distinguish themselves from women and at the same time, they try to compare with and dominate over other men (Segal, 1990). Instead, they ought to detach their perspectives from traditional manhood. Men's beliefs and outlooks are important factors in moving towards equality between men and women as well as equality within the masculine group, because as Connell (1995) argued, marginalised, subordinated and socially excluded groups of men do exist. In order to transform gender relations and structures of power aggregated within the society men should challenge and question what they do and who they are. It is important for both men and women to understand the problematic nature of masculinity. The paradox is that despite the large number of publications and research agenda on masculinities it is unclear, more than ever before, what the contemporary faces of men are (Hearn and Pringle, 2006).

Chapter 3
Theorising the Concept of Consumption

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is an attempt to illustrate the notion of self-identity in relation to patterns of consumption in order to understand the ideological framework within which people construct their everyday life experiences. It relates to theories of Marx, Bourdieu and Baudrillard to understand how the notion of commodities and consumption appear within different theoretical traditions. In this sense, the chapter raises accounts of symbolic consumption and argues that through purchasing goods individuals create the sense of self as well as attempt to locate themselves within society. As Miles (1998) argues, in capitalist societies the self is no longer allocated within traditional arrangements of social class, family or community. Social life functions in the area of purchasing goods and economic markets. The irony of consumption is that by structuring people's everyday lives, it provides (to some degree) the illusion of autonomy. At the same time, this autonomy is subject to the structures of a particular social context. Finally, it is argued that people identify and locate themselves within a particular society through the consumption of cultural meanings, social expectations and codes of behaviour.

3.2 Theoretical approaches to consumption

The common approaches towards consumption refer to acts of purchasing and using goods. While this perspective might suit (to some degree) the discipline of economics that tends to stress factors such as price or income, the complex analysis of consumption has to involve sociological, cultural and psychological variables (Corrigan, 1997). In western capitalism, consumption patterns navigate everyday-life experiences and carry symbolic meanings that have a fundamental impact upon individual identity and self-conception. In explaining consumption, there is a need to move beyond economic terms of reference, because through purchasing goods people locate themselves within particular social groups (Miles, 1998). This standpoint is further elaborated in the discussion below. Nevertheless, Karl Marx ([1867] 1976) and his economic understanding of commodities will be the point of departure for theoretical analysis of consumption. His perspectives are necessary to provide a foundation for exploring earlier forms of consumption that remain intellectual grounds for understanding modern capitalism.

For Marx, commodities have a *use-value* dimension, which refers to their actual ability to satisfy specific needs. The other element, more significant for capitalist modes of production, relates to *exchange-value* (money-price) that makes commodities exchangeable on the market. Marx understood use-value as a relatively straightforward concept because for him, all objects are destined for a particular use. On the other hand, he regarded an exchange-value as more significant phenomenon, because it explains relations between individual commodities. The exchange value of a commodity represents what quantity of other commodities it could be exchanged for. For example, one laptop is equivalent to 300 pencils or 3 pairs of Tommy Hilfiger jeans. Consequently, for Marx commodities are not analysed according to their use but according to their exchange. When commodity X is exchanged for *n* number of commodity Y, corresponding amounts of labour are being traded. In other words, the labour power influences the ratio at which objects exchange against each other. For Marx, exchange-value is not related to use-value, because the former is not the measure of qualitative attributes, but relates to the amount of human labour in production. Under capitalism, the idea behind producing goods is to make a profit and for Marx, human labour is another commodity that one can buy and sell on the market at a particular value. Marx extended these views by the concept of surplus labour. He pointed out that workers earn just enough to maintain their basic needs and to bring up the next generation of labourers to sustain production and reproduction. Employees in a day's work produce far more than this, than the value of their own wages. The further amount of money is a surplus value (Worsley, 2002). Thus, in capitalism, the exploitation of workers brings profits because surplus labour creates surplus value that is the source of extra income for the employer. Workers have no alternative but to agree to the existing *status quo*; they simply have no capital or other resources to work for themselves. These conditions of production Marx identified as 'alienation'. Marx's concept of alienation helps in theorising the notion of identity in consumption-orientated capitalism. For Marx, a person is able to fully understand his or her inner self through the satisfaction of individual needs. However, in capitalism workers become alienated from their potentials, being driven by the need to survive. Alienation describes the lack of creativity that underpins many aspects of contemporary life.

The concept of alienation has distinctive meaning that relates to the role that labour played in the process of creating individual self-identity. First, the alien character occurs when people lose control over the manufactured goods that become a part of the marketing system. Similarly, the labour itself is external to the worker who sells his 'productive activity' in exchange for a wage. In other words, workers rather than being active and

creative, become an object, another commodity controlled by someone else. Paradoxically, claimed Marx, employees being at the bottom of pyramidal authority-structure, are most human outside their work environment, in behaviours that they share with other animals such as consuming, sleeping or procreating. Labour did not provide conditions for self-realisation or personal satisfaction. For Marx, in capitalism the social nature of work brought the sense of estrangement among people, competition with one another for fulfilling private gain and for paid employment. For that reason, the labour of the industrial working class was not a cooperative but isolating experience (Morrison, 2006). However, human beings are not destined to live and work in such conditions because alienation is nothing more than a consequence of historical circumstances and social relations. In Marx's view, workers had intellectual capacity to reflect on the unequal nature of capitalism. In order to emancipate themselves they should socially cooperate and take further action to transform types of alienation. Marx recognised the importance of autonomous reasoning that helps individuals in considering personal as well as social circumstances. Marx did not aim to overcome the distinctive individuality of every person, but attempted to reject the individualistic nature of modes of production. For dialectical Marx each human being is unique, but each individual shares social attributes with other people from the same social background (Worsley, 2006). Throughout the twentieth century, alienation of human labour might have changed to some degree. However, one can argue that the notion of objectification and estrangement spread into patterns of consumption (this theme will be addressed in the next sections of this chapter).

In Marx's terms, the understanding of commodity is related to the process of production rather than consumption. Thus, commodities are produced with the aim of selling on the market and use-value is not significant to the actual value of an object. It appears to be a limited perception on the commodity, which ignores the impact of people's everyday needs and desires, reducing services and human relationships to an exchange (monetary) value (Miles, 1998). Marx (1961) believed that history, society and social relations derive from economic acts that people undertake in order to fulfil basic material needs such as food or clothing. His perspective revised the formulations of idealist philosophy, by stating that not human logic, but material conditions, acts of production and interests of the dominant social class determine individual and collective reasoning. Marx described this idea using metaphorical expressions of 'superstructure' (ideology, politics) that has its roots in the 'base', socio-economic system found in a particular society. In other words, in Marx's view, as the superstructure is placed on top of the economic base, legal and political institutions protect and consolidate the economic power of the ruling class that acts only in

its own interest. By this, he implied that ordinary people see reality and define themselves through the lens of the dominant political standpoint. Similarly, mass media and popular culture help legitimate capitalist ideology in the daily lives of millions of people (Bocock, 1993).

Marx's moral and philosophical views remain intellectual grounds for exploring modern capitalism (Bocock, 1993). Despite interpretations that reduce his theories to utopian doctrines, pointing at political errors of communism, despite gaps and crimes that were part of the communist reality, 'Marxism is a humanity-centred ideology' (Worsley, 2002, p.8) that recognises social inequality and relations of exploitation. For Marx, perceptions, actions and cultural lives are not a result of direct encounters with reality because viewpoints of dominant social class filter consciousness and set appropriate attitudes towards 'reality'. When economy becomes the main category of experience, people start characterising and locating themselves within a society through the material relations. Those who have no income and stay outside of work are perceived through the lens of 'being less valued'. Marx in *German Ideology* ([1845] 1947) claimed that distorted and filtered categories of labour, turning reality 'upside down', cannot define human worth because in fact everyone has equal value (Morrison, 2006). Marxism undertakes a critique of all forms of bourgeois ideology that helps to maintain the *status quo* where the privileged class determines the particular order and conditions of life. The humanist character of Marx's theory relates to the struggle of a class where the rise of consciousness, the ability to reflect on one's own situation, is a necessary element to transform the relations of exploitation and domination. Although, people, living in a society, see the world through the lenses of a particular superstructure, there is also a possibility for an individual to develop an autonomous understanding of the world. Marx argued that social and economic arrangements are historical constructions, creations of human beings rather than facts of nature and for that reason people by themselves can change reality.

Nevertheless, in considering the notion of consumption in relation to social structures and personal identity, it is necessary to move beyond Marx's socio-economic theories and examine other perspectives that involve cultural dimensions. Bourdieu (1979) analyses the relationships between social class and the consumption by drawing a distinction between economic and cultural capital. He argues that understanding of cultural practices cannot be perceived only through the lenses of economic conditions. It is necessary to take into account variation in cultural capital, or in other words, differentiation in levels of learned abilities, skills and knowledge. At one level, the meanings of cultural capital relate to

educational qualifications and intellectual practices that often involve ability to create or evaluate new cultural products such as academic texts, music, paintings and films. However, some preferences and tastes appear to be more prestigious and sophisticated than others and become legitimate for the 'right' kind of social class. For Bourdieu (1979) possession of cultural capital gives symbolic power to those with the greatest and longest access to education. It also enables establishing and monopolising particular symbolic activities, practices or patterns of consumption as signs of status and superiority (Lee, 1993).

Consequently, what is the more appropriate ground for distinction: intellectual capital or economic means? There are four possibilities of locating and classifying social groups, that can be a. high in economic and high in cultural capital, b. high in economic, but low in cultural capital, c. low in economic, but high in cultural capital or d. low in economic and low in cultural capital (Corrigan, 1997). Bourdieu's approach highlights that stratified access to economic and cultural forms of capital, establishes patterns of class demarcation where each social group generate distinctive lifestyles and preferences of consumption. For example, working class modes of consuming food, drinks, and clothing, reading or music choices are different from those of the middle-upper class. The earnings of some working-class families might be higher than that of middle-class households, but according to Bourdieu each social group appears to use the consistent set of cultural practices to mark off its own distinctiveness from another group. In other words, the consumption involves symbols, ideas and values that express and reproduce social differences. Bourdieu (1979) argues that the higher levels of cultural capital construct Kantian aesthetic approaches to life that are introspective, reflective and contemplative in their nature. On the other hand, anti-Kantian aesthetics, lower in cultural capital prefer immediate pleasures and body-centred rather than mind-centred sensuality. For the former the value of art is assessed through the deeper, esoteric information it articulates. For the latter the beauty relates to representation *sensu stricto,* for example, to the image of beautiful scenery or a beautiful woman, because they are incapable of understanding hidden meanings of the subject matter. Moreover, anti-Kantian aesthetics have a tendency to explicitly demonstrate wealth and consumption where this kind of exhibitionist behaviour is questioned by subtle manners of display of those with higher cultural capital (Miller, 1987). This is not to say, that diverse cultural practices exist only between different social groups.

Bourdieu (1979) did not regard consumption patterns as a simple product of social structures, but as an interaction between society and individual. Within this theoretical

framework, he developed the concept of 'habitus', personal schemas of thoughts, tastes and behaviours that are shaped to some degree by routines and expectations of particular cultures. Individual actions, beliefs and values are not detached from one's position in the social structure, but still contain high levels of autonomy (Bocock, 1993). Bourdieu attempts to transfer the binary understanding of social action where the actor is either an independent producer of social meanings or a product of the process of socialisation. Consequently, the 'habitus' aims to blur the line between subjectivism (an individual perception) and determinism (the influence of external rules and conditions on one's behaviour). It constructs a group-distinctive matrix of social cognition and interpretation that provides logic for everyday actions and behaviours. However, more than that, the habitus allows analysing and classifying social actions, where future or unexpected experiences can be incorporated into the existing schemata. Thus, social codes of performance are stable (never static), but at the same time, the cognitive matrix of understanding social actions is flexible enough to accommodate new cultural perceptions (Lee, 1993). Bourdieu (1979) identifies habitus, educational competence and social class as crucial determinants of consumers' choices. In this respect, taste is not the product of biological and innate traits but learned and culturally acquired attitude. It is important to point out that for Bourdieu the individual economic situation has an impact upon habitus and perception of the world. For example, those who are closest to the borders of 'economic necessity' (Lee, 1993, p.34) and have no money for obtaining higher educational qualifications are deprived of cultural capital. They are not able to move beyond the narrow realm of popular taste because, according to Bourdieu, educational settings transmit specific intellectual preferences. Similarly, differentiation within the middle-class consumption models seems to be linked with the number of years one spends in academic institutions and with the access to cultural commodities such as art, films, music or books. Those who are educationally privileged maintain more sophisticated, Kantian manners of consumption. For that reason, in Bourdieu's sense, taste is a part of cultural capital that sustains discrimination and distinction between social groups and between individuals. Bourdieu's approaches heavily relate to sociological traditions in which class remains a basic structure of consumer lifestyles and ignore the power of advertising or marketing. He neglects wider influences of commercial organisations and their politics of attaching meanings and cultural values to particular commodities (Lee, 1993). Similarly, defining 'cultural capital' in the realm of intellectual or elite customs seems to be a narrow perception that is not practical in addressing issues of educational inequalities. Also for some critics (Robbins, 1991 or Kingston 2001), Bourdieu reduces the concept of a working class culture by presenting distinctions in tastes where most

sophisticated consumption patterns are an attribute of dominant social group. For him, lower classes in order to develop 'appropriate' taste and become a part of the cultural capital, must obtain higher educational qualifications. However, overall, Bourdieu's effort to address the issues of consumer experiences should not be undervalued.

3.3 The symbolic consumption in relation to self-identity

Baudrillard (1981) in opposition to Bourdieu (1979) emphasised the influence of political and ideological agenda on cultural practices. This is to say that for Baudrillard consumption is embedded in the system of signification where materialistic models of capitalism and frames of social marketing generate specific meanings. Thus, consumption is not about satisfying an already existing set of needs or as some authors argue innate desires. Significant for this study is that the process of purchasing goods or choosing specific types of entertainment is an attempt to create and sustain a sense of individual identity. It also helps people to locate themselves within society (Bocock, 1993). Baudrillard argues that buying products encapsulates a system of symbols that signify specific meanings to the consumer himself and to others who share a similar understanding of these symbols. This conceptual framework is ideologically connected with Saussure's ([1915]1986) theory where words are 'signs' composed from two parts: signifier (a mark that can be written or spoken) and signified (concept/message/thought that is articulated when the mark is made). There is no natural and obvious connection between the expressing word and expressed meaning, but this arbitrary isolation communicates a message through the system of relations and distinctions within the structure. For example, a set of traffic lights can figuratively explain the logic of the sign-system. Each colour, in the traffic organization indicates appointed meaning: red/stop, green/go. The unity between signifier and signified is not an outcome of natural linkage, but a consequence of stressing the difference and contrast within a system. 'Red' light obtains its significance by not being 'green' and *vice versa*, 'green' by not being 'red' (Selden and Widdowson, 1993). For Baudrillard (1981, p.180), these models of sign communication are reflected in the dominant social practice as well as media messages that convey hegemonic and hierarchical meanings and class stratification.

Baudrillard claims that meanings are incorporated in the items of everyday use (for example, one obtains a sense of power and freedom when driving their own car). The commodities always signify something socially and acquire specific meanings through the advertising and marketing practices that build a system of 'sign-value' logic. Thus,

Baudrillard (1981) criticised Marx's theory of use-value and exchange-value, rejecting the view that there is an objective connection between an item and a person. For him, sign-value logic is an expression of social status, power, prestige or style and becomes an important aspect of consumption. Thus, purchasing goods relates more to a demonstration of sign-value rather than use-value logic. This perspective is akin to Veblen's ([1899]1994) analysis of the American *nouveaux riches* in the late nineteenth century. This wealthy middle-class group, through the display of wealth, attempted to maintain social and cultural distinctions. For Baudrillard, the entire society consumes not the goods *per se* but their meanings where commodities that are more prestigious (at least in social perception such as houses, cars or holidays) indicate higher status in the sign system. In the theory of semiology, words acquire sense through their position within the system of language relations; similarly, Baudrillard's sign-value obtains meaning through the distinction within a system of prestige and sophistication (Kellner, http://gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/baudrillard.pdf). Consequently, for Baudrillard human needs do not satisfy individual pleasures but serve as an indicator for self-recognition and social differentiation. Needs are products of socialisation, marketing or advertising practices, and for that reason, they are ever-expanding and cannot be fulfilled. People choose commodities that encapsulate symbolic meanings that are in line with their self-creation project (Giddens, 1991) and at the same time, they try to avoid goods that bear negative connotations either on social or personal grounds. Purchasing goods conveys meanings, which consumers use to implement and sustain the sense of who they are. Thus, it seems that through consumption choices individuals can communicate personality, age, ethnicity or gender. Nevertheless, it is not to say that a certain object carries a certain intrinsic meaning. While dealing with signs and symbols the same message might contain more than one potential interpretation (Wattanasuwan, 2005). Each person can assign a different cultural understanding to the object, idea or image depending on the degree to which an individual shares codes of meaning with the producer of the message. The encoding and decoding process of communication remains polysemous, where usually messages suggest and support a particular interpretation over others, but they can never be limited to a single explanation or reading (Hall, 1973).

For Baudrillard, consumption is a sign-system that attempts to maintain and stabilise the structures of capitalism. Capitalism enforces the ideology of mass culture that is compatible with large-scale commodity production. Individuals construct their needs according to the meanings manufactured by advertising and media. The constant manipulation of needs and fluidity of the sign-value system increases social differentiation.

It is also a way to push people, who want to live at certain standards, towards an 'economising and controlled labour force' (Corrigan, 1997, p. 20). For Baudrillard, consumption appears to be incompatible with the ideas of free choice or individual consumer desires. He believed that human exploitation moved beyond the levels of production and became an integral part of the process of consumption.

3.4 Consuming gender

In capitalism, consumption became an important ground for constructing and maintaining gender identities. People articulate a sense of their own personality through purchasing goods, through clothes, hairstyle, perfumes, jewellery, cars, music, sport, etc. From a historical perspective, shopping has been a strongly gendered process, (rightly or wrongly) associated with a feminine activity. From the mid-nineteenth century, with the introduction of large department stores in the United States and later Britain and Germany, shopping became a leisure activity for middle-class women (Bocock, 1993). Within this period, production and consumption took place within specific context of gender relations. Production was attached to labour, to men earning money and being family breadwinners, which provided them with some sort of masculine power. On the other hand, consumption was associated with leisure, with trivial spending that brings no form of authority (Bocock, 1993). As Miller (1998) points out, less glamorous food shopping is another activity associated with domestic responsibilities, thus, mainly undertaken by women. For Miller, buying food expresses concerns about health and the well-being of the family and has nothing to do with a self-centred model of consumption.

However, from the second half of the twentieth century, men also became a part of consumerist culture, trying to construct a sense of who they are through, for example, body image or clothing style (Bocock, 1993). After the First and Second World War, men living under western capitalism were not defined only through the lens of being a soldier. The definition of masculinity involved experiences of consumption and developed a distinctive sense of identity. Frank Mort (1996) argues that advertising and marketing practices promote visual culture that is a matter of gazing and creating quick impressions. With the spread of men's magazines and television advertising, commercial pressure influenced masculinity. Activities and pleasures previously associated with the 'feminine side' such as clothes shopping or taking care about one's own body image, became a part of masculine lifestyle. Men, as much as women, construct and maintain their identities through purchasing goods. Nowadays, a growing number of men do not necessarily gain a sense of

self only through the type of employment or through fulfilling breadwinner responsibilities. Work gives financial resources to buy particular commodities that help to sustain a desired image. For the unemployed, who have no work-role identity or no income, it is difficult to achieve an adequate sense of self. Nevertheless, in order to understand gender identities, there is a need to move beyond patterns of consuming goods.

As argued above, the concept of consumption can have various dimensions, depending upon the theoretical framework. The present inquiry involves Baudrillard's approach towards symbolic consumption where the term 'consumption' relates to cultural values and beliefs, rather than simple material commodities. Marx's views on use-value and exchange-value are no longer relevant to current conditions, where consumerism *per se* became a way of life. This is not to say, that use-value vanishes, but people in capitalist societies tend to buy more to signify certain things. Individuals construct and maintain a sense of self through the consumption of symbolic meanings.

However, for Marx (1961, p.93), the ruling class popularise certain ideas that serve its own interests, ideas that become the leading intellectual power underpinning social life and human relationships. This perspective corresponds to the contemporary notion of gendering, where social regulations **'**produce' particular codes of behaviour. For Bradley (2007) gendering operates at three different levels. The first micro-level relates to personal interactions with the surrounding environment. The norms of socialisation construct gender identities within the context of heterosexual meanings, where the male should possess aggressive and dominating attributes, while females should be passive, dependent and emotional. This very distinctive characteristic of femininity and masculinity, first transmitted by parents, family and friends, is confirmed within the broader framework of institutional rules (meso-level). Schools or workplaces are not ideologically innocent and sustain gender inequalities and stereotypical understandings about femininity and masculinity. Finally, the macro-level of social totality defines broader and still gendered social structures such as sexual division of labour. Bradley's (2007) three levels of gendering has to be enhanced by the subject of mass media and popular culture that, as argued above, play a pivotal role in spreading a false consciousness and reinforcing 'right' and 'wrong' social perspectives.

Within this framework, it is reasonable to argue that people identify and locate themselves within a particular society through the consumption of cultural meanings, social expectations and codes of behaviour. However, it is not to say that a personal

understanding of reality is passively shaped, because at the same time individual perception involves (to some degree) feelings of freedom and autonomy. People construct a sense of self through the negotiation of the relationships between individuality (agent) and community (structure). In order to understand the practices of everyday life the current study will attempt to define to what extent consumption of gender codes allows articulating the non-traditional expressions of the self. It is to recognize the boundaries of homogeneity. Individual agents have (at least in theory) freedom of choice, but this autonomy is subject to the public criteria of a particular society. In other words, the study attempts to illustrate how men negotiate their gender identities within structures that society provides. However, what is meant by the non-traditional expression of the self? Franklin (1984) identifies some typical male roles that map out widely accepted perspectives on masculinity among popular public:

Table 3.4 Stereotypic male-valued traits

Stereotypic Male-Valued Traits
Aggressive, Independent, Unemotional, Hides emotions, Objective, Easily influenced, Dominant, Likes maths and science, Not excitable in a minor crisis, Active, Competitive, Logical, Worldly, Skilled in business, Direct, Knows the way of the world, Feelings not easily hurt, Adventurous, Makes decisions easily, Never cries, Acts as a leader, Self-confident, Not uncomfortable about being aggressive, Ambitious, Able to separate feelings from ideas, Not dependent, Not conceited about appearance, Thinks men are superior to women, Talks freely about sex with men

(Adapted from Clyde W. Franklin, II, 1984, p. 5)

These assumptions about masculine roles portray men not as individual or free agents but as actors who have to perform the 'appropriate' script of masculinity, if they want to be regarded as 'real men' (Baker, 2005). Agents of socialisation such as parents, school or media reinforce stereotypical and gendered expectations as well as emphasize the inferiority of traditionally feminine qualities (for example softness or emotionality). Most of the time this social and cultural norms, taken as fixed and unchangeable reality, function in hidden and unobserved ways. Like in the Wachowski Brothers' film, *The Matrix* (1999), where all but a few protagonists are unaware of living in a virtual simulation created by cyber-intelligence, gender codes create an inequitable template of 'appropriate' feminine and masculine behaviour, that is unnoticed by many people (Barker, 2005). This study conceptualised how far men consume stereotypical traits as well as meanings that

challenge gender binary systems (for more discussion on this topic see Chapter 5). This perspective draws upon Goffman's (1959) notion of the 'self-presentation' that distinguishes between social relations and individual self. There is a social front (observers) with particular set of expectations and standards. Individuals, in order to fit well-established social contexts, attempt to change their behaviour and practices. At the same time, there is also a back stage or a private place where people try to identify their distinctive individuality, where each person can leave behind his social roles and identity (see Chapter 4).

Through the consumption of gender meanings, people express a sense of belonging to a particular group and particular identity (Baudrillard, 1981). Nevertheless, masculinity is neither a unitary concept, nor a set of fixed practices, but many young people do not see beyond the gender matrix, ignoring the possibility of differentiation and variation among men and among women. Nowadays, men have to be encouraged to explore and critically think about alternative masculinities, because treating gender in monolithic and totalising terms distorts understanding of social relations and self-identity.

3.5 Critical perspective towards consumption

The below articulation of the researcher's assumptions provides grounds for understanding the complexity of contemporary societies and culture. It is necessary to locate the concept of consumption in a wider framework, because the researcher's perspectives on social reality construct and underpin the character of this research.

The irony of consumerism is that, in theory, it provides prospects for individual emancipation and liberation through economic resources but at the same time sustains a dominant order that to some degree limits personal independence (Miles, 1998). People believe that they can make their own choices, but in reality, they follow and consume lifestyles imposed on them by marketing practices, advertising industry or even schooling. Advertising directs human interests away from political or social problems, toward personal and private concerns. The desire to 'have', to create the sense of self through purchasing goods is a vicious cycle that captures people in the shallow world of consumption. 'If I am what I have and if what I have is lost, who then am I?' (Fromm 1976, p.76; cited in Wattanasuwan, 2005). The risk of losing material goods symbolically bears connotation with losing the part of identity and thus, brings insecurity and need to collect more and more commodities. Advertising attempts to influence human needs,

preferences or attitudes in order to sell particular goods and maintain the economic system and social stratification (Wattanasuwan, 2005).

Moreover, nowadays citizens in a capitalist society are implementing the false measure of success and failure as well as ideas about being the 'winners or losers in the marketplace of employment' (Burbules and Berk, 1999, p.50). Apart from advertising, also the institution of school develops and sustains ideas of inequality and competitiveness through the constant testing, assessing and cultivation of meritocratic system of relations within the teacher-student and student-student interactions. Pupils are manipulated to become consumers, greedy and at the same time hard-working citizens (Apple, 1979). For Freire (1972) or McLaren (2003) the growth of capitalism and consumerism in the Western world is depicted more than ever by people's suffering, struggling and fighting for favours of the ruling elite. This critical vision of society raises ethical concerns about human dignity, empowerment and autonomy. Freire in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* used influential and political terminologies as well as strong tone of expressions such as 'injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors' (Freire, 1972, p.20) to reflect the problem of dehumanisation where manipulative practices and uni-vocal thinking distort people's existence.

The researcher's perspectives relate also to broader political and economic actions that maintain Western capitalism and consumerism. Wallerstein (1976) explains how Western capitalism and consumption sustain inequalities and underdevelopment of some parts of the world. According to Wallerstein, the current world-economy structures are based on hierarchical relations between *core-states* (advanced and wealthy countries such as UK, USA or Japan) and *peripheral areas* (less developed societies, for example Asia or Africa). The flow of surplus to the superior areas, those with high technological development, takes place on unequal conditions because peripheral regions have to sell raw material, agricultural products or labour power at a low price and buy processed materials from core-states at relatively high prices. For Wallerstein (1976), the exploitation of peripheral countries leads to advancement and development of the core-states. Like in Marx's theories, this relation of dependency is crucial to maintain the system as a whole. While strong countries accumulate substantial capital, peripheries experience the status of subordination and remain underdeveloped. The Third World countries, low in technological progression in order to repay national debts, are forced to create markets that benefit the major economies of the world, markets that have little or no profit for their own long-term economy (Miles, 1998). Nevertheless, there are also semi-peripheral zones (such

as Eastern European countries) that can function as a core or as a periphery depending on the nature of economic relations with other areas. It is important to point out, that exploitation, poverty and underdevelopment cannot be regarded only as the outcome of Western capitalism and consumerism. For example, political instability, military violence, geographical location or historical backgrounds are important factors that place particular region within the world-system hierarchy.

On the other hand, as mentioned above, in the Western world itself, the ruling class, mass media, education and popular culture create meanings and ideas that produce and determinate people's consciousness. As Giddens (1991, p.81) puts it 'we all not only follow lifestyles, but in an important sense are forced to do so- we have no choice but to choose'. Of course, many people are aware of 'pseudo-sovereignty' (Miles, 1998, p.156) or inequalities that are linked with consumerism culture, but, on a daily basis, they do not feel the need to challenge the ideology of consumerism as a way of life. It is not to approve communism (that constituted the major challenge to capitalism in the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China, Cuba or other places) or to support establishing a classless society by violent means. However, there is a need, as Freire or McLaren argued, to transform the state from the 'bottom-up' where people have to refuse to reproduce capitalism and capitalist rationality. Freedom begins with the recognition of distorted relations. For Freire, authoritarian and egoistic interests, depicted by the notion of dehumanization cannot begin the process of empowerment. Paradoxically, only the weakness of the objectified is powerful enough to realise both oppressors and oppressed. Freire does not believe only in self-liberation but also in emancipation through the solidarity of the oppressed. The ability to think critically (Freire's concept of *'conscienticizao'*), to identify faulty arguments and to see multiple sides of the situation/problem is a starting point for humanisation. People with desire for social justice and desire for a more egalitarian world are obliged to undertake further battle for changing the injustice through the praxis, through applying their knowledge and understanding into political, social and educational transformations.

3.6 Conclusions

This chapter has explored different theoretical approaches towards self-identity in relation to consumption. First, the aim was to present Marx's social, moral and philosophical concepts that remain intellectual grounds for exploring modern capitalism. His perspectives on alienation, ideological manipulation and human exploitation have a universal character as a framework for understanding contemporary social relations where

inequality and injustice are still part of everyday life. Next, the debate shifts towards Pierre Bourdieu (1979) who explored links between social status and the patterns of consumption. More specifically, he analysed how various consumer choices and distinctive tastes in for example music, food or home furnishing, mark particular socio-economic class. Hence, he supports Marx's view that there are social structures that influence people's consciousness where apart from individual economic situation also cultural capital has an impact upon human behaviours and awareness of the world.

Nevertheless, Marx had never predicted that consumption would play such an influential role in modern capitalism where people express own identities and individuality through purchasing goods. As discussed above in relation to Baudrillard's work, nowadays in western societies, individual autonomy is spread among visual culture that attempts to portray the 'reality' through the eyes of dominant elites. In other words, mass media re-organises the freedom, emotional lives and identities of large number of people, as well as manipulates the notions of female and male roles. For Baudrillard (1981) material possession is a part of social communication system that defines and locates person within society. Purchasing goods expresses an individual sense of identity as well as a sense of belonging to a societal group. However, the symbolism of a particular object is not total, but rather fluid because each person can assign different cultural understanding to it. Looking through the lens of this ideological framework, it was argued that people identify and locate themselves within a particular society through the consumption of cultural meanings, expectations and codes of behaviour. Social production and distribution of specific value systems constitute a development of hegemonic and stereotypical beliefs. This is not to say that humans are passively shaped because at the same time individuals might have very own, distinctive understanding of reality that involves feelings of freedom and autonomy. People construct the sense of self through the negotiation of the relationships between individuality (agent) and community (structure). The problem is that many people still do not see beyond the social matrix, ignoring the possibility of differentiation and variation.

Chapter 4

Conceptualising the Internet: Contexts of Reality, Identity, Community and Gender

4.1 Introduction

Terminology, related with the culture of the Internet, such as 'cyberspace', 'cybernetic environment', 'virtual world' or 'virtual reality' (VR) indicates an ideological split (Vitanza, 1999) between reality and imagination, real life and fantasy domain, actuality and simulation. The aim of this chapter is to explain that online identity and online community map out human experiences and can be considered as reliable representations of current culture. Thus, first the chapter focuses upon theoretical ways of thinking about 'cyberspace' and 'virtual reality' in order to formulate these concepts in the realm of everyday life. Then, as the context of the Internet contributes to imposing questions about identity, community and gender constructions, this chapter provides an insight into these three subject areas.

4.2 Online versus offline reality

The term 'cyberspace' is derived from William Gibson's science-fiction novel *Neuromancer* (1984). He described cyberspace as 'consensual hallucination', general agreement to 'hallucinate', agreement to see or hear things or people that are not really there. For example, a telephone conversation involves talk between two or more people who are spatially absent from each other, positioned in different rooms, buildings, cars, cities or countries. It is not face-to-face conversation, so the question arises, where does it take place? Gibson (1984) would argue that phone or computer-mediated communications are situated in the matrix of cyberspace. Matrix is a space of electronic circuit elements, wires and cables in which and through which informational data and communications are created and exchanged (Vitanza, 1999). Thus, face-to-face discussions are mediated through the senses. Cyberspace conversations also engage the matrix. Nevertheless, Gibson's definition of cyberspace as 'consensual hallucination' refers to the situation when individuals are dominated by the flow of technology and media, which ends up separating them from the surrounding 'real' world. People experience cyberspace when talking on the phone, watching television, listening to the radio or using the Internet, however, at the same time, they are not fully aware of being in the matrix (Woolley, 1992). Thus, everyone (consciously or unconsciously) becomes residents of cyberspace and this type of residency

is very real. However, in the case of virtual reality, there might be a sense of being in another place or situation (Woolley, 1992).

For Jaron Lanier (1992) virtual reality means a physical and mental immersion in a virtual world. For example, aircraft pilots obtain their training in flight simulators that provide a pseudo-experience of being in a real cockpit. Various scenarios such as engine failure are displayed on the monitors of a simulator and pilots' actions influence the manner and the result of the task. In addition, computer games might create the illusion of living in a different world. Images created by a computer appear to surround a person looking at them. Moreover, usage of joysticks, gloves, headgear or pedals cumulate and intensify sensations. However, Heim (1993) presented another perspective, claiming that for some people virtual reality means an interaction with any technological equipment. It might be the simple act of organising files in a personal computer. Documents are not tangible papers or trash bin on the computer screen is not a physical object but they become 'real' in the context of our involvement in the situation. Moreover, as private and public life became highly computerised, some might regard the world in terms of artificiality where environment is created by nature and simultaneously constructed and controlled by human beings. While being in virtual reality one might also experience the cyberspace. Vitanza (1999) highlighted that the prefix *cyber-* has Greek roots and in literal translation means 'one who steers'. In virtual reality, the mind that is in the informational-data space of the matrix steers the illusion of being in a different reality. The above discussion indicates that the concepts of reality and the virtual world overlap each other not only theoretically, but also in situations of everyday life. Maybe, instead of discussing reality in singular form it would be better to use a plural expression such as realities to recognise and acknowledge multiplicity of interpretations and experiences. Reality is what one believes to be real (Sherman and Judkins, 1992). For example, keeping money in banks on saving accounts, paying bills with credit cards or making financial transactions, in reality involves operations of electronic data. It has nothing to do with 'hard cash' *per se,* but people believe and there is a social agreement that this money exists.

The notion of reality appears to be problematic and controversial from a philosophical point of view. According to Jean Baudrillard (1983), the reality has been lost in the culture of 'hyper-reality', that questions the sense of what is real and what is an illusion. In his highly influential book *Simulations* (1983), he argued that in a post-modern world, signs do not represent and do not refer to the real world any longer. Instead, there is a culture of 'simulacra', which is defined by image-creating technologies such as television or the

Internet. For Baudrillard, media, cyberspace and virtual reality provide people with extreme experiences that create codes of human behaviour, guide human reasoning and set the lines of normality. In simulated society, there is an 'implosion' of depth and surface, the meanings of culture as well as differences between authenticity and appearance collapse. People live in the 'ecstasy of communication', constantly exposed to the superficial and shallow figures and information which are again only images of the images with no original or authentic grounds. Baudrillard (1983) argued that media, technological experience and hyper-reality mould human existence and there is no control or stabilising force. Social relations disappear and people become the passive spectators and viewers of the external 'reality'. Human perception is not only simulated by various media but is also in simulation. He claimed that the idea behind building amusement parks such as Disneyland is to persuade people that the rest of the world is real, when in fact everything is Disneyland. Baudrillard's (1991) provocative claim, in the realm of post-modern simulation, is that Gulf War did not take place. For him, it was a media event rather than a real war. This point of view was criticised by Norris (1992) who claimed that complex issues such as war cannot be explained through theories of simulacra. During war, oppression, death and deconstruction are real experiences. Norris added that assumptions about reality and truth are part of human reasoning and become foundation for moral, political or ethical judgements. Nevertheless, Baudrillard's theories depart from ideologies of modernity where the subject aspires to understand reality and accumulates knowledge, in order to use this knowledge to dominate over the object such as nature or other people. Baudrillard's (1983) philosophy marked new era, where human subjects and human reasoning are under the influence of post-modern technologies. For Kellner (1995) theories of simulacra and hyprreality can be compared with William Gibson's science fiction novel, where people are losing the battle with omnipresent technology. However, Hilary Putnam has a similar to Baudrillard's thoughts that carry the notion of the 'simulation' argument. Putman in *Reason, Truth, and History* (1981) developed the brain-in-a-vat theory. The experience of a brain in a vat would be identical as the experience of a brain in a skull of a living body. The problem is that no one can be certain that he is not a brain in a vat, as it would be undistinguishable from within. Thus, this possibility undermines human knowledge about the external world, 'knowledge', which might be only an illusion. Putman's (1981) perspectives suggest that human reasoning and taken for granted 'truths' ought to be provoked by some degrees of uncertainty and challenged by applying doubts and disbeliefs. This philosophical scepticism is an open-minded tendency to test various ideas. Thus, what claims can one make to prove that what we think to be a real world is in fact real, rather than hallucination or imagination? Alternatively, what grounds can one

produce to justify that cyberspace and virtual reality are an illusion rather than waking experience? As Nietzsche would argue, there is no truth with a capital 'T' or absolute knowledge. There is no superior right as everything has equal value and is based on relative merits. Moreover, objectivity does not exist as human perspectives contradict each other and are nothing more than subjective interpretations. Consequently, in the discussions about the modern-day Internet, scholars have different perspectives on the same concepts or use the same terminology to describe dissimilar facts. For some writers the words 'cyberspace' or 'virtual world' might bear connotations with illusion or imagination. For others (Deleuze, 1994) these terms have a quite different associations. 'Cyberspace' relates to electronic communication and the word 'virtual' means something actually existing and happening, but in the Internet environment. The multiplicity of interpretations might be confusing. For example, while talking about 'virtual library' or 'virtual banking' there is no clarity if the writer considers these things to be a real or unreal phenomenon. In this study, in order to avoid misleading associations, I will be using the expressions such as 'online environment', 'online identity' or 'online community'. It is also a way to emphasise that the modern Internet is a part and extension of everyday life rather than a second reality. Nevertheless, as the definitions of reality, virtuality and cyberspace cannot be agreed upon, similarly it is difficult to obtain consensus about the meanings of recent social phenomenon, namely the 'online identity'.

4.3 Online identity

The early social research connected with the nature and formation of the online self was influenced by post-modern theories. These ideologies stressed the importance of technology in the development of new social practises. In the Internet reality, there are no deterministic factors as people are free to choose who they are or how they behave because their personas are not affected by background, surrounding, social status or gender. In post-modern view, online identities are created online rather than being informed by pre-existing selves and can function free from limitations and restrictions of the offline social order. The online processes of self-transition, self-realization and re-development help to understand the external world and above all own identity (Bell, 2001). For Sherry Turkle (1995) the Internet is a ground for developing multiple and fluid identities. Her study is one of the first investigations of the Internet users, more specifically, MUDs (Multiuser Dungeons/Dimensions/Domains) groups that are formed for the purposes of gaming or some social activities such as online chat. People communicate with each other by typing,

moreover, by using words they can 'build' their own objects (rooms, houses, castles, etc.), 'manipulate' items and 'share' them with others. It is like writing fiction. To enter MUDs, one has to create his or her avatar with a name, gender and textual description of the character's appearance and personality. As Turkle (1995) pointed out participants mostly remain anonymous. Those who become friends might exchange real names or email addresses, however, not many people choose to do that. They prefer constructing new selves and experiencing multiple identities by playing various avatars positioned in the same or distributed among different MUDs groups. In *Life on Screen* Turkle (1995) illustrated online versus offline reality where people, mostly middle class males in their late teens or early twenties, lead parallel lives. They function in many worlds, occupy many roles at the same time, and can test different genders, behaviours and alter egos. The MUDs might create the environment for discovering who one is and wishes to be. As Turkle believed, MUDs develop contexts for self-expressing, interacting with people and ideas. However, sometimes the frontiers between self and game, real life and role become blurred. People start associating themselves with personas they play or play who they are. Their character from the screen is who they want to be or who they do not want to be. Turkle (1995) in her book described cases where individuals became addicted to games, spending ten to twelve hours a day in the MUD environment talking about real life problems and at the same time forming MUD friendships, romances, engagements or marriages. She argued that in some circumstances, MUDs can isolate their users from 'normal', everyday life activities and surroundings. Nevertheless, for Turkle, one does not have to reject his screen persona but on the other hand, it cannot be treated as an alternative self. Online and offline worlds should not be regarded in terms of two competing areas as the online settings might develop and help to explore new ways of thinking about relationships, identity, sexuality, culture or politics as well as serve to improve the offline status quo. Being in an actual world requires maintaining not only a steady name and surname but also a stable identity and character. The Internet domain invites people to experiment with self and encourages them to be fluid, shifting and multiple. People can use their real names or stay anonymous, adopt various identities to become for example kinder, riskier or more open than in everyday life situations. Changes might be applied to one's social class, vocation, gender or race (Vitanza, 1999). For some critics of cyberspace, the Internet identity is threatening to real communities. For others, the Internet's multiple identities, role-playing and simulations involve some kind of therapeutic aspect and becomes a way to learn about the self. It creates possibilities for open-minded reasoning, it makes people more tolerant and appreciative of notions of difference. Sherry Turkle focused upon defining MUD culture, however, she does not reflect on the other ways in

which Internet users might interact (Vitanza, 1999). What if current reality creates different contexts and settings for Internet-mediated communication?

It has to be kept in mind that Turkle (1995) conducted her research over fifteen years ago, at the beginning of the Internet revolution and focused upon the first-wave of Internet users. Consequently, the example of MUD groups seems to be out of date and cannot be relevant to modern culture. As Slevin (2000) observed, in the late 1990s the worldwide number of Internet users was estimated to be between 150 and 180 million. According to World Internet Usage and Population Statistics (http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm) in 2012, 34.3% of the worldwide population or in other words, nearly 2 billion people had access to the Internet. Ten years earlier, it was just 4.3% of the world population. Moreover, within the computer industry there is an accepted law, the so-called 'Moore's Law' according to which, power, speed and capability of the integrated circuit double every two years. Similar to computers or laptops, the digital electronic devices for example iPods, mobile phones or digital cameras, double in performance and become two times cheaper approximately every two years (Vitanza, 1999). Moore's model of technological development carries implications not only for the world's economy, but also for social changes. This rapidly expanding world of technology influenced facets of human experience. By now, some have grown up with digital media as an integral part of their lives, while others had to embrace and become a part of this cultural shift. Consequently, nowadays people perceive and use the Internet in a different realm than Turkle's generation of first-wave internet consumers. Junco and Mastrodicasa (2007) conducted a study on how students use technology to build social networks and communicate. A survey carried out on nearly 8000 students from seven different colleges and universities in the United States revealed that 97% of learners own a computer and 94% own a mobile phone. Seventy six percent of students use Instant Messaging to communicate with friends and parents. Moreover, 94% of the users report doing something else on the computer while messaging. Douglas Rushkoff in *Playing the Future* (1997) talked about 'screenagers' to describe the generation of children who are brought up on watching television, playing computer games and surfing the Net. This neologism relates to teenagers who are multi- tasking in their media experience, who are listening to an iPod, texting friends and doing homework all at the same time. For Rushkoff, these type of activities allow obtaining and reacting to information much faster than ever before, while helping to understand the world on greater and deeper levels. On the other hand, Miles (2000), like Baudrillard (1983), believed that nowadays, young people live in a hyper-reality, which extends reality. Technology stimulates its users to such a degree that they

prefer 'actuality' created and delivered only by the high-tech medium where it becomes difficult to distinguish real from fake, surface from the depths. This is not to say that other generations are excluded from this technological revolution. As Nielsen's report on *The Myths and Realities of Teen Media* (2009) suggests, adults in the United States spend more time browsing through the Internet pages than teenagers do. People aged between 18-24 spend about 14 hours and 19 minutes on the Internet monthly. In comparison, consumers aged 35-44 use the Internet for 42 hours and 35 minutes each month. Moreover, it was revealed that teenagers and adults use the Internet for the same purposes, mainly for browsing general interest portals. The top Web brands visited by young people and adults in the United Kingdom are Google, MSN/Windows and You Tube. However, the most popular categories among U.S. teenagers are social networks such as Facebook and MySpace. It seems that, since Turkle's (1995) investigation, the major trends in the Internet experience and Internet use have been redefined and reconstructed. Nowadays, there is a shift from Turkle's postmodern conception of multiple and fluid identity towards stable identity.

There are some practical reasons why the notion of a stable identity is crucial for a network to function (Cavanagh, 2007). The first motive, using Resnick et al. (2000) terminology, is the importance of a 'reputation system'. Nowadays, Internet users also have the ability to distribute goods and services. However, the domain, where there is little control over frauds, cheating or selling faulty goods, might provoke some kind of consumers' uncertainty. Thus, online companies such as Amazon, eBay or iTunes attempt to eliminate sellers' poor practises and overcome shoppers' fears by introducing a reputation system, which is based on gathering and distributing feedback from customers. It acts as a form of control that prompts sellers to provide good service, as buyers' negative opinions might affect future transactions. As Cavanagh (2007) observed, these circumstances encourage the development of a particular kind of stable identity, which is trustworthy and reliable. Nevertheless, what is the construction and presentation of the self in other contexts of Internet culture?

Charles Cheung (2000) discussed how individuals use personal web pages to picture and develop the notion of self. Home-pages are set for entertaining or informative purposes and centre on authors' feelings, characters or relationships. It is a form of an online diary, which might include descriptions of hobbies, daily activities, random thoughts or notes, photographs or links. Moreover, readers of these pages can post their own comments and observations. As Cheung (2000) pointed out, a blog is a way for reflective self-

presentation. The entire control over the site content gives people the possibility to be in charge of the production of self and the opportunity to expose real and previously unknown aspects of their own identity. People create personal home pages to attract a different type of audience, beginning with family and friends through peers to the wider national or international Internet users. As Cavanagh (2007) observed, without public interest there is no rationale for keeping a page. Thus, site owners have to implement some marketing strategies to gain, increase and encourage readers to visit the blog on a regular basis. Apart from providing interesting content and themes, the creator's personality and self-presentation have to be comprehensible to his or her audience, which involves a certain stability and rationality. One has to have an unambiguous and clearly defined sense of self to mark his or her online existence and attract connections with readers. On the other hand, in order to obtain visibility or popularity in the Internet domain, home pages have to reveal more and more intimate, even extreme information from personal life (Burnet and Marshall, 2003). Exposing private details is a way to attract an audience; however, it might lead to playing out the persona for the audience. This home page exhibitionism is a result of a wider media trend, which promotes reality-shows or soap operas as well as the popularisation of details from the lives of celebrities. Similarly, Bunting (2001) pointed out, that what was once regarded as a cultural taboo, has become in the last fifteen years common topics of talk shows or tabloids, where discussions centre around people's sex experiences, relationships or any kind of daily problems. For Bunting, within the capitalist society the privatisation of the mass media industry is linked to the process of excessive individualisation what pushes people towards ostentatious flaunting of intimate life. This is a culture where public visibility is an indicator of popularity and status. Personal web pages give the possibility to be recognised and publicly noticeable at the low cost. Nevertheless, an online environment might become a place where people act out their own personality in order to satisfy social expectations (Burnet and Marshall, 2003).

Goffman's (1959) work on the self-presentation indicates that individuals perform their behaviour on an everyday basis. There is a social front (observers) with particular expectations and standards that relate to one's appearance, setting or manners. Actors attempt to change his or her 'face' to fit these well-established social contexts. Consequently, humanity's everyday actions appear to be reinforced by sets of social practices. For Goffman (1959), performers in order to highlight their conformity with generally accepted norms, often use the 'dramatic self-expression'. This dramatisation of our own acts makes invisible actions visible and people frequently apply it to a work environment, from which occupational status is gained. Moreover, one might mould and

shape his or her behaviour to give appreciation of 'ideal' social models. For example, as Goffman pointed out, American college girls used to pretend to be less intelligent in the presence of their boyfriends. Normative order and social expectations establish acceptable and unacceptable forms of self-presentation. Goffman in his influential work *Stigma* (1968) made a distinction between *virtual social identity*, which reflects demands that society put on one's character and *actual social identity*, attributes that individual is able to prove to posses. The disagreement between these two identities is called stigma, which has a negative effect on one's self-perception and social performance. There are three different realms of stigma, body abnormalities, flaws on individual character (for example addiction or mental disorder) and tribal shame of for example race, religion or nation. Thus, as Goffman (1968) believed, people posses different potentials to control their self-presentation. For the group of the 'discredited', stigma is impossible to conceal and there is no control over their external image. 'Normals' fit to the particular social expectations. 'Discreditable' are those who have something to hide that is not obvious or perceivable for the observers and for that reason people can be misled and regard them as 'normals'. 'Discreditable' might attempt to persuade others that his or her own attributes do not depart from social norms. Cavanagh (2007) pointed out that the Internet domain provides greater possibilities to hide particular physical or behavioural failings and shortcomings. However, for her, there is no crucial or vital difference between online and offline environments because both settings, to some extent, reproduce normative social orders. For example, in general it would be acceptable to admit to be a 'shop-a-holic' but inappropriate to reveal unnatural desires, alcoholism, heroin addiction or suicidal attempts. Self-presentation refers to one's external performance that is adjusted to social expectations. Goffman's point of view equally applies to the constructions of online and offline identity where individuals want to formulate a clear notion of the self that is not separated from cultural norms. It has to be borne in mind, that behaviour or appearance that is disapproved within one society can be regarded as normal in the contexts of other societies. Nevertheless, Cavanagh (2007) stated, that in everyday life situations social interactions, for the most time, are underpinned by trust, by the belief that somebody is honest rather than 'discreditable'. As Cavanagh explained, people do not ask the bus driver for the license or teacher for his or her diploma. This notion of social trust functions unless there is a particular reason to challenge one's behaviour or status. This 'faith' in consistency and the logic of everyday life sustains structures of offline reality. Then why is it that the online environment and its framework cannot be underpinned by similar trust in the coherence and the logic of people's actions?

The Internet quite recently became a popular social domain and the theme of online identity is a relatively new phenomenon. Nowadays, as over 700 million people all over the world have profiles on online social networking websites such as Facebook, Bebo or MySpace, scholars studying online identity, raised the question to what extent OSN profiles accurately reflect users' character (Gosling et al, 2010). There are two perspectives that contradict each other. According to Gosling *et al.* (2010), first viewpoint known as the *idealised virtual-identity hypothesis*, suggests that profiles do not reflect an adequate characteristic of the owners' personality, but imitate the picture of the ideal self. The study by Salimkhan *et al.* (2010) supports this line of reasoning and at the same time points out that social networking websites create opportunities for investigating and exploring personal, social and gender identity.

The early research on the computer-mediated communication (Turkle, 1995, Poster, 1995) promoted images of a person isolated from the real world whose multiple identities and avatars were constructed within the online environment. However, for some scholars such as Ambady and Skowronski (2008) or Hall and Bernieri (2001) this picture is not adequate in relation to social networking websites. They support the *extended real-life hypothesis*, which assumes that people through OSN profiles distribute their real self. As Laura Freberg (2010), professor of psychology at California State Polytechnic University (http://www.businessweek.com/lifestyle/content/healthday/636205.html) pointed out, networks such as Facebook are not domains that provide anonymity and there is a rather small tendency to use it for meeting new people. Members are trying to stay in touch with friends, family members, co-workers or re-connect with people they actually know. The purpose of OSNs is to sustain already existing friendships rather than generate new relationships. Thus, individuals have to represent themselves in a stable and accurate manner, as colleagues would recognise an alter ego and question atypical profiles and behaviours. Friends provide feedback on one's profile by writing for example a wall post. Consequently, it is difficult to conceal one's personality and character.

The recent study by Gosling *et al.* (2010) showed that people who use online social networking websites display in their profiles valid and real information about themselves. Researchers analysed profiles of 133 American users of Facebook and 103 profiles of German users of StudiVZ/SchuelerVZ. Participants, all aged between 17 and 22, were asked to describe themselves. In addition, four 'well-acquainted' friends of the Facebook users had to portray their friends' character. To ensure that participants do not modify their OSN pages, their profiles had been saved before the topic of OSN was raised. Observer

ratings were obtained from undergraduate research assistants (9 in U.S. and 10 in Germany), who could review the Online Social Networking (OSN) profiles without any time restrictions. Observers only rated profiles from his or her own country. All the American participants, their friends and observers assessed personality by rating the Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI), which measures the Big Five personality traits: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness. In the German case, self-reports and observer-reports were based on the combination of Big Five Inventory (BFI) and NEO Five-Factor Inventory. Profile owners were also asked to illustrate their ideal-self (the way they wish to be), what was gauged by reshaping TIPI and BFI instructions. Then, observers' ratings were correlated with participants' actual personality and ideal self. The study did not find any evidence of online self-idealisation and results were consistent with the extended real-life hypothesis. Accuracy was strongest for extraversion and openness and lowest for neuroticism. The findings show that people in the context of OSNs do not create an idealised identity but provide valid and accurate information about their own character and personality. There is no reason to regard offline identity and OSN identity as separate constructions.

Manuel Castells (2000) introduced an important concept of 'real virtuality', which is an attempt to explain processes that take place in current culture:

> Reality itself (...) is entirely captured, fully immersed in a virtual image setting, in the world of make believe, in which appearances are not just on the screen through which experience is communicated, but they become the experience.

(Castells, 2000, p. 404)

Nowadays, diverse media such as television, radio or newspapers communicate all kinds of information from news to commercials. These channels of knowledge-transfer allow individuals to absorb past, present and future events and incorporate new patterns of understanding reality. Meanings popularised by the media do not only represent or reflect the social world but also form human reflexivity. However, the Internet surpasses the idea of a medium that informs, entertains or shapes experiences (Bakker and Sadaba, 2008). The modern world is not longer the culture of Baudrillard's (1983) simulacra where people are passive viewers unable to influence the message. In online reality, people become active users who search for particular content and navigate their choices. It is a powerful means of social communication with possibilities of emailing, blogging, chatting as well as receiving and giving feedback. The Internet is a productive vehicle, where there are no clear frontiers between producers and audience. The above discussion indicates, that Online Social-Networking Websites are an example of, borrowing Castells (2000)

terminology, 'real virtuality' as people use these networks to extend already existing social practices, where the term 'virtuality' relates to something actually existing and happening but in the Internet domain. People do not enter an online environment as a *tabula rasa*. To create their own Internet profile, an individual has to have clear and unambiguous perception of their self which might be developed through both offline and online social interactions. It is not to ignore the post-modern notion of online identities that are multiple and fluid. However, as Giddens (1991) suggested, nowadays the self is informed by the 'micro' levels (individual views and perceptions of own image) and 'macro' levels (external big picture, product of globalisation and multicultural corporations), which interact and cannot be treated in separation. Everyday life (micro level) is no longer assigned to one particular place or reduced to understanding oneself within the national traditions or local environment. People are globally networked (macro level) and become border- crossers, both literally and metaphorically. This state of 'homelessness', constructs a new understanding of one's own culture and political issues as well as develops the respect for the notion of differences. Similarly, in the context of OSNW it is difficult to regard offline and online domains as isolated entities as they influence upon each other and share the same social norms and codes of behaviour. It is a network of micro and macro levels. For Giddens (1991) this interconnectedness of micro/macro forces and globalisation of individual life that places people among various meanings, contributes to development of a biographical continuity. In other words, people attempt to maintain their self across time and space that is underpinned by reflexivity. Giddens suggested that the nature of the self is not a fixed or an inherited attribute. In the age of post-traditional society, the reflexive process of rethinking and reshaping one's own personality informs identity. It is a 'project of the self' that requires steady work and action. People themselves arrange, sustain and modify their own biographical narrative, the ongoing 'story' about themselves. Normal sense of self-identity has its continuity, stability and integrity. However, social contexts have to be reflexively included in the process of self-formation where individual choices and decisions ought to be constructed and transformed in the light of the external world. The individual biography cannot be wholly separated from everyday life. In order to communicate one's own biographical narratives to others, people have to constantly incorporate into their own experiences, events, which occur on a day-to-day basis. The self in the post-traditional society has the ability to explain the past as well as narrate the present and the future. On the contrary, in traditional times lifestyle options were limited and organised by customs and traditions. For Giddens (1991) current freedom of choice is liberating, but can place people between dichotomous meanings, conflicting concepts and contradictory conditions of local, national and international reality. Thus, in these shifting

contexts of every-day life, as Giddens suggested, the most fundamental element is the ability to create a stable identity and person-hood that is informed by self-reflexivity. Through the diversity of choices, biographical narration becomes an integrated and coherent framework. Nevertheless, Giddens pointed out that self-actualisation takes place in the realms and standards of capitalist markets. Individuals through the notion of modern reflexivity can either challenge or incorporate these capitalist products and messages in the project of the self, depending on personal values and beliefs. The Internet domain provides a flow of consumer goods as well as a transfer of information and communication on a global scale. It has an impact upon micro levels, the way in which people live, work or study, it serves as the source of self-actualisation that might contribute to the development of a reflexive and consistent self. It is an interaction on the local, national and international grounds and such communication would be meaningless or even impossible without having well-defined self-identity. Otherwise, individuals would be positioned in a domain of overwhelming complexity. That is not to say that self-image is passively stable, people actively narrate and modify their own biographies and react intelligently to external influences. Many scholars studying online identity dismissed the notion of this coherent and integrated self. However, what Giddens' work maps out is that in late modernity people are exposed to constantly changing conditions of life. It raises the possibility of choice of who we are and what we do, but at the same time uncovers uncertainty and provokes existential dilemmas. For that reason identity becomes a continuous and reflexive process in which complex conditions of current reality strengthen and steer individuals towards an integrated project of the self.

4.4 Network society

As Cavanagh (2007) argues, the concept of network is not ideologically new and in sociological understanding relates to structures that systematise and regulate organisations, information or relationships. Nevertheless, the term 'network society' is rather problematic to define. For some (Barney, 2004) it is simply a society arranged by networks. However, Dijk (1999, p. 23) points out that the rise of the Internet and other electronic technologies has contributed to the formation of a new type of society where individuals, groups or companies are connected and networked through both social and media webs. People live and work within their own environments but at the same time they are linked with large-scale structures. Face-to-face interaction is enhanced or replaced by mediated communications. Internet 'is a *network of networks* that consists of millions of private,

public, academic, business and government networks of local to global scope' (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet). Moreover, from the technological point of view, the nature of the Internet domain is based on electronic computer networks, or in other words communication channels that enable the flow of data among billions of users. Also, information resources are organised through the World Wide Web that links hypertext documents, stores data and allows retrieving information in a web-like rather than hierarchical manner (Bell, 2001). As Hassan (2004, p. 52) observes, the network society puts the dynamic of culture, politics and media into new dimensions of 'digitisation' and 'informationisation'. The current culture is digitally-mediated. In other words, it facilitates the spread of interaction through digital means. Consequently, the ability to navigate and use technologies becomes a fundamental skill that enables individuals to become the part of a network society. Digitisation can be considered as a vehicle that strengthens global interaction and connectedness. Ironically, it might create social distance, separate and alienate in a sense that people have less time and opportunities to communicate in non-digital ways, to reflect on interpersonal relationships or absorb and process information. Similarly, informationisation, the spread and accessibility to the same content all over the world blur the notion of traditional place and time as well as potentially pushing societies toward the homogenisation of customs, meanings and standards (Hassan, 2004).

For Castells (2000) space and time appear to be fundamental models that shape aspects of network society, social life and social meanings. With the development of information technology, the nature of these two concepts has been significantly transformed and ought to be understood through a new lens. The reorganisation of physical space is a complex phenomenon. This is because geographical space relates to the countries, regions, cities, areas, streets and so on that are informed by time-synchronised, social patterns and values. Thus, in sociological terms, spatiality refers to more than geographical location, proximity or distance. It is also about socio-cultural norms, codes of behaviour and coherent interactions that are both spatially defined and simultaneous in time. For Castells (2000, p. 441) space does not reflect society but becomes its expression. Social meanings influence a cultural framework of space as well as define the urban and architectural context of the environment. Consequently, traditional society defines itself in the realm of so-called, *space of places* (Castells, 2000, p. 453), which refers to spatial settings informed by common experience and time coordination. However, the emergence of New Media opened new spaces for social interaction that have their own dynamics and attributes. For example, in an online domain people can connect with each other despite being in different geographical locations and can asynchronously produce and comment on information over

an extended time. The online environment is global. This is not to say, that everyone is involved in networked public spheres. However, for those connected to the Internet its content and information are available through the World Wide Web that does not exist within any geographical frontiers. The Web also increases the speed of social relations and communication where there are no limits of how many people can join and participate (synchronously or asynchronously) in various groups or discussion forums (Jordan, 1999). Castells (2000) proposes the idea of *space of flows* to define space that is dominated by constant movement and exchange of information, goods, images or sounds between physically disconnected people. The space of flows can be characterised by the combination of three layers. First, it refers to the technological infrastructure, services and facilities such as computer processing or broadcasting systems that are necessary for network to function. Then, there are *nodes*, that link local activities with the whole network and communication *hubs* that organise the exchange of information among integrated parts of the network. Functioning of nodes and hubs heavily rely on hierarchical organisation where their status is assessed according to the importance for the network. To clarify his ideas, Castells provides the example of the coca trade. According to the World Drug Report (2008)

(http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2008/WDR_2008_eng_web.pdf), cocaine production takes place mostly in Peru, Colombia and Bolivia. Neighbouring the United States, Mexican drug producers and dealers have control of cocaine retail distribution in many American cities, thus dictating terms to the production sites. Moreover, Mexican drug-traffic centres are connected with drug lords and distribution points, mostly in America and Western Europe. This is a well-organised network where none of the hubs could function by themselves and where each centre has its own role and position in the network's hierarchy. The third layer of the space of flows relates to the managerial elite whose 'personal micro-networks' influence global macro-networks. Cosmopolitan and homogeneous elite are not attached to any locality and through the possession of cultural codes dominates financial, cultural and political networks. Thus, Castells defines the Internet in terms of space that sustains the accounts of existing power relations. For him networks and their logic are fundamental parts of society. They can expend and incorporate new nodes as long as they share the same meanings, interests and goals. Within a particular network, the exchange of information between different centres is quicker, more frequent and intense than between points that do not belong to the same system. Thus, network-based structures are active and vibrant, determined by the flow and analysis of information (Castells, p.501).

Nevertheless, the Internet by challenging the notion of space, questions conventionally defined axes of time. Information technology contributed to the acceleration of social interactions. David Harvey (1990, p. 284) speaks about 'time-space compression', because nowadays distribution of information over large distances takes place within a matter of seconds. Similarly, Castells (2000) introduces the concept of *timeless time*. Most of the online activities are always available. The online environment is a source of information obtainable twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, throughout the globe. Consequently, personal needs navigate access to online resources and direct decisions about expressing own opinions and comments. The instant possibility of communication provides the experience of timelessness. In other words, new technology overcomes the barriers of time and creates the impression of speed of social relations. This is not to say that time loses its importance or relevance. Dijk (1999, p. 197) observes that in digitalised society the production and consumption of content is quick. People's expectations for the fast flow of information increase with the development of technological possibilities. It brings into existence a 'culture of speed' where various messages are sent at high frequency in order to attract attention. According to Dijk (1999), the culture of speed adopts language with increased amount of jargon and countless abbreviations. The need to save time leads to superficiality of cultural expression as well as informational and communicational overload where too much information is produced and cannot be absorbed. Consequently, important data are mixed with useless content which might create a sense of uncertainty and puzzlement. Internet search engines such as Google or Yahoo provide an impossible to manage number of sources, which might blur relevant content. Nevertheless, at the same time the Internet opens up opportunities for creativity, self-expression as well as unlimited communication and collaboration.

Within the network society, space and time are governed by a new technological logic. Castells (2000, p. 459) writes that the relationship between space of flows and people's rootedness in local, everyday life might lead to 'structural schizophrenia' and might place individuals in two parallel worlds informed by different time dimensions. Social-networking websites such as Bebo, Facebook or MySpace are examples of space of flows and timeless time, where the use of the Internet brings people together from all over the world. There is no face-to-face interaction and communication is not always synchronised in time. However, networking-websites can be compared with offline places, for example parks or pubs where individuals meet to socialise, gossip, exchange information, play games, make plans or support each other (Rheingold, 1993). Nowadays, in the age of the network society, people use technology and media to support traditionally non-mediated

practices. In other words, social situations and experiences are shifted into new technology-mediated contexts. The idea of 'structural schizophrenia' defines the online domain in terms of the 'other' place. Castells' reasoning, introduces a conceptual split between online and offline spaces (however, both are influenced by global power relations). I intend to argue that in the context of Facebook social-networking websites, technology and personal practices are in a state of continuity and fusion where the Internet domain is not isolated from everyday life experiences. To support this statement it will be useful to highlight a distinction between mass media and new media. The online domain might be regarded as an anonymous setting where individuals can experiment with different self-presentations. In this context, it would be difficult to claim the validity and meaningfulness of collected data.

Thomson (1995) in *Media and Modernity* characterises the concept of 'mass communication' that is misleading in many ways. The first part of this expression implicates that a large number of people receives the particular product or information. While it might be relevant in the case of some films, magazines or television programmes, it does not reflect conditions of specialised media, like the periodical press whose audiences are relatively small. Moreover, for Thomson the word 'mass' bears connotation with homogeneous and passive group who dismiss the complexity of the process of interpretation. Similarly, the term 'communication' indicates that the exchange of information is dialogical. However, in the case of mass media, communication appears to be more like transmission, which are directed only one-way. There is a clear frontier between a producer and an audience, where the latter one has very small (if any) possibility to influence the content of communication. Surprisingly, Thomson (1995) in his accounts does not take into consideration the Internet domain. Nevertheless, Poster (1995) classifies the Internet as the new media to differentiate its nature from the mass media. In the second media age, the traditional producer/audience dichotomy is blurred because the character of communication becomes more like many-to-many. Internet users can be simultaneous producers and receivers of information that offers the possibility of commenting on events and expressing their own opinions. The Internet provides greater freedom of choice and gives some control over transmitting content. It does not require a large-scale organisation to create web-pages as everyone with basic technological skills might design their own blogs and websites. Consequently, Poster (1995) highlights more individualised character of new media where users become in many contexts active creators. Slevin (2000, p. 74) observes that levels of participation can be limited to some degree and depend upon particular circumstances. For example, some websites deliberately do not prompt the

exchange of information and limit the level of interactivity. First, Internet users have to choose to become the receivers of information by visiting and familiarising themselves with a website. Then, the creator can use so-called 'push technology' and keep sending information to the receiver. At the same time, the producer might limit the ability to publish users' opinions by setting up an Intranet so that only particular group of people can participate as producers. Finally, many web-pages provide a narrow possibility of feedback by supplying only an e-mail address for correspondence. Thus, the flow of information is directed only one-way towards the receiver.

Nevertheless, the Internet domain questions more than any other media the producer/ audience dichotomy (Slevin, 2000). It transforms the character of society by shifting the ways in which people live, work, study or interact with each other. The Internet is a part of everyday life experiences of millions of people. Being more specific, in 2009 the number of Internet users reached nearly two billion (Internet World Stats, 2009). Its dialogical nature reallocates the dynamic of communication, where participants can become both producers and recipients at the same time. In contrast to traditional mass communication, the Internet audience is engaged in searching for or navigating through information and has more power and freedom of choice. The Internet is a multifunctional space that enables working, studying or talking to friends at any time of the day or night. Boundaries between daily experiences and computer-mediated communication are fading away. It is not a 'structural schizophrenia' but the interrelationship and interactivity of different spheres of living (Dijk, 1999). The electronic media dialectically engages with everyday life, where social-networking websites became the primary medium of communication and networking (Gosling et. al, 2010). In *Being Digital*, Nicholas Negroponte (1995) predicts that the technological revolution will reshape people's existence, restructure cultural experiences and form new social networks. In his theory of 'bites and atoms' he argues that all forms of texts, images, sounds or data will be digitalised or in other words, turned into bites. Bites are the smallest units of information used by computers while atoms are the smallest parts of the material objects. Consequently, every physical item can be produced on the screen (for example, books, newspapers, radio or television). Negroponte's understanding of becoming digital is novel in a way that for him technology does not enhance everyday life practices, add to community or relationships among people, but is an integrated part of human reality. Technologies such as the Internet navigate our culture and change society by being closely linked with human experiences, daily activities and social communication.

Nevertheless, in the context of network society and social interaction it is significant to ask, what are the implications of the Internet for understanding the concept of community? The discussion is controversial as it encapsulates contradicting viewpoints. The debate does not only centre around 'virtual' versus 'real' experiences or boundaries between online and offline world. Above all, it involves arguments about the impact of online communities on 'real' life and vice versa. The Internet as the *space of flows* and *timeless time* offers new forms of attachments to communities that are, as Bell (2001, p. 95) observes, 'disembedding' and 'detraditionalised'. It means that people are no longer restricted by geographical position, time or local obligations. Moreover, they have freedom to belong to multiple communities in order to fulfil different needs and expectations.

4.5 The Internet and a sense of online community

From a sociological perspective, there are many explanations of what components construct a community. Contemporary usage of the expression might relate to physical features such as location, boundaries or neighbourhood and cultural commonalities that identify relationships among people, their interests, needs or identity traits (Cavanagh, 2007). Ferdinand Tonnies (1955) believed that the nature of human relationships influences the facet of society. In *Community and Association*, first published in 1887, he made a distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft.* The former one in literal translation means 'community' and defines realities where human interaction is personal, close and based on face-to-face contact. Social bonds are strong and regulated by common norms, loyalty, responsibilities and beliefs about appropriate fellowship. By contrast, the latter one ('society', 'association') describes social structures mostly linked with urbanisation and modernisation where people's relationships become distant, impersonal and instrumental. External rights, regulations and obligations maintain social cohesion. Moreover, self- interest and competition, rather than mutual values, guide human reasoning. Consequently, according to Tonnies, urbanisation changes community for the worse, but at the same time his concept of *Gemeinschaft* appears to be romanticised and depicted by nostalgia. *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* reflect differences between rural and urban living, whereas in everyday life these theoretical constructs are combined to different degrees. Nevertheless, identifying strengths and types of human relationships might be a promising criterion for examining online communities.

The shifting conditions of the contemporary world might also be perceived from Benedict Anderson's (1983) point of view that presents a nation as a community that is 'imagined' around socially created practices and symbols. The concept of imagination indicates that it is impossible for all members of community to know and interact with each other. Instead, individuals have to theorise and hypothesise their association and union. Symbols such as a flag or national anthem are meaningful representations of cultural integration and strengthen the sense of affinity. Moreover, community is 'limited' by frontiers beyond which lie another nation and at the same time, it is 'sovereign' by being independent and free to govern itself. Finally, within the community, despite inequalities that might exist among its members, people are united by the sense of 'comradeship' (Anderson, 1983, p. 7). Although Anderson (1983) uses the definition of 'imagined communities' to explain the idea of the nation-state, something that the Internet seems to question to some extent, one might argue that comparable communities exist within the online environment. Within this framework, as it is in a 'real' life, the notion of 'imagination' indicates that community exists because its members believe in it and built around it mutual practices. The Internet transforms the way in which people communicate or form groups as well as challenges physical features of community such as size, location and boundaries. What remains constant is that communities connote interaction and require shared cultural practices, both in online and offline environments.

Rheingold's vision of online community resembles Tonnies' (1955) traditional *Gemeinschaft,* a place where people gather to chat, exchange opinions, political views or to obtain advice. Rheingold's (1993) interpretation, based on his own experiences in the WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link), creates an idyllic vision of online society and at the same time depicts online community in opposition to real life. It can be perceived as a problematic attitude. Rheingold tries to persuade his readers that 'traditional' communities have 'disintegrated' (1993), because people of different races, religion, sexes are separated and treated unequally. In other words for Rheingold, within the offline environment, it might be difficult to build human associations or develop a sense of belonging. In his viewpoint, the online domain appears to be a model of a virgin society, a new terrain for constructing community based on democratic involvement and participation. It is a mythical or utopian vision in which the Internet can restructure 'traditional' communities. Thus, the online domain is placed in opposition to real life.

The WELL as one of the first online communities, was available mostly for computer hobbyists and hackers. WELL's organisation based on general subject areas known as

conferences, or using Rheingold's phraseology 'customized neighbourhood' (1993, p. 431), reflects members' interests and opens possibility to find individuals with similar hobbies. Nowadays, millions of people participate in Internet discussions or Internet forums, compared with a few thousand in early 1990s (Preece, 2000). The widespread expansion of the Internet influenced the nature of online communication, participation and interaction. Thus, Rheingold's observations, rooted in the first age of Internet studies appear to be irrelevant in the context of social networking websites. Shifting conditions of modern life require analysing the concept of online community in the light of current scenery.

For Rheingold (1993) the sense of community begins with mutual interests that might create other social attachments. Sharing ideas and experiences as well as network etiquette, a set of Internet's social conventions, classify WELL's interest-groups as communities. However, some of the online groups do not describe themselves in terms of community as they have a narrowly-defined purpose that does not facilitate sufficient interaction to create social bonds among people. By having clear boundaries that determinate membership, groups do not develop sufficient strengths of relationships (Bell, 2001). Then what defines an online community? Preece (2000) presents four features of the Internet community and provides a framework for understanding online associations. The first aspect relates to *people* (moderators, mediators and participants) who contribute to discussions, give opinions, provoke or simply observe. Then, individuals have a mutual *purpose* that gives reasons for the community to exist (for example exchanging information, discussing ideas, providing support or socialising with others). Moreover, *policies* provide guidance for joining a group, regulate online behaviour or specify a style of communication by drawing up rules of conduct. Finally, the *computer systems,* as the dominant medium of communication, facilitate a sense of attachment among its users. Social networking websites fall into these four-level systems, in general connecting people who have some sort of social ties, ranging from weak to very strong ones.

As Fernback (1997) argues, some of the Internet communities focusing upon their own self-existence and self-interests have no position in a larger social scene. Moreover, becoming a member of an online society requires a small investment of time and occasional participation. For Frenback, this is a shallow sense of belonging and superficial in its nature. Thus, one can argue that online communities do not the perform roles of a Gemeinschaft-like society. Moreover, people have started using the Internet and new technologies in ways not predicted by its inventors, going beyond limits of what is morally

or legally accepted. Online transgressions can range from acts that harm or hurt people, for example bullying or luring individuals into dangerous relationships, through stealing information such as credit card numbers to hacking government computers (Vitanza, 1999). Nevertheless, Rheingold treats the Internet as egalitarian space and ignores differences in power and status that might influence online as well as offline interactions. He presents the online environment as a promised land for people who wish to live in a more organic type of society and for individuals who look for opportunities to repair failures and avoid the chaos of 'traditional' societies. This perspective implicates questions about social impacts of online communities and networking sites.

The published research and the findings are often contradictory. Nie and Erbring (2002) pointed out that high amounts of time spent online decrease social interaction and participation in offline activities. On the other hand, Steinfield *et al.* (2008) explored the relationship between the intensity of Facebook use, psychological well-being and bridging social capital. The study established that greater intensity of Facebook use results in greater social capital benefits. Tools such as wall posting, tagging or messaging help to maintain weak ties and improve relationships. Moreover, Facebook decreases barriers of interaction for those with lower self-esteem. Subrahmanyam *et al.* (2008) have argued that young people use the Internet, particularly social networking websites to be in touch and reconnect with friends and family members. Emerging adults exploit online environments to reinforce diverse aspects of offline life (more discussion about research on social networks can be found in the next section of this chapter 'Gender, technology and the Internet'). It seems that study by Steinfield *et al.* (2008) and Subrahmanyam *et al.* (2008) question Rheingold's idea of duality and separation between online and offline communities.

One can refer contradictions in the research findings to the changing conditions of Internet studies. Barry Wellman (2004) describes the first stage of Internet studies (early 1990s) as a period of euphoria and excitement with new technology that was believed to revolutionise the world. Analysts had a tendency to focus on online phenomena in isolation from everyday life, assuming that only an online environment is adequate for understanding the Internet domain. Ignoring sociological accounts and theories, the Internet was ideologically disconnected from the offline community. The second stage of Internet studies (from mid 1990s) relates to the period when the Internet became more than a domain for scientists, hobbyists or hackers. The Internet was expanding and ordinary people started using it on a daily basis. In response to the changing conditions of everyday

life, Internet research focused upon measuring and displaying tendencies of Internet uses. As Wellman (2004) observes, governments, academics and organisations such as the Pew Internet & American Life Project or the World Internet Project have investigated the number of Internet consumers, examined geographic and gender differences in the Internet use or listed most popular Internet activities. In the third stage, with the development of social network software, one can observe a shift from documentation to analysis of the Internet connections. Social network software has two general functions. It can be regarded in terms of a 'corporate network program' (Wellman, 2004, p. 127) that allows members of particular companies accessing and exchanging information. However, currently social networks are above all 'friendship makers' (Wellman, 2004, p. 127) that connect people with similar interests, help individuals in building new and sustaining old ties as well as facilitating the expression of own opinions and judgements. Wellman dismisses the idea of duality and separation between online and offline environments, arguing that in the third age of Internet studies, online communities cannot be examined only through their own internal dynamic. The Internet is not a separate space or domain that competes with other social grounds and activities. Similarly, doing research in the Internet domain is not about challenging or undermining the principles of well-established academic paradigms. It is about developing new methods and skills to use technologies such as the Internet to follow and cope with post-modern conditions. Bearing in mind the context of technological and cultural transformations it appears to be reasonable to locate and understand online communities as a social space that is not an extension but a part of people's everyday lives.

4.6 Gender, technology and the Internet

The above discussion raises questions about issues such as reality and the online domain, fluidity and stability, authenticity and deception. However, there is also a growing concern about how gender issues intersect with the online environment. It is important to discuss and understand the complexity of gender codes in the context of technology and the Internet.

The rise and development of the Internet appears to be depicted by patriarchal factors and male dominance. The Internet emerged in 1969 out of the partnership among ARPA (Advanced Research Project Agency, an organization within the US Department of Defense) and American Universities. ARPANET was the first project that created a long-distance computer network. However, it seems that its origins are embedded in political,

military and industrial circumstances of the Cold War. The launch of Sputnik1 by the Soviet Union in 1957 caused astonishment and fear. More specifically, if the USSR was able to build the first Earth-orbiting artificial satellites, it could also be able to produce long-distance nuclear bombs. In response the US set up ARPA. Its mission was to maintain US military technology that is more sophisticated and to avoid technological revelations and surprises to the US. Among one of the most important projects supported by the agency was investigating how to interlink and facilitate the exchange of information between different computer networks (Slevin, 2000). For some feminist critics like Wajcman (1991) or van Zoonen (1994, 2002), the Internet remains a domain deeply rooted in masculine systems and values not only because of its historical backgrounds.

Wajcman in *Feminism Confronts Technology* (1991) points out that western culture constructs technological competence as a masculine skill. Technologies of 'service' such as microwaves, vacuum cleaners or washing machines are associated with the feminine realm. On the contrary, technologies of 'power' that require technical abilities are gendered as masculine. Nevertheless, democratisation and 'feminisation' of particular technology takes place when knowledge related to the technology's use and maintenance becomes less influential and significant. Then, as Wajcman (1991) claims, women's unwillingness to become technological might be socially assigned and supported by cultural codes of gender performance. People learn particular technological associations as a part of their gender identity. Men's identification with technological competence is an important component of their self-image. Women's disassociation from technological scene complements men's demand to maintain control. For example, the simple act of playing computer games influences the attitudes towards computers and widens the technological gap between genders.

Spender (1995) argues that the dominance of boys in playing computer games has its source not only in games' design or subject-matter. Boys are socialised to be risky, adventurous and brave, moreover, they have to prove their masculinity by challenging the unknown with no fear of consequences. On the other hand, girls feel uncomfortable in unfamiliar settings as their socialisation process stresses the importance of planning in advance and finding out what the consequences are before they take any action. Thus, the responses towards playing computer games are stereotypical and gendered. Boys play confidently, testing the rules and limits in order to fully understand them while girls engage with caution, follow the guidelines and avoid taking risks. As a result, girls become less active and their lack of confidence in playing computer games decreases further involvement in computing (Grundy, 1996). This gender 'symbolism', the meanings

according to which people construct their personal and social action, has implications for future educational and employment choices. Consequently, as van Zoonen (2002) observes, men dominate new information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the situation is not likely to change.

The number of women working in the IT sector in the US is small. In 2009, only 22.3% of women worked as network and computer systems administrators. 9.8% was employed as computer control programmers and operators and 13% as computer, automated teller and office machine repairers (http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/nontra2009.htm). Similar trends can be traced in Europe. For example in the UK, according to the Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2004), women contributed to 30% of IT operation technicians, 15% of IT managers and only 11% of IT planning professionals. Moreover, Griffiths and Moore (2010) report that in the UK, the number of women in the ICT sector significantly decreased falling from 27% in 1997 to 21% in 2004. These downward tendencies have been identified as the phenomenon of 'disappearing women'. Griffiths and Moore's (2010) study indicates that IT jobs require long working hours and involve a heavy workload. In addition, the IT sector sustains the environment of a masculine, malicious, sexist and chauvinistic culture (p. 99). There are many problems that women have to face when trying to mark their presence in the computing sciences. The difficulties do not relate only to feminine marginality within the IT environment, but to bringing feminist values and attitudes into IT workplaces. More women have to enter IT sectors and be involved in the construction and consumption of the Internet domain, but without losing their feminine identity or feminist values.

Nevertheless, for Dale Spender (1995) the Internet domain offers completely new gender contexts. Without denying that the Internet is a male territory, she claims that women have to become full members of the online society. Women ought to claim their place in creating and shaping the computer culture or they will be outsiders who have no access to the production of 'knowledge'. This feminine participation in the construction and consumption of the Internet content, contributes to the development of networks that are relevant to women's experiences and needs. Similarly, Sadie Plant (1998) presents femininity as a crucial element of the online environment by highlighting the relationships between women and techno-culture. Women should feel comfortable in the Internet domain as it is a zone of freedom, with no barriers or restrictions. Moreover, according to Plant (1998) it is a medium accustomed to women's rather than men's styles and approaches to life, providing opportunities to enhance communication, exchange of

information and possibility to stay in touch with family and friends. Authors like Spender (1995) or Plant (1998) try to shift the understanding of the Internet from the masculine terrain towards a feminine concept of peaceful communication. However, sexual/gender politics of the Internet deny any Utopian vision of the online domain as an uncomplicated, feminine environment. Online practices such as sexual harassment, bullying, flaming (posting nasty and harassing messages) or spreading pornographic images raise concerns about gender relations and gender patterns in the online domain. The story of the Webgrrls, one of the first female networking movements on the net, provides a good parallel. The group had to take a name 'grrls' rather than 'girls', because browsing the Internet for 'girls' generally provides sex-related websites (van Zoonen, 2002). In contrast, a search for 'boys' produces categories such as boys' bands, boys' gadgets, boys' clothing and fashion. Moreover, Shade (2004) argues that in the US despite gender equality in Internet access, one can observe a parity in Web activities. Men's favourite Web activities include reading news, obtaining political, financial or sports information, dealing with stock markets, bidding in online auctions, researching products' description or seeking information about their own hobbies and interests. On the other hand, women look for health or religious information or browse websites just for fun. Both men and women use the Internet as a means of social interaction through e-mails, chat groups and forums. Again men appear to join online groups whose subject matter is politics, sports or professional activities, while women focus upon online community groups or health and beauty discussions (Shade, 2004). Other academic studies examined gender differences in the patterns of online communication. The masculine style is found to be strong, self-orientated, sarcastic, often rude and aggressive. Feminine language patterns are typically characterised by a supportive and apologetic tone. Correspondingly, women and men value different communication ethics where flaming is justified and compatible with male standards (Herring, 1993). This is not to say that the Internet does not enhance women's perspectives or their range of action. One can argue that the Internet has been gradually feminised and that women increasingly become communicative users and consumers of the online environment. Website content is targeted at women by offering 'traditional' female topics such as health, beauty, shopping or parenting and builds personal relations by providing opportunities for interactive discussions. Moreover, many feminist groups, governmental institutions or academic circles have been using the Internet to extend their projects and propose new initiatives in order to achieve gender equality (Shade, 2004). For example, the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW) develops online seminars and discussions that provide

opportunity to network and exchange information or experiences with other members from all over the world (http://www.un-instraw.org/).

It seems that organisation of the Internet environment can be explained as a masculine as well as feminine space. The statements for masculinity are grounded in the fact that men dominate most of the ICT sectors, thus, men are responsible for the production of the Internet's content and design. The assumed feminine side is visible in the communication and networking features of the Internet that, for some feminists, are in line with female nature (van Zoonen, 2002). Nevertheless, there are some claims that ignore gender differences and sexual politics of the Internet by posting the Net as a gender-neutral zone that brings the possibility of movement beyond binary oppositions between masculinity and femininity. For some academics, the online domain has the potentials to remove boundaries set by physical bodies and to provide a 'pre-Oedipal space of no fixed identity' (Diamond, 1997, p. 83). This concept of technophilia, strong enthusiasm about new technology that implies the complete assimilation of the human body with the design of the machine/computer, is an important indicator of cyber-feminism. Donna Haraway's '*A Cyborg Manifesto*' (1991), is a crucial book that provides new perspectives on the politics of cyber-feminism. The concept of cyborg, besides drawing attention to the physical modifications and fusion between biology and technology, is an original metaphor for philosophical and political reflections. It is a symbol, which undermines conventional patterns of reasoning about gender, race, class and sexuality. Haraway, like Butler (1990), tries to eliminate the supposed naturalness of particular binary demarcations by blurring the lines between 'self' and 'other', 'inside' and 'outside'. Haraway also wishes to remove the distinction between nature and culture, because there is no clarity of what is natural and what is constructed. For her, nature is the interplay of both human production that is often patriarchal in its character and its environmental mechanisms. Cyborg, as 'the hybrid of the machine and organism' (Haraway, 1991, p. 291) represents the need for stretching traditional, social and cultural perspectives. Haraway (1991) points out the necessity of seeing and thinking as cyborgs, from both sides, machine and organism, because it gives the possibility of understanding similarities, differences and contradictions of both viewpoints. '*A Cyborg Manifesto*' is a call for breaking the boundaries between technology and human; between men and women.

The ideology of cyber-feminism is also encapsulated in the Internet activities that question traditional gender identities. For example, for some (Turkle, 1995) games such as MUDs created a secure place to experiment with gender and sexuality by bringing together

motives of fantasy and reality. They offered (at least in theory) an escape from offline gendering. For van Zoonen (2002) cyber-feminism is overly optimistic in its approaches because online domain is not ideologically innocent. Kranzberg's first law that 'technology is neither good nor bad, nor is it neutral' (1986) brings some kind of philosophical concern and highlights the problematic character of the Internet environment. Women and men are positioned differently in relation to technology. However, it is crucial to understand that science, including computing science, is not masculine but has been embedded in a masculine character by the politics of gender. Cyber-feminism appears to ignore the unequal nature of the Internet and technology. Questioning traditional gender assumptions and representations by creating a selection of online imaginary identities is ironical rather than feminist (van Zoonen, 2002). Interestingly, as I argued above, social networking websites became an integral part of everyday life and serve as a medium to connect with family and friends. From the cyber-feminist point of view, it might resemble the assimilation of the human mind and body with the social networking software. Nevertheless, in the case of the social network, people have to represent themselves in a stable and accurate manner, as colleagues would recognise an alter ego and question atypical profiles and behaviours. However, would social networking sites be themselves gendered? It depends upon their technological design and above all upon their users.

Research on the social network in the context of gender appears to indicate that the percentage of female users is higher than male users. For example, in the case of Facebook in January 2010, women constituted to over 56% of the US Facebook population and this trend remains stable over the time. Moreover, in the US the use of Facebook among women is rising faster than among men in almost every age category (http://www.insidefacebook.com/2010/01/04/december-data-on-facebook%E2%80%99s-us-growth-by-age-and-gender-beyond-100-million/). Other studies involving MySpace on friending and gender found that in general, both sexes have a majority of female friends. Moreover, on MySpace websites the majority of men and women mark females as 'Top' friends (Thellwall, 2008).

It indicates that with increased access to the online content, the Internet becames less technical and less scientific in its nature. Consequently, one might argue that through the democratisation or even 'feminisation' of the social networking websites, the understanding of the Internet as a masculine domain disappears. On the other hand, the popularity of social networks among women could be explained through supposed analogy between qualities of the new medium with traditional, feminine attributes such as sociability or gossiping. Thus, researchers of the social networking services often

investigate similarities and differences in the patterns of use among women and men. It seems that despite women's dominance among social network users, their Web activities remain gendered. Research by Jones *et al*. (2008) offers insight into the choice of topics among MySpace weblog writers. Females are more likely to write personal blogs about family, romantic relationships, friendships and health than male users. Moreover, Strano's (2008) investigation into self- presentation through Facebook pictures indicates that women are more likely to keep up-to-date profile photographs. They also tend to choose pictures that emphasise their physical attractiveness, cheerfulness and out- going personality. A Harvard study on Twitter (2009) based on a sample of 300,542 participants found that women represent majority of Twitter users (55%), but men have 15% more followers than women. An average woman is 25% more likely to follow a man than a woman. Moreover, the average man is 40% more likely to follow another man rather than a woman (Heil and Piskorski, 2009). Findings indicate that male users create the most-read content while female postings are less compelling. Finally, research by Salimkhan *et al.* (2010) suggests that stereotypical gender norms remain applicable to social network websites. Data expose that males tend to portray themselves as strong and powerful while females present themselves as physically attractive and sociable. The limitation of this study is that results are exclusively based on focus group discussions among twenty-three active users of MySpace without analysing or taking into consideration the actual content of MySpace profiles. Nevertheless, participants observed that women put a lot of effort into constructing profiles to impress others, especially by adding pictures that demonstrate physical beauty. There is a contradiction here as displaying sexualised images can bring a social reward in the form of attention and positive comments from other users as well as carries the possibility of being labelled as morally wrong. Similarly, participants noticed that men feel pressurised to present physical attractiveness, but at the same time, both men and women demonstrate discomfort with men's concern over own appearance. Will these research findings be consistent with the present investigation into hegemonic masculinity? Salimkhan *et al.* (2010) examination of gender identity focuses upon aspects of physical attractiveness, but ignores cultural spheres such as interests, daily activities or individual experiences. It is more an initial attempt to define whether social networking websites create new contexts for understanding gender. The current research is in-depth study on masculinity where the online domain, as an integral part of everyday life, becomes a setting for investigating gender issues.

4.7 Conclusions

There is a wide range of possibilities of how to think about the online environment, computers and technology. Thus, this chapter has discussed the Internet in relation to concepts of reality, identity, community and gender. The initial exploration of boundaries between 'real life' and 'virtual life' brought up philosophical issues of human experiences in a post-modern world. According to Baudrillard or Putman's argumentation, new media and communication technologies placed people in a simulated reality where individual experiences became indistinguishable from virtual reality. These perspectives laid foundations for addressing the problem of authenticity in relation to online identity. The early research on the Internet (Turkle, 1995) marked the online domain as a space for experimenting with identities. The Internet self, in these early accounts, was believed to be multiple and fluid as well as constructed by online rather than offline practices. Nevertheless, nowadays, especially in the context of social network websites, research findings show that users present themselves in an accurate and stable manner (e.g. Gosling et al., 2010, Cheung, 2000, Jones *et al*., 2008). Similarly, Giddens (1991) suggested that in the complex conditions of every-day life, which can place people between dichotomous meanings of local, national and international reality, the most fundamental element is the ability to create a stable and integrated personality.

Next, the debate shifts towards the notion of online communities and raises important questions about social relations in the context of space of flows and timeless time. As Castells (2000) pointed out, people are no longer restricted by geographical position, time or local obligations. They have freedom to belong to multiple communities in order to fulfil different needs and expectations. Consequently, it is argued that individuals use technology and social networking services to support traditional non-mediated practices. Social situations and experiences are transferred into new technology- mediated contexts. Moreover, this chapter discussed the concept of community from different ideological perspectives (Tonnies, 1955, Anderson, 1983 and Rheingold, 1993) to draw a conceptual and critical framework for understanding the Internet as a social space.

The final part of this chapter explores an important theme of gender in relation to technology. The Internet domain is not ideologically innocent because stereotypical codes of gender performance are embedded into technological development. Nevertheless, Plant (1998) or Spender (1995) claimed that the Internet is a feminine domain, accustomed to women's rather than men's approaches to life. Moreover, cyber-feminists posted the Net as

a gender-neutral zone that brings the possibility to move beyond binary oppositions between masculinity and femininity (Haraway, 1997). However, research findings (Jones *et al*., 2009, Strano, 2008, Salimkhan *et al.* 2010), in relation to social networks, seem to demonstrate that gender binaries are still inscribed into the nature of technology.

Part Two

The Research Process

This part of the study presents a research process and its complexity that requires careful planning and rigorous data collection. Chapter 5 explains the research design, justifies the choice of particular research methods as well as examines ethical issues in the context of online investigation. Chapter 6 describes the process of data collection and illustrates methods of analysing the collected research materials.

Personal standpoints influence and shape the character of every study in terms of the chosen paradigm and methods, affecting researcher's relationships with participants and the content of analysis. A positivist approach assumes that knowledge is objective and tangible, able to capture 'truth' and 'facts' about the social world or social behaviours. However, this study presents knowledge as subjective, personal and relativistic what imposes on the researcher a requirement to engage with social arrangements through the lens of individual perspectives. This research subjectivity does not impede or deny the usefulness and value of the research per se because academic exploration and evaluation contribute to the intellectual practices of the day.

Chapter 5
Design of the Study

5.1 Title

The Consumption of Hegemonic Masculinity: Understanding Gender Patterns Through Computer-Mediated Communication.

5.2 Abstract

Gilbert in '*The Disposable Male*' (2006) presented the modified theory of asymmetry between patriarchy and matriarchy. He argued that in the twenty-first century women have disempowered men to such degree that masculinity is in crisis. According to his theory, nowadays, it is a man who feels marginalised and victimised. Gilbert (2006) pointed out, that boys grow up learning that traditional images of manhood such as competitiveness, domination, assertiveness or ambition are morally wrong. Furthermore he argues that masculine instincts inherited and innate are to some degree undesirable in contemporary western societies. Thus, men are fighting against their own biology and have no motivation or encouragement to build their careers or family life. However, genetic predispositions do not seem to explain sufficiently themes of gender identities. Justifications based on ideologies of Darwin's natural selection might be as convincing as questionable.

Moreover, one could easily generalise stereotypical and simplistic explanations about masculinity and femininity. However, it is important to realise that, as Connell (2002) stated, reality is not dichotomous, is not always about objective, realistic and independent man versus subjective, imaginative and dependant woman. For the purpose of this study, the concept of gender is examined through the lens of multiplicity of masculinities and femininities. This project is an analysis of masculine choices that relate to consumption of specific behaviours, attitudes and norms, undertaken by participants in order to establish contemporary understanding of masculinity.

Moreover, Stephen Whitehead (2004) claimed that gender is socially constructed rather than genetically programmed. In other words, biological aspects such as hormones, genes or DNA cannot determine masculine or feminine behaviours. For him, only social and environmental issues establish human identity. Thus, 'masculinity is not something men are born with but something they aspire to' (S. Whitehead, 2004, p.5). Similarly, Connell (2002) pointed out that both womanhood and manhood are constructed not only by social

norms but also by people's individual response to the social life. Consequently, this research also raises the issue of creating a very personal picture of masculine self in the context of everyday life.

5.3 Aims and Objectives

1. To obtain a contemporary understanding of masculinities;

2. To address cultural constructions of masculinity by exploring how manhood is 'consumed' and experienced by men;

3. To understand and analyse the relationship between men's social self-representation and individual perception on masculinity;

4. To introduce and test research that is located on the Facebook Networking Website so as to further develop the existing models of studying gender;

5.4 Research Questions

1. How far do socially created conceptions of masculinity influence the construction of men's daily self-presentation?

   - What representations of masculinity are consumed and sustained by men?

   - What activities, interests and roles are presented as appropriate to be consumed by men?

   - Do current perspectives on manhood confirm or challenge gender stereotypes and generalisations? How?

2. How far do men produce their own meanings of masculinity?

   - How do men feel about themselves within contemporary culture?

   - What are the personal, social and cultural obstacles that concern men?

3. What is the relationship between the consumption of gender norms and men's individual understanding of their own masculinity?

- Are there any significant differences in the shape of social self-representation and personal conceptualisation of masculinity? If so, how might these be understood?

- In what ways does a social conception on manhood construct an individual understanding of gender?

4. To what extent is the context of Facebook profiles as well as the use of computer-mediated communication accurate and applicable to the social framework of this project?

- How can well-established research methods of studying gender be adapted to fit an online environment?

- What ethical issues should address the analysing of Online Social Networking Websites?

5.5 Theoretical framework

Within this study, the concept of consumption relates to the process in which individuals assimilate specific gender meanings through an interaction with different socialisation agents (for example family, peer group, school or mass media). Consumption is classified as an integral part of socialisation next to the other two components, namely production and reproduction of beliefs and values. The term production relates to conditions where the ruling class, through institutions, legal systems or media, popularises certain ideas that reinforce existing social structures and economic system. The term reproduction defines the micro level of individual actions (such as gender-stereotyped upbringing or consumption choices) that are being influenced by the dominant ideas to maintain an unequal status quo. At the same time, it would be a limited perspective to neglect the possibility that people have their own understanding of reality. Thus, the knowledge accumulated through the process of socialisation is also a subject of an individual reflexivity. Two perspectives, social and personal, interact with each other to varying degrees, creating a complex network of relationships. The Figure 5.5 below illustrates the process of developing a concept of self, where the theories of both Erving Goffman (1959, 1963) (see Chapter 4) and Jean Baudrillard (1981) (see Chapter 3) have been combined for the discussion of identity.
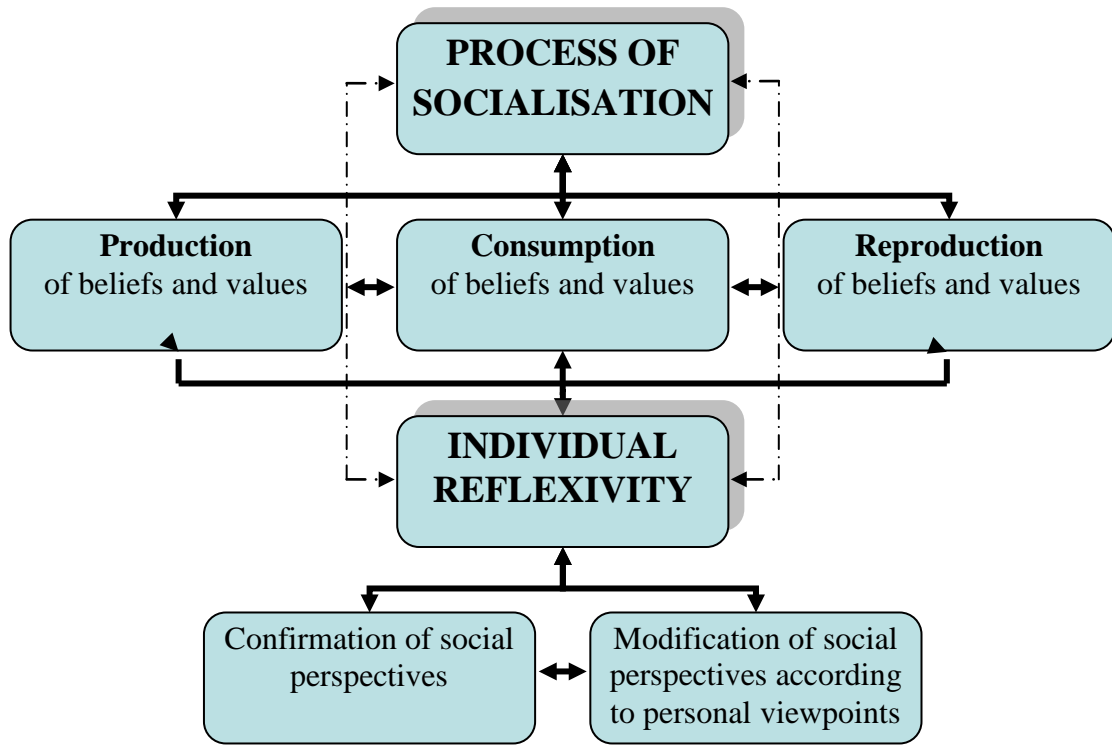
Figure 5.5 Theoretical framework

A person's understanding of himself/herself consists of 'social-self' and 'individual-self' (Goffman, 1959). Social-self is established according to public norms and standards, whereas individual-self relates to the personal understanding of one's own identity. At the same time, consumption of particular commodities, activities or beliefs symbolically communicates how people understand themselves (Baudrillard, 1981). In order to obtain a complex view on contemporary masculinities, this study has to acknowledge to what extent individuals consume socially created representations of manhood. In other words, the research examines whether modern men attempt to maintain social codes of gender performance or try to confront the forms of traditional masculine behaviour with an individual perception of manhood. The project focuses upon exploring what parts of the hegemonic masculinity men have consumed in a context of Facebook profiles in order to maintain their social-self but at the same time the study recognises ideological aspects that underpin men's personal understandings of manhood.

Another issue of this research, that creates various methodological challenges, is studying masculinity in the online environment. The fieldwork of this project is entirely located in the Internet domain that is understood as another real-life setting of communication. The decision whether to restrict boundaries of the study to online communication or employ both offline and online data collection depends upon the research conceptual framework, goals and the Internet environment that is being investigated (Hine, 2005). Facebook social

networking profiles that have been selected as the focus material of this study are not isolated from offline activities. Rather, social situations and experiences are shifted into this technology- mediated context. In the culture of technological convergence (Hine, 2005), the multiple media intersect within the same device and reorganise the spatiality of social relations, communication and thoughts. For that reason, offline communication with participants would not contribute to obtaining new sets of information. It has to be pointed out that doing research entirely in the Internet domain is not about challenging or undermining the principles of well- established academic research methods (Hine, 2008). This approach offers the possibility to develop techniques and skills to use new technologies to explore both the consumption of masculine norms and individual experiences of being a man.

5.6 The nature of inquiry

Cohen *et al* (2007) stated that, there are three paradigms shaping the structure of the research. First normative (quantitative) offers the impersonal, objective interest to the observed and measured reality, where hypothesising is desired in order to test concepts in a medium or large-scale variety, within a large group such as a community or institution. The second interpretive (qualitative), is constructed on the involvement of the researcher to gain the meaning of the situation in a small-scale investigation where individual opinions create the perception of the events. Finally, critical orientation is interested in the ideological critique of power or oppression of the studied phenomenon both by exercising social and individual views. For Cohen *et al* (2007), those three approaches ought to emphasise the importance of objectivity, where the researcher's subjective view can significantly influence qualitative or critical paradigm. Bogdan and Biklen observed that qualitative and critical researchers have to 'objectively study the subjective states of their subjects' (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007, p. 37).

The academic community of natural and social sciences often stresses the importance of unbiased and objective research (Sklar, 2000). However, philosophically, Kuhn (1962) has shown that what appears to be a 'fact' in science rests upon the system of known and unknown influences that are applicable to a researcher's understanding of the studied phenomena. Scientific theories, cultural world-views, individual emotions, experiences, social norms or media can contribute to one's understanding of the research process. Consequently, researchers themselves, being a part of society, are subjects to political, philosophical or ideological assumptions. Similarly, research data, whether quantitative or

not, can be manipulated (consciously or unconsciously) in various directions; for example through the choice of words, numbers, charts or graphs. The researcher selects a frame of interpretation and specific language to describe data. This language can be absolute, positive or negative depending upon the researcher's feelings (Barns and Bloor, 1982). Thus, the research inquiry is deeply embedded in the individual reasoning that to some extent is influenced by political authorities and by ideologies of the ruling class. Moreover, knowledge is not absolute as our understanding of the world is constantly changing. The fundamental theories of one generation become devalued and rejected by succeeding generations. People evaluate their knowledge and beliefs in the context of historical, social and cultural changes, posing new kinds of questions, which can only be answered by producing new theories and ideas (Kuhn, 1962). This indicates that we cannot talk about objectivity because the concepts we use to understand a particular social and cultural phenomena are in constant transition.

It has to be pointed out that these doubts about the research objectivity do not impede or deny the usefulness and value of the research per se because academic exploration and evaluation contribute to the intellectual practices of the day. The research goal is to provide possible answers to the articulated questions, but claiming the answers to be the 'final' truth is hardly rational (Sklar, 2000). Current theories often contradict each other, are inconsistent and what for one seems to be an unacceptable hypothesis for others becomes a logical theory. For example, there are various explanations as to why gender differences exist. Some explanations tend to emphasise the influence of biology and variation between the brains of males and females. Other justifications focus upon social and environmental influences. For that reason, it is difficult to declare that there is any absolute truth or to claim that this research is objective in its nature. In addition, this is not to question the plausibility of for example Newtonian mechanics or Einstein's general relativity or to argue that these might be replaced by other alternatives (Sklar, 2000). The field of social sciences creates a space for interesting and reasonable relativistic claims, which might not necessarily be applicable to the framework of the natural sciences. Here, the core idea is to situate cultural relativism in the context of the notion of knowledge.

There is also another relative facet of knowledge. The image below indicates that the act of perception is not fixed because it is the picture of a woman's head facing left or a man playing a saxophone facing right. Thus, within a single field of vision, there are different possibilities of seeing and analysing the image.

Figure 5.6 Visual illusion (adapted from Google)

Most people have their preferred understanding of reality that appears to be more natural. Initially they need to invest some effort to bring out the other interpretation and to see the image from both sides at once. At this point, one's basic assumptions might change, a 'gestalt shift' might occur radically changing the line of reasoning. However, in the end everyone will accept one of a number of perspectives (Selden and Widdowson, 1993). Then, human knowledge is a subject to a particular point of view. Similarly, a choice of scientific paradigm locates the researcher within a particular framework of thought and its methodology.

This project is rooted in the critical approach, which as Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) argued, helps to explore human approaches, perceptions and personal data better than the quantitative analysis, as its character helps to construct and understand social relations and people's individual views. At the same time, it offers quite a different perspective to the qualitative paradigm by going beyond the empathetic understanding of the situation. The critical inquiry questions the existing status quo, currently held assumptions, values and social structures. The nature of this research requires an investigation of men's social-self that is established according to collective standards, as well as an identification of men's individual perception of gender identity. Therefore, the situation needs to be defined and understood in the context of everyday life in order to reveal unequal relations aggregated within the social world. The main objective of this research is to move beyond the critical thought toward the critical practice.

However, Hammersley (2000) criticised the framework of reasoning, where the desire of social change is the main drive of the research process. For him, the aim of academic investigation is to obtain knowledge for its own sake. He argues that a critical approach excessively depends upon a set of previous assumptions about the society that is being studied. It relies on beliefs that class-ridden capitalist societies are shaped by the dominant views of the upper class that sustain and reproduce different kinds of inequalities (e.g. financial, patriarchal or racial). For Hammersley (rightly or wrongly) these are one-dimensional statements about the nature of society, statements that 'are neither common-sense nor well-established on the basis of empirical research' (Hammersley, 2000, p.136). In other words, for him the principles of critical theory operate on the grounds of personal ideological standpoints rather than academic evidence. First, it seems that he ignores the possibility that empirical research can also be influenced by personal judgements. Secondly, as Kuhn (1962) would argue, we cannot assume that the research process has to be cumulative in its nature and build on the previous achievements and hypothesis of academic community. Theory might emerge from the collected data rather than *vice versa*.

Nevertheless, transformation of unequal gender hegemonies rather than a pure search for knowledge is the main goal of this research. The critical orientation is interested in the ideological critique of power and the oppression of the studied phenomena by identifying the 'false consciousness'. Its intention is to unmask social injustice where the researcher's objectivity and neutrality are replaced by the evaluation of power relations (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006). Within this study, the critical approach identifies how society reproduces stereotypical assumptions about gender. It also explains how to transform critique into practice to apply the knowledge and understanding of the problem into sensible action toward gender equality. The research questions described above have arisen from the burning need to make the world a better place without lies, illusions or false consciousness. Widening our common understanding and knowledge of gender issues ought to develop a new framework of social practice and serve as a guide to effective action not only for academic community, but also for individual self-reflection. This work has grown from the need to engage with both the academic community and with the public. Exposing and challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about social worlds can transform unequal facets of the existing status quo. Thus, this research and its social nature will go beyond the principle of knowledge for its own sake.

5.7 Research setting: Facebook Social Networking Websites

Thinking about the Internet as a research site raises questions about how to define and frame boundaries of the online fieldwork. While information technology extends the scope of research theories and methods, it does not indicate that any given media delivers an adequate concepts or meaningful fieldwork structures. Similarly, it is not a straightforward decision to identify an appropriate context within the online environment that could be applicable to our own research objectives (Hine, 2005). In order to select an appropriate field site (in either an online or an offline context) it is necessary to understand the characteristics of social interactions as well as the cultural framework of the investigated environment.

Within this project, Facebook accounts are identified as another real-life setting for researching gender and masculinities. Facebook is a social networking service that has experienced exceptional growth since its creation in February 2004. First, launched as a Harvard intra-campus socialising website, Facebook quickly expanded to other universities, high school campuses and commercial organisation. Finally, in September 2006, it became accessible to everyone who is over 13 years old and has a valid email account (Zhao *et al.* 2008). Nowadays, it boasts more than one million users all over the world, out of which 50% log on to Facebook on a daily basis (http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics).

The Facebook experience focuses upon constructing an individual home page and requires the complex articulation of users' identity. On personalised profiles, users can present themselves in a number of ways, from displaying photographic albums to creating narrative descriptions of personal interests and activities. Facebook accounts also provide an interactive space where people write notes, exchange comments and share opinions with one another. At the same time, privacy settings allow users to define their potential audience. Usually, only Facebook friends can read each other's posts, view photos or provide feedback. It is possible to cover certain information from certain people or block particular users from checking the account. This social networking service is less anonymous than for example Internet dating sites because in general Facebook friendships map out offline social connections (Zhao *et al.* 2008). These unique features of Facebook accounts create a rich environment for the self-reflexivity and offer the possibility to examine the consumption of socially desirable and undesirable representations of manhood.

It has to be pointed out again that, the present study supports the *extended real-life hypothesis*, (Gosling *et al.* 2010) which in opposition to *idealised virtual-identity hypothesis*, assumes that people, through Facebook Social Networking profiles, distribute their real self. Social networks such as Facebook, Bebo or My Space do not provide anonymity and there is a rather small tendency to use it for meeting new people. The purpose of Facebook is to sustain already existing friendships rather than generating new relationships. Thus, individuals have to represent themselves in a stable and accurate manner, as colleagues would recognise an alter ego and question atypical profiles and behaviours. Friends leave comments on other users' profiles by writing for example a Wall post. Consequently, it is difficult to conceal one's personality and character (Zhao *et al.* 2008).

5.8 Research procedures

For the purposes of the present study, a Facebook account was set up in order to create appropriate conditions for thoughtful communication between the researcher and participants. In the first phase, the aim was to become a part of participants' social space in order to research men's activities, interests and self- presentation in the relatively public context of the Facebook platform. The content analysis of Facebook profiles illustrated which gender codes are consumed by men and underpin men's social identities. It has to be clarified that within this study, Facebook interactions were seen as not much different to other, offline forms of sociability. In other words, this research did not only document the nature of human behaviour in online settings because its theoretical perspective assumed that the presentation of the 'Facebook- self' is analogous to one's 'offline-self' (Gosling *et al.* 2010). Unlike Chat Rooms, MUDs or dating sites, Facebook is not an anonymous setting, because it reflects offline relationships. It is used to sustain already existing social ties and its environment might prompt users to highlight their conformity with generally accepted norms. Thus, there is no vital difference between Facebook and the offline environment because both locations, to some extent, push people to reproduce normative social orders (Cavanagh, 2007).

The second stage of the project involved sending via Facebook e-mail open-ended questionnaires (see Appendix D) to all participants in order to explore their individual perception on masculinity. The lack of face-to-face interaction might pose questions whether the Internet-mediated research, based only on a written communication, can

produce satisfactory data (Kivitis, 2005). For that reason, it was crucial to create and maintain a thoughtful environment, which encouraged more detailed and honest answers. In this study, setting up a friendly research relationship through mutual disclosure created an appropriate context for personal and sincere interaction. Consequently, another principle of this study was to avoid a strict research context and to generate more friendly relationships that prompted honest interaction with participants to help increase the validity and richness of data. The process of 'mutual disclosure' is a key factor for setting up personal relations (Kivitis, 2005, Mann and Stewart, 2000). Here, it began with posting on a research Facebook Wall information about the project's objectives, methods and ethics. In some research cases, participants did not need to have knowledge about the researcher's social background or identity. However, participants within this study, by sharing their Facebook profiles with the researcher, revealed elements of their personal lives. Similarly, the research profile could not be left blank. Respondents had to have sense of researcher's age, work, interests or hobbies. This phase of 'mutual disclosure' enabled participants to obtain a better understanding of the research and facilitated personal and friendly contacts. At the same time, respondents were assured that the researcher, under no circumstances, would post comments on their walls/pictures or attempt to communicate with their Facebook friends (unless it is another participant of this project).

Potential participants were invited to familiarise themselves with the research Facebook profile. Initially its content was located in the public domain and visible to anyone on the Internet. However, only those interested in participating in the project were asked to send researcher a 'friend request'. This put the decision whether to join the project entirely into respondents' hands and increased the probability that any potential drop-outs would self-identify before the process of data collection was begun (Cohen *et al*., 2008). All 'friend requests' were accepted at the time when the targeted number of people reported a willingness to participate in the research. However, beforehand, the profile's privacy settings were changed from 'everyone' to 'friends only' so that all information was shared only between the researcher and participants, thereby excluding a wider audience. This step was also undertaken to ensure that participants' names were visible only to the researcher and other participants.

At this point, the informed consent form (see appendix A) was sent to all participants via Facebook e-mail. Participants e-mailed them back to the researcher with an electronic signature. This method of obtaining informed consent appeared to be reliable because logging on a personal Facebook account is possible only through providing a private

password. This ensured that the consent form was in fact returned by the particular participant. The problematic issue was that in the context of computer-mediated communication, it is easier to conceal one's age. According to the Age of Legal Capacity (Scotland) Act (1991), participants should be 18 years or over to be able to give consent. In the case of younger people, the consent should be obtained from the adults responsible for youngsters. However, the sampling procedure used in the current research overcame this problem. Participants were recruited among undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University of Glasgow, which automatically excluded individuals under 18.

Finally, to comply with ethical requirements, participants were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time and without any consequences or prejudices (Cohen *et al*., 2007). Withdrawal was possible by deleting the researcher from the Facebook list of friends. This procedure is quite simple and participants were given full information on how to 'unfriend' the researcher. It has to be highlighted, that methods used for examining any social group and its interactions ought to be adjusted to the social and cultural context in which the study takes place (Hine, 2005). It depends upon the individual researcher to decide whether an online investigation is a better option than more traditional methodology to answer his or her research questions.

5.9 Sampling

Within this project, the sampling goals were as follows: (a) volunteers; (b) males over 18 years of age; (c) active users of Facebook Social Networking Websites who communicate on their profiles mostly in the English language. By an active user, it was meant a person who logs on to Facebook at least once a week. Eighty-nine participants (N=89) were recruited via the University of Glasgow students' WebMail. The invitation explaining the aims of the research and providing instructions on how to take a part in the project was forwarded to all undergraduate and postgraduate students (see Appendix B and C). It has to be pointed out that the University of Glasgow environment brings together a cross-cultural population with diverse social characteristics that provide an opportunity for analysing different perspectives on manhood. At the same time, using non-probabilistic and volunteer sampling may reduce the generalisability of the findings (Cohen *et al*., 2008). However, it is not perceived as a problematic issue because the conceptual framework of this research did not require the sample to be representative of a wider population. The study aimed to focus upon exploring perspectives on manhood in the social context of

Facebook profiles and in the context of more private, one-to-one communication between the researcher and participant. Of course, posting an announcement on the University of Glasgow WebMail was likely to select a particular type of users; middle-class and well-educated (which will exclude experiences of men from outside the academia or men who opted out from having a Facebook profile).

The inductive nature of this research demonstrated high validity where volunteer participation contributed to gaining greater honesty and sincerity of responses. However, one might argue that data gathered through computer-mediated communication can pose some concerns about the validity and accuracy of the presented subject matters. The online domain might be regarded as an anonymous setting where individuals can experiment with different self-presentations. In this context, it is difficult to relate collected data to offline environment and defend its correctness, usefulness and meaningfulness. Nevertheless, Facebook identities are mostly rooted in offline relationships that limit the extent to which users can change their personalities, switch gender or exploit their fantasy characters. Facebook is a non-anonymous setting where people make identity claims that are accurate with their offline selves (Gosling *et al*., 2007, Zhao *et al*., 2008). As Mann and Stewart (2000) point out, online researchers have to believe in the truthfulness and honesty of their participants, just as researchers in offline settings.

5.10 Methods

5.10.1 Non-participant observation with content analysis

As Facebook is not an anonymous setting, it might prompt users to act outside of their own personality in order to satisfy social expectations. Goffman's (1959) work on the self-presentation indicates that individuals perform their behaviour on an everyday life basis to reflect demands that society puts on one's character. Similarly, in the case of Facebook, there is a social front (friends) with a particular kind of expectations and standards that relate to one's appearance, behaviours or manners. Facebook users might attempt to present their gender identity to fit these well-established social contexts and non-participant observation with content analysis enabled to explore consumption of men's everyday behaviours, practices and activities.

It has to be explained that within this study, non-participant observation overlapped with content analysis. Put differently, there was no clear distinction between the two methods,

as the researcher became a part of participants' social space in order to observe their ordinary setting and at the same time to examine participants' textual conversations, their photographs and personal information. The researcher adopted a role of non-participant observer who recorded men's behaviours and interactions, standing detached from the investigated environment. However, in the context of Facebook, the lack of physical presence indicated that understanding of others had to be negotiated by the interpretation of textual and photographic materials rather than interpretation of oral and face-to-face interactions. Thus, content analysis of profiles became a starting point for establishing a panoramic view on what parts of hegemonic masculinity are consumed in contemporary culture. This method apart from demonstrating general social perspectives on gender roles also exposed frequencies of occurrence of particular themes.

Coding schemes were developed to cover four main categories that can be found on each Facebook profile, namely: Wall, Info, Photos and number of Friends. The researcher adopted the non-intrusive role of observer, noting down behaviours, situations and factors by entering a tally mark in an appropriate coding schedule. This very systematic approach enabled generating numerical data and highlighting the importance of particular patterns and trends. Contextual categories and coding units of analysis were determined by the research objectives and focus upon capturing of how men portray their gender identities and what elements of men's self-representation are avoided in a social context. Collecting and segregating information about everyday life-behaviours, attitudes and roles enabled to uncover generally accepted norms of masculine behaviour. The problematic element was that Facebook profiles are not a static or fixed domain. Data was not recorded in a permanent form and could change over time as users added and removed posts. Consequently, in order to make data available for checking, the profile pages (including Wall, Info, Pictures and Number of friends) were saved on an external hard drive. Then, it was possible to verify newly obtained information through reanalysis (for more discussion on coding and categorisation see point 5.10).

5.10.1.1 Comment Wall

It is an interactive space on every user's profile page where friends publicly exchange comments and messages that are visible on the account unless the user decides to remove them. Often, wall discussions accumulate a large quantity of information that is obtainable in the form of electronic files. In other words, it is possible to scroll down through the

posted messages to analyse previous social activities (Salimkhan *et al.*, 2010). In the case of Facebook, communication is not reduced to a simple, written exchange. The comment wall can include posts in the form of other multimedia such as emoticons, pictures, videos or songs. This part of the study focused upon both the Wall's narrative and its visual content.

Analysing users' textual interactions that are encapsulated in the context of their social environment can be extremely revealing. This is to say that Facebook Wall interactions are shaped by a user's individual assumptions and ideological messages that for example might demonstrate their patriarchal or feminist values and beliefs. At the same time, there might be issues of ambiguities and misunderstandings. Facebook texts can be understood as a system of signs that exists among the literal words. Drawing on semiotics, language is not obvious and a clear medium through which the writer/producer of the message can express a cohesive 'reality' and 'truth' because there are always meanings that lie beneath the surface of text (Selden and Widdowson, 1993). On the other hand, the reader is free to attach any understanding to the text depending upon his/her social, cultural, political or historic perspectives. There might be a dominant interpretation but no text can be limited to a single, unequivocal explanation (Hall, 1973). For further discussion on signs in relation to Baudrillard and Saussure's theories please see Chapter 3.

Facebook textual communication resembles the informality of spoken conversation and should be seen as a part of daily social interactions that reveal users' feelings, ideas and the understanding of reality that they inhabit. The narrative structure of the Facebook Wall contains signs that are not obvious or easy to understand at first sight because people themselves are often unaware of ideological messages and codes they consume and then reproduce. For that reason, within this study the frequency distribution was calculated and applied to a users' Wall covering three main contextual categories a) self in relation to daily activities and interests, b) self-presentation of participants, c) roles adopted by participants. The smaller coding units of analysis defined these main categories. As the content of each individual Wall was too large to be analysed in full, a decision was taken to focus upon content that has been posted between January and August 2011.

Counting contents, allowed detecting the presence and absence of certain features, exposing elements that facilitate further interpretation of deeper meanings and signs. There are alternative strategies of examining texts, for example, the analysis could focus upon language and linguistic features rather than upon counting the occurrence of particular

information. Susan Herring's (1993) research on gender differences in online communication related to the linguistic structure and rhetoric of messages posted on LINGUIST-L (academic forum for professional linguists). This method was useful to expose that socially created gender inequalities persist on computer-mediated networks. Herring reported that the Internet domain does not naturalises offline gender distinctions because men in CMC (Computer-mediated Communication) adopt an adversarial style that is strong, lengthy, sarcastic and self-promoting while women tend to express doubts, ask questions, apologise and support other users' opinions. However, within the current study, developing appropriate categories and codes was used to illuminate human behaviours and actions as well as conscious and unconscious beliefs and attitudes towards gender issues. Through such analysis, it was possible to organise a large amount of material and to gain understanding of cultural patterns and values that underpin the notion of contemporary masculinity.

5.10.1.2 Info

Another aspect of this investigation related to participants' 'cultural self' (Zhao *et al.* 2008). Facebook users might incorporate information into their profile about their own cultural preferences including activities and interests, favourite books, films, games, TV shows and so on. Through the selection of specific cultural preferences, users might attempt to symbolically create and sustain a sense of individual identity because people choose commodities that encapsulate meanings that are in line with their self-creation project (Giddens, 1991). At the same time, they try to avoid goods that bear negative connotations either on social or individual grounds. It seems that through the consumption choices individuals can communicate their own personality, age, ethnicity or gender as well as attempt to locate themselves within the realm of social expectations (for detailed discussion on symbolic consumption see Chapter 3).

Content analysis of Info mapped out men's consumption preferences and tastes. Facebook users through enumerative cultural self-description, convey meanings that sustain the sense of who they are. They incorporate messages that communicate desirable character and gender traits that locate them within the society. A stereotypical framework of consumption choices indicates that females have a greater interest in topics such as fashion, popular music or romantic fiction, while males are more likely to concentrate on adventure stories, rock music, sport and computer games (Hopper, 2005). These significant differences might be rooted in diverse emotional and developmental needs or in a fear of

questioning traditional gender norms. Consequently, content analysis of Info conceptualised how far men apply into everyday life experiences, meanings that challenge gender binary systems.

5.10.1.3 Profile pictures

As mentioned above, in the case of Facebook, basic social encounters are enriched by other multimedia. This study will go beyond the text-based materials and focused upon analysing photographic images. Facebook users choose a profile picture that is displayed on their main profile page as well as alongside any text they write for example, public postings or private messages. Moreover, under the 'Photos' tab, users can upload as many photographs as they wish in order to present themselves to their wider social network (Salimkhan *et al*., 2010). The visual language of photography provides a new context in which men can express their gender identity and personal characteristics. By displaying particular visual meanings, they aspire to maintain the 'self-creation project' (Giddens, 1991). Facebook users upload photographs that have some personal significance, that illustrate one's life narratives and stories. At the same time, through chosen images people might frame themselves within the canon of social expectations.

Facebook users can create a number of photographic albums. However, a common component of all profiles is the Facebook album entitled 'Profile Pictures'. Consequently, in the context of this research, in order to establish a boundary of picture analysis, only participants' profile pictures were subject of the research interest. Analysis of profile photographs effectively captured the range of men's identity representations and specific masculine traits (see Appendix F). Another possibility would have been to adopt more interpretative strategy of analysing visual images. Drawing on semiotics, Roland Barthes (1981) distinguished two levels on which one can build an understanding of photographs, namely, denotation and connotation. The former one relates to the literal meaning of the image or in other words, to the literal representation of what that particular photograph illustrates. The latter one reflects the meaning attached to the image that is dependent upon one's social, cultural and ideological principles. This element of photographic duality indicates that each individual is free to understand the 'visual language' from a very personal and subjective perspective. However, uploading photographs on Facebook profiles is a form of self-presentation that relates to displaying one's own personality through images. Pictures are not only the visual records of what has happened or how people appear. They communicate specific meanings and without the background context

or information provided by participants themselves, it would be difficult to make deeper sense of photographs. Research methods selected for any academic investigation have to be directed by the concept of 'fitness for purpose' (Cohen *et al*., 2008). The first phase of this project focused upon obtaining a panoramic view on contemporary manhood rather than seeking individual perspectives, which were captured in the second phase. For that reason, the chosen method of using frequency distribution reflected better the social context and the kinds of norms that define masculine behaviour than interpreting signs and symbols behind particular photographs.

5.10.1.4 Friends

Robin Dunbar (1992), a director of the Institute of Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology at Oxford University, claims that, cognitive power of the brain, limits the number of people with whom one can develop and maintain meaningful social interactions over a long period. Dunbar's number that has been valued at 147.8 or approximately 150 relates to people's natural capacity to have trustworthy and genuine social relationships. 'It's the number of people you would not feel embarrassed about joining uninvited for a drink if you happened to bump into them in a bar' (Gladwell, 2000, p. 179). Dunbar (1992) points out that the number of 150 was the size of typical hunter-gatherer societies, or the average size of an 18th century village or military units in the Roman army. In bigger groups, it is more difficult to uphold solidarity and cohesion, because people do not know each other sufficiently to develop personal relationships and to create an interconnected community without external rules and regulations.

In other words, Dunbar (1992) argues that there is a general relationship between the human brain size and the stability of human networks. This idea was extrapolated from the observation of non-human primates, monkeys and apes and then referred to human beings. Human primates, have a larger neocortex than nonhuman primates; a part of brain that is responsible for conscious thought, language and social arrangements. For that reason, the former one can handle the complexities of a larger group. Additionally, Dunbar (1992) claims that in the wild, primates' grooming is an activity in which individuals clean one another's body in order to reinforce social structures and relationships. Similarly, people maintain friendships by investment of time, emotional energy and care where at certain point individuals might become overloaded with too many social channels.

One might argue that social-networking websites enable their users to surpass Dunbar's social channel capacity, by offering the free and uncomplicated possibility of staying in touch with other people. According to Cameron Marlow's *'Maintained Relationships on Facebook'* (2009), the average number of Facebook friends is 120, what is consistent with Dunbar's theory. At the same time, as Marlow observed, some individuals have more than 500 social connections. This exaggerated number of friends might be regarded as one's attempt to show off one's own popularity and social connectedness. It also indicates that the Facebook platform involves both the Dunbar's circle of meaningful relationships as well as a user's wider social ties that are treated more instrumentally without intimacy or closeness.

Similarly, within this study, the general number of Facebook friends was taken into consideration as an important element of participants' popularity and social connectedness (the higher number of Facebook friends is understood through the lens of better social connectedness). Moreover, as in Marlow's investigation, it would be a valuable step to display separately the number of female and male friends for each user and to consider the number of people with whom a particular user has frequent Wall interactions. It would expose active and closer social ties rather than the size of a social network that users claim to posses, but due to data and time constrains it was not possible to pursue these ideas. However, the general number of Facebook friends was associated with one's effort to produce a group- orientated identity (Zhao *et al.* 2008).

5.10.2 Interpretive analysis

Frequency of responses were enriched by interpretive analysis, which allowed for capturing the complexity of a participant's social worlds. Frequency of responses produces a 'big picture' of the situation without encompassing the rhetorical sense of the message (Deacon *et al*., 1999). Consequently, within this study the dominant meanings and concepts which were extracted from the frequency of responses were also discussed in relation to gender issues. This stage of investigation demonstrated some explanations of the major themes that arose from the data. Using numerical calculations and frequency distribution can be criticised for being positivist. However, what distinguishes interpretive research from the positivist one is not whether quantitative methods are applied to the research framework, but how data obtained are used and analysed. Positivists draw conclusions directly from statistics, tables and graphs, indicating causal relationships and simply summarising data. For interpretive or critical researcher numerical figures, become

a driving force for developing analytical questions and a source of more comprehensive investigation (Deacon *et al*., 1999). Similarly, within this study a percentage distribution of responses was enriched by detailed and reflexive ideas that served to develop new meanings and an understanding of gender issues.

The issue arising from content analysis is that the method is ultimately dependent on the opinions of a single analyst. A personal outlooks might influence, consciously or unconsciously, a researcher's judgements. Similarly, information that is included in the data analysis can be affected by individual preferences. Sometimes the ignored elements (purposely or otherwise), which do not appear in the study, can depict a new line of interpretation. Thus, the decision was taken in advance on what counts as valid elements of investigation (Cohen *et al*., 2008). Within this study in order not to distort information, contextual categories and coding units of analysis were extracted directly from participants' Facebook profiles. Then the researcher examined profiles and simultaneously ticked on the checklist each category as it occurred. This systematic approach was useful to analyse data statistically and then to interpretively expose what roles and behaviours men typically or unusually adopt in their social environment.

To sum up, in offline contexts people highlight their conformity with generally accepted norms by symbolic behaviours and declarations (Goffman, 1959). Similarly, through Facebook profiles individuals might attempt to express an idea of how they would like to be seen by others. Thus, extracting numerical data from Facebook profiles and its interpretative analysis exposed a panoramic view on gender roles in a social context. However, at this stage, it was not intended to generate much insight into deeper and individual meanings of masculinity as they were covered in questionnaires.

5.10.2.1 Questionnaires

The second phase of the project focused upon exploring participants' individual-self and investigating men's personal attitudes towards the notion of masculinity. This part of the research marked a transition from the public self-representation to the individual experiences of being a man. Some aspects of masculine identity might be collectively unspoken within the relatively public context of Facebook profiles. In other words, the confidential nature of questionnaires moved beyond the surface of normalised gender roles to uncover deeper meanings of masculinity. It provided an opportunity for new themes and

ideas to emerge. Questionnaires (see Appendix D) were sent to all participants via Facebook e-mail.

Questionnaires might consist of several kinds of questions that influence the mode of response and generate different types of data. Within this study, first it was necessary to specify social factors such as age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, educational background, etc. which influence the nature of personal experiences. (Similar details are voluntarily provided on Facebook profile pages but some users opt to leave them blank). As masculinity is diverse, dynamic and distinctive it might be assumed that opinions on manhood of, for example, a forty-year-old gay man from Scotland would be different from the views of a Polish, heterosexual, eighteen years old boy. Thus, the aim of collecting information about particular social aspects was to capture the complex structures of men's experiences.

The first part of the questionnaire collected basic information about participants such as age, nationality or sexual orientation. The second and third section of the questionnaire attempted to capture individual perspectives on masculinity where the nature of open-ended questions triggered a rich and honest response from participants. Leaving a space for a free articulation of own thoughts contributed to exploring complex issues of self-identity. The alternative method of researching this subject could be for example by conducting informal interviews, where questions would emerge from the context of conversation and would be matched to individuals and their circumstances. However, certain themes of masculinity, important for the present study, might not have arisen from this 'casual' dialogue. Similarly, it might have been a complicated procedure to analyse diverse information with no thematic sequence, collected through different sets of questions (Cohen *et al*. 2008). Changing the type of interviews into standardised open-ended forms would not reduce organisational constraints. Participants, mostly the University of Glasgow undergraduate and postgraduate students might not have been easily accessible in offline environment, as data collection took place during the summer break in July 2011. Even during the academic term, setting up interviews at the location and time, that would be convenient for both interviewees and the researcher, could be quite a difficult task.

Then, another alternative strategy was an e-mail interviewing as the Internet is not restricted by a specific setting or time synchronization. Ironically, overcoming the temporal and spatial dimensions could radically extend the process of data collection as interviewees might take as long as two or three weeks to replay. It is not unusual that

respondents' initial interests in participating in the research decreases after receiving the first few emails (Kivits, 2005). Direct conversation via the Internet was also possible, for example, through the Skype service, which provides video conferencing free of charge between two or more users. It requires a basic knowledge of the software and involves arranging a mutually convenient time to log on to the computer. However, the Internet questionnaires enabled the researcher to reach a larger population in comparison to the Internet interviewing and considerably reduced the time of data collection.

The problem with the Web-based methodologies is that participants with one click of the mouse can withdraw from the project (Cohen *et al.*, 2008). However, the context of Facebook platform established an appropriate atmosphere such that people could feel secure to communicate openly. Posting the questionnaires via Facebook e-mail ensured personal, one-to-one relationships between the researcher and participants that might have increased the response rate (see Chapter 6).

Participants were given two weeks to familiarise themselves with questions, to provide answers and send them back. This period appeared to be sufficient for respondents to explore and elaborate their ideas. The benefit of the Internet communication was that they could complete the questionnaire from home and did not have to do it all at once (Cohen *et al.*, 2008). Of course, there is always a possibility, both in online and offline settings, that participants will provide inaccurate and dishonest information (Hewson *et al.*, 2003). As suggested in Chapter 3, this should not pose a major dilemma, as in general there are no reasons to question participants' sincerity. Moreover, Facebook and its trusted environment, which maps out users' offline connections, appears to minimise the issue of fraudulent responses. Similarly, the open-ended nature of questionnaires invited genuine and personal comments that uncovered deeper meanings of masculinity (for more discussion please see chapter 5).

On the other hand, it was a more demanding and time-consuming task for participants to write responses in their own words. Again, there was an assumption here that respondents were able to articulate their own thoughts and express them on paper (Cohen *et al.*, 2008). Some questionnaires might be long and daunting to complete. Consequently, there is a need to ensure that questions are clear, well worded and relevant to participants' experiences (Kivits, 2005). Additionally, within this study the level of software literacy did not pose any problems, as all participants, being active users of the Facebook platform, were familiar and experienced in navigating the website. In short, open-ended

questionnaires investigated complex issues of masculinity to which straightforward answers cannot be provided. This method captured rare information where the quality of data depended upon the richness of participants' comments.

5.11 Coding/ categorisation of data

In this study, coding units used in the analysis were identified and extracted directly from the Facebook profiles. In order to exclude the possibility of misrepresentation of the data, the validation of peer reviewers was applied to the project. During the peer debriefing two competent judges were presented with ten random Facebook profiles and given the researcher's explanation of coding units in relation to Facebook Walls, Photographs and Cultural Information. Then, the discussion with reviewers helped to identify if the researcher's interpretation is rational, as well as highlighting potential problems in the analysis. For example, judges had to be instructed that categories derived from the Facebook profiles were not mutually exclusive. A person in one Facebook post might relate to meeting friends and drinking alcohol, which would be classified as two separate codes. Similarly, one Facebook profile photograph might show a participant being relaxed and with male friends only, which again would be classified as two separate codes. Consequently, the need for additional information was highlighted. Nevertheless, the exact details of coding will precede each table with a percentage distribution of postings in the later parts of thesis.

Similarly, in the case of questionnaires, sharing the findings with two fellow students validated the researcher's interpretation. In Chapter 10, the categories in Table 10.3.1 ('Indicators of a 'real' manhood according to respondents') and Table 10.4.3 ('Summary of the masculine and non-masculine side of participants' identities') were derived from the questionnaires themselves. Each listed statement was noted down as it occurred in the questionnaires (respectively in question 1 part 2 and questions 10 and 11 part 2). Any recurring statements were eliminated from the list unless participants classified the same category on the opposite bases. The purpose of the peer review was to avoid distorting information and to reach consensus in the interpretation.

Sharing the findings with two competent judges, familiar with the topic, validated the researcher's interpretation. Although extracting coding units from the data might be

depicted by an element of subjectivity, the entire process was underpinned by rigorous procedures and inter-judge agreement.

5.12 Ethical concerns

Locating research investigation entirely in the Internet domain raises specific ethical considerations. The novelty of computer-mediated methodologies has to be compatible with well-established ethical standards. At the same time, the element of novelty poses ethical concerns to which there are no common or widely accepted procedures (Hewson *et al*., 2003). In such circumstances, searching for rational solutions to ensure participant's rights remains the responsibility of the researcher (Mann and Stewart, 2000). Ethical recommendations provided by professional bodies (such as the Association of Internet Researchers, 2002), aim at ensuring that researchers do not cross the ethical boundaries. However, many 'netiquette' (etiquette of the Net) suggestions can offer only an initial agenda, because doing research through diverse Internet services and platforms requires setting up different ethical frameworks.

Mann and Stewart (2000) have considered netiquette from two different perspectives. The first, relates to principles of courtesy and respect within the online environment; the other to the set of rules that underpin online research practice. It is self-evident that in the context of this study, flaming (insulting someone electronically), criticising or making any cynical comments is unacceptable practice. Moreover, it was an open research where participants were fully informed about the purpose of the investigation and methodological procedures. They were assured that the researcher did not intend to be actively involved in their Facebook environment, for example, by leaving messages on their Walls or by writing comments under pictures. This non-active observation did not make the current project less authentic. Of course, one might argue that only active engagement with participants' social space (for example by posting messages and contributing to discussions) allows meaningful capturing of data. However, the non-interventionist approach that was applied to this study, did not manipulate the circumstances or participants' experiences nor 'provoke' new situations or behaviours (Cohen *et al*., 2008). The researcher became a part of the participants' physical setting (Facebook platform), but did not invade interactions that were taking place in order to sustain the natural dynamic of events.

Internet-mediated research introduces issues of private versus public domain and raises questions of individuals' rights to self-determination and autonomy. It has to be pointed out that this study was not a covert one and participants were aware that their Facebook pages were subjects of analysis. The initial idea was to examine profiles that are publicly available on the Internet what would ensure that participants do not alert their profiles as a result of being in the project. However, it is controversial whether the publicly available content of social-networking sites is best seen as a public self-expression and therefore it is acceptable to use it for research purposes. It can be also seen as a property of the author then it cannot be analysed without the permission (Hine, 2000). The ethical procedures of every study ought to be considered on its own merits and in the case of the current study, covert investigation would invade people's privacy and personal space. Users of the Facebook platform create profiles mostly to stay in touch with friends or re-connect with people they actually know. Nobody expects his/her profile to be examined and used as a part of academic investigation. Moreover, some individuals might not be aware of how to change the privacy settings and for that reason, their profile is located in the public domain. In such circumstances, rejecting the principles of informed consent would violate people's rights for freedom and autonomy. It is to say that in both online and offline environments, covert research can help in investigating sensitive issues, marginalised or stigmatised groups (Cohen *et al*., 2008, p. 409) but in the realm of this study, it would be an unjustified practice.

However, Facebook posts and comments made by participants' friends can be seen through the prism of public versus private debate. These posts made by friends are a part of participants' Facebook Walls. However, it has to be borne in mind that informed consent was obtained only from participants while their friends were most likely not to be aware of the researcher's presence. Consequently, in order to ensure the integrity of the ethical conduct of the research, the researcher decided not to analyse or include any quotes that came from participants' friends, in this investigation. As argued above, conducting online research is a challenging task in terms of ethics, as the Association of Internet Researchers provides just a general framework of 'netiquette'. Consequently, it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure ethical principles such as informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality.

As discussed above, involvement in this study was voluntary and there was a possibility to withdraw from the project at any time. Individuals were given an explanation of the research aims, objectives and potential risks. They were also asked to electronically sign the consent form. These procedures were in line with ethical requirements and ensured that participants' rights were properly taken into consideration. The informed consent indicates that people being researched know about the research taking place and freely choose to participate in it. It suggests that people are fully informed about the nature and potential consequences of the study. Deacon et al (1999, p. 374) raised the question of 'how much and what kind of information is sufficient to make subjects informed'? They argue that providing information about the research might bring the risk of participant's reactivity and bias the data. This element might be problematic because in online as well as offline situations, participants can change their behaviour and attitudes if they know that they are being part of the research investigation. For example, in the context of online and offline observation, participants might feel nervous, act better or much worse than normally or they can try to modify their behaviour in order to satisfy a researcher's expectations (Cohen, *et al*., 2008, p. 410). On the other hand, withholding information or misleading participants about the true nature of the research without appropriate justification, appears to violate people's rights and dignity. Within this study, providing an explanation of the research procedures did not alter the content of participants' Walls, as on Facebook any unusual behaviour generates friends' comments. Colleagues could easily recognise ones alter ego and question atypical behaviours by writing, for example, a wall post. For that reason it was difficult to misrepresent own character (Gosling, *et al.,* 2010). Moreover, in terms of open-ended questionnaires, participants might have felt more reassured and confident knowing the purpose of the research project. Without any background knowledge about the study, they would be less willing to answer personal questions related to masculinity.

In the context of Facebook communication, maintaining an assurance of anonymity might be more difficult than in an offline setting. Facebook users have to be aware that information such as names, profile picture, gender, networks and user name is visible to anyone on the Internet even if the profiles' privacy setting is restricted to 'friends only'. Similarly, people who agreed to participate in this research cannot expect complete anonymity, first because participants were not a part of a random sample and the researcher was familiar with their identity. Secondly, on the Facebook research site, the list with participants' names was visible to all individuals taking part in the project. Participants were able to view each other's profiles (where visible details depended upon

one's privacy setting) and to send private messages to one another even without being Facebook friends.

In offline research, it is unusual to reveal the name of a participant in order to avoid the possibility of causing embarrassment or harm. Similarly, online names should be treated with confidentiality because even if particular personal information was located within the Internet's public domain, it does not indicate that people have abandoned their rights to privacy. For that reason, within this study, confidentiality and non-traceability of given information were ensured by changing names or Facebook pseudonyms in any research writings, reports, conference papers, etc. In addition, the researcher took sensible steps to ensure that collected data and all records were kept in a confidential manner. Access to the computer files and to the researched Facebook profile were available only by providing a password. External hard drives with research data saved on them, coding sheets and printouts of questionnaires were stored in the researcher's locked desk at the University of Glasgow. Moreover, all data will be kept for a period up to five years after the researcher's graduation. The research profile will be permanently deleted from the Facebook platform (after the researcher's graduation), by contacting the Facebook team, so it will be impossible to reactivate or retrieve any of its previous content. All research files will be erased from the computer as well as from the external hard drive. Finally, printouts are going to be securely disposed in a paper shredder.

There is also the ethical dilemma surrounding issues of researcher identity. In traditional research, the researcher is defined by his or her age, gender or ethnicity, which can restrict to some extent the nature of the relationship that can be developed with participants (Mann and Stewart, 2000). On the other hand, in the Facebook environment participants have to interact with an online researcher, which may also cause this sense of insecurity and uncertainty. For that reason, in order to facilitate a friendly environment and to establish mutual trust, the researcher had to share personal information with participants. However, the ethical considerations relate to the amount of personal information that should be provided to create an authentic presentation of the self. The unique character of the Facebook platform allows users to present themselves in a number of ways. Users can for example describe their activities or hobbies, list favourite books, films or TV series as well as display the gallery of their own pictures. Facebook research profiles featured this personal information to convey as authentic as possible an image of the researcher's identity. This step ensured that participants had a sense of a fair play, because the individuality of both the researcher and participants was mutually exposed. However,

within this study there was another aspect regarding the ethics of researcher identity. Namely, the researcher was obliged to report results with honesty and truthfulness. Falsifying data or intentionally ignoring of information to manipulate the results would be highly unprofessional. Such practices would place the researcher in a position of denying their own academic identity (Cohen, *et al*., 2008, p. 77).

5.13 Summary table

The following table (5.13) is a summary of theoretical and methodological strategies that were implemented into the current study:

Table 5.13 Research methods: summary table

	THE MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THIS RESEARCH is to explore through the prism of symbolic consumption men's gender identities in the context of:	
	Social-self that is established according to social and cultural norms	**Individual-self** that relates to individual understanding of own identity
Masculinity seen as:	Collective practice	Personal experience
Research setting:	Facebook Social-Networking Website	
Recruitment:	Eighty-nine participants (N=89) recruited via the University of Glasgow students' WebMail	
Participants:	• volunteers • males over 18 years of age • active users of Facebook platform	
Methods of data collection:	Non-participant observation with content analysis of Facebook accounts	Open-ended questionnaires sent via Facebook e-mail
Nature of the inquiry:	Researcher as an 'observing friend'	One-to- one communication between researcher and participant
Ethical concerns	• private versus public domain • informed consent • anonymity and confidentiality • data protection • researcher identity	
Data analysis	• frequency distribution • interpretive analysis	• looking for emerging themes

Chapter 6

The Process of Data Collection

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present how previously designed research procedures were implemented and then confronted with reality. In the context of this study, many times the researcher had to renegotiate prior thinking about the process of data collection. While computer-mediated communication contributed to obtaining rich sets of data, it also raised unexpected situations and problematic issues. Apart from describing the 'field work' of this project, the chapter is concerned with tactics of analysing the collected research materials. Qualitative data can be interpreted in a number of different directions, which might become a potential source of difficulties. Moreover, choosing appropriate methods of analysis might influence the overall analytical framework of the research. Finally, the chapter discusses an important issue of online relationships with participants and the role of the researcher in navigating the computer-mediated study.

6.2 The time-line of the research process

The recruitment began on 05 July 2011, when the invitation e-mail was circulated through the University of Glasgow student WebMail. It has to be clarified, that there was no cut-off date for recruitment, but an intention and hope to find 100 participants. This sample size appeared to be sufficiently large (Cohen, *et al.*, 2008) to examine men's social and individual self and to obtain a rich set of data. This is a small-scale, inductive study with only one person conducting the research. This automatically placed limitations upon what could be achieved in terms of sampling or data analysis. Nevertheless, on 21 July, when the number of volunteers was steady for the third day in a row (N=82) the research profile privacy settings had been changed from public to private and then all 'friend requests' were accepted. Participants returned informed consent forms via Facebook email within 4 days. Obtaining approval from volunteers in such a short period was surprising and allowed proceeding to the next stage of the research process earlier than expected. On 25 July, another email with an open-ended questionnaire was forwarded to all volunteers who were asked to return it by 08 August 2011. In the meantime, participants' Facebook profiles were saved onto a disc. Between 25 July and 08 August another seven people joined the project increasing the size of the sample to 89 (N=89).
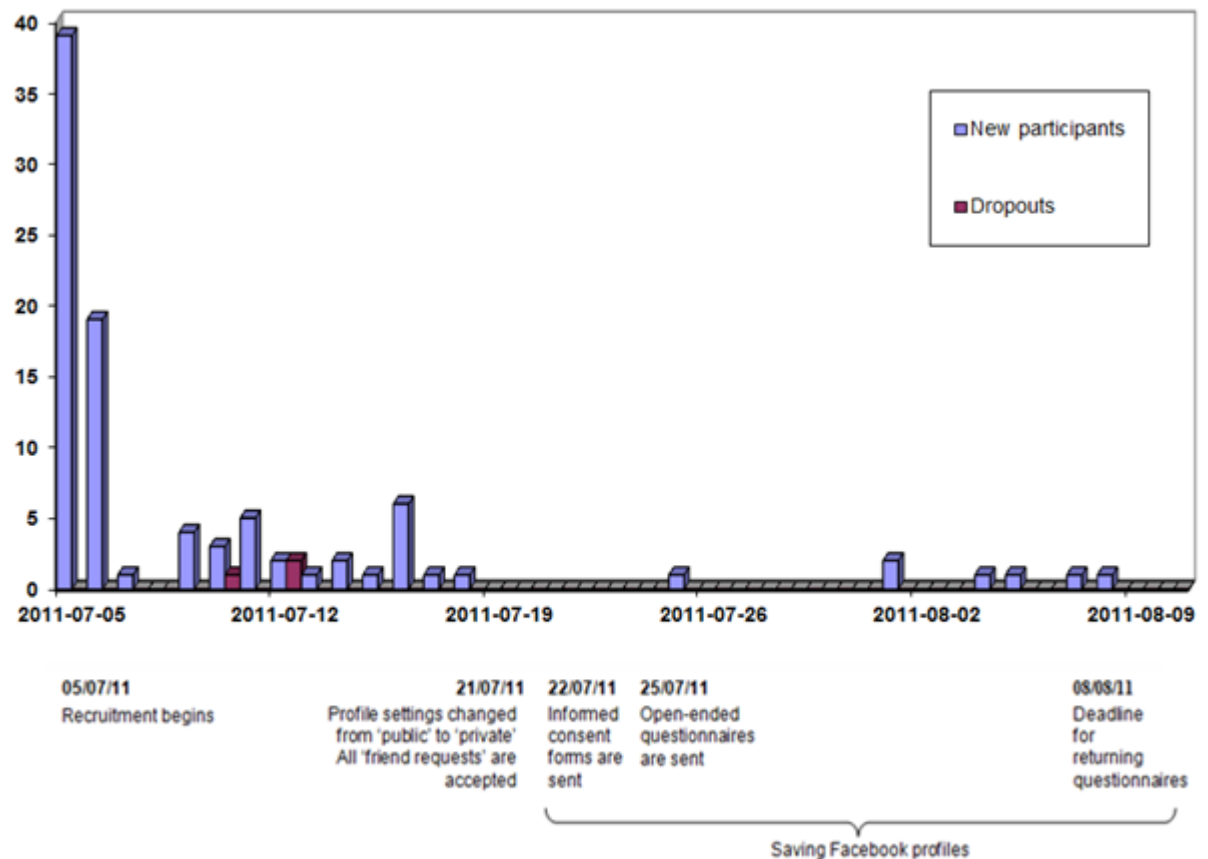
Figure 5.2 The time-line of the research process

6.3 Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)

Computer mediated communication does not comply with the more traditional process of qualitative data collection. Lawley (1994) defined computer-mediated communication as a text-based interaction between physically disconnected people that might include sounds, images or videos. Exchange of messages is mediated by the use of computers and does not require face-to-face interaction. Human relations and conversations are facilitated through the Internet rather than other technologies of communication such as telephony.

Nevertheless, it has to be kept in mind that the character of CMC undergoes constant changes and introduces innovations that are widely available, for example webcams, video calls or visual chats. Most recent technologies such as smart-phones brought together mobile telephony with the Internet and automatically the scope of communication became even more interactive and multimodal. According to research on mobile Internet usage published by GSMA and comScore (2010), 16 million people in the UK (about a quarter of UK's population) accessed the Internet from their mobile phones in December 2009. During this month, Facebook was the leading Internet site with over 2.6 million mobile views, nearly three times more than Google sites. Total time spent on the Facebook Mobile

was 2.2 billion minutes out of 4.8 billion where Google scored a distant second place with 400 million minutes. GSMA's research indicates that non-verbal modes of communication grow rapidly and become an interesting and complex field of study. Similarly, in this project CMC went beyond the use of computer keyboards. During the process of data collection participants were often connected with Facebook profiles and posted on the research Facebook Wall through their phones.

CMC might refer to both synchronised and asynchronous communication. The former one relates to an exchange of information between two or more people that are simultaneously accessing the same chat room. The latter one relates mostly to e-mail messaging where users can write extended messages, attach files, forward information and respond at any convenient time (Mann & Stewart, 2000). This research employs the latter type of communication that is not restricted by time nor geographical location. In the context of this study, CMC included two areas of interaction: the Facebook Wall where conversations were visible to all participants and private messages send by Facebook e-mail. In other words, participants were able to start one-to-one discussion with the researcher or share their opinions more publicly with other volunteers.

There are several advantages of introducing CMC into this research design. It enabled to recruit and reach participants during the period of summer holidays (time convenient for the researcher). It would be difficult to undertake any research procedures on a face-to-face basis as most of the students were not around the University campus during the summer break:

> *'Hey Katarzyna! I'm in Sweden on holiday at the moment. I'll be home next week. This is my written consent however. Feel free to use my FB information for your project.' (25 July at 16:12, e-mail)*

Maintaining electronic connection with participants was not a problematic issue as in most cases volunteers had Internet access outside the University. Similarly, with the asynchronous communication messages could remain unanswered until the receiver was ready to respond:

> *'aah sorry i was away in berlin for a few weeks so only just saw your message now :) is it too late to take part?? sorry again! ☺' (16 July at 12:58, e-mail)*

CMC minimised time commitment required from participants. Volunteers could have logged and checked research Facebook account at any time suitable for them. It eliminated the problem of appointments and organising face-to-face meetings at mutually convenient times (Mann & Stewart, 2000). Nevertheless, quick communication was still possible in the form of e-mails or posts on a research Facebook Wall:

> *'Dear Katarzyna, I am currently in Ghana and have to pay for very limited internet access and computer facilities, so I may find it difficult to complete an online form like that, before i return on the 7th of August. I may be able to complete it by the end of that week though, would that be acceptable?' (27 July at 16:10, e-mail)*

The above, personal e-mail sent by one of the volunteers highlights an important point: that technology in Third World Countries is not a widely accessible medium of communication as the personal computers and the Internet access come at a very high cost. At the same time, the lack of a basic level of literacy, mostly among women, makes it very difficult, for example for African countries to gain any benefits offered by the Internet (Slevin, 2000).

Nevertheless, CMC also reduced organizational difficulties in terms of handling data. The textual nature of Facebook communication as well as electronically sent responses to questionnaires provided materials that were immediately accessible for analysis. Information was gathered in a form of electronic files (each file was associated with an individual participant) easy to recall on a monitor screen or to print out as a hard copy. It was possible to quickly access textual and other photographic data and to re-organise them effortlessly. It contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the research communication and to identifying present and absent themes throughout the data. The textual character of this study also eliminated the issue of transcription bias and the problems of transcription mistakes related to unclear accent or blurred recordings (Mann & Stewart, 2000).

Finally, in the case of open- ended questionnaires sent via Facebook e-mail, volunteers could have completed forms from home or any self-selected setting. They could have worked on their answers over time rather than filling it out hurriedly all at once. Providing some space for reflection might have contributed to a greater depth of obtained responses. This is not to say that in any research context, computer-mediated communication could replace more traditional, face-to-face forms of data collection. The decision whether to exclude offline methods of data collection depends upon the research focus, approach and the Internet environment that is being investigated (Orgad, 2005). In the framework of this

study, CMC brought advantages to both the researcher and participants in terms of minimising organisational constraints. The ability to overcome time and space barriers and the possibility to communicate asynchronously triggered the reflexivity and depth of the research process.

6.4 Validity and reliability

The discussion on validity and reliability has to be situated within the context of the paradigm that is being used as a research frame. Within this study, the inductive nature of content analysis as well as open-ended questionnaires produces data low in reliability, but high in validity.

The critical paradigm concentrates on analysing specific activities and situations in the light of both macro- and micro-concepts, which increases the accuracy of the presented picture. This study offers a first-hand insight into very personal accounts from participants. In the case of content analysis, a complex and fair representation of researched phenomena is ensured by triangulation, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. The complexity of social relations as well as the richness of human perspectives is reflected through the multi-method approach, where different techniques of data collection, frequency distribution calculations and qualitative analysis, complement each other. The validity of open-ended questionnaires lies in its capability to reflect participants' subjective viewpoints and their understanding of the situation. This method reflected reality through the eyes of participants. Nevertheless, Gray (2006) argues that a small-scale and single researcher study raises questions of the validity of interpretation. Within this research, any judgements and interpretations were made only in the context and on the basis of the collected data. The researcher attempted to detach herself from the studied phenomena and address reflexivity and critical thinking. To sum up, this research is high in validity but it does not necessarily indicate high generalisability, as its research findings cannot be applied to a larger population.

Participants in this study are diversified in terms of age, sexuality, ethnicity or class. Therefore, obtained data are not generalisable. This is not to say that this project does not offer valuable insights into the studied phenomena. There is depth of the study that is supported by the descriptive and detailed data. Moreover, novelty and soundness of the research procedures applied to the framework of this study might be transferable to other contexts and become a source of reflection and information for other researchers.

Finally, the concept of reliability is associated more with the quantitative perspectives and refers to the consistency of the received results. Producing consistent data might be an important objective in, for example, a large-scale survey study (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006). Within this project, open-ended questionnaires invited participants to express their opinions and beliefs, uncovering what might be something original and unpredictable. This free stream of discussion cannot generate reliable consistency. Similarly, content analysis is dependent on the opinion and interpretation of a single analyst. Chosen categories and units of analysis may reflect (consciously or unconsciously) the researcher's preferred criteria. In addition, words are ambiguous in their nature and any effort to ensure standardisation of findings would be improper.

6.5 Identification of the participants

Initially the research intended to relay on volunteers who responded to the invitation email sent via University of Glasgow student's Webmail. Students interested in the study were asked to familiarise themselves with the Facebook research profile that explained in detail objectives and methods of the study. Those wishing to participate were asked to send the researcher a Facebook 'friend request', which shifted the interaction from the student's Webmail to the Facebook domain. Nevertheless, the project extended beyond the University, as volunteers' offered to suggest a participation in this study to their friends from outside the University. On the research Facebook Wall, they posted:

> *'i'm not sure about your sample. I got it through my student mail. If its not for only students then i could recommend to mates.' (06 July at 00:49, Wall)*

At this point, ethics approval did not cover this type of recruitment. Realising the value of including participants from beyond the University, the researcher decided to apply for an amendment to the approval. The Ethical Committee was willing to grant an extension that expanded the boundaries of recruitment and from this point on it was not possible to identify how many participants were recruited from outside the University. Overall 89 people (N=89) participated in the study, where original assumptions proposed a larger group of 100 (N=100). Nevertheless, the obtained sample size was sufficient to produce a good quality study and generate a large amount of material for analysis.

The project focused upon active users of Facebook who communicate on their profiles mostly in the English language. This sampling goal might have affected to some degree the characteristic of the cultural composition. Of those who indicated their nationality 46 (51.69%) reported being British, 5 (5.62%) Pakistani, 4 (4.49%) Indian, 3 (3.37%) American, 3 (3.37%) Polish, 2 (2.25%) Chinese, 1 (1.12%) Australian, 1 (1.12%) Columbian, 1 (1.12%) French, 1 (1.12%) German, 1 (1.12%) Irish, 1 (1.12%) Italian, 1 (1.12%) Japanese, 1 (1.12%) Libyan, 1 (1.12%) New Zealander, 1 (1.12%) Romanian, 1 (1.12%) Serbian, 1 (1.12%) Tanzanian and 1 (1.12%) Turkish. Thirteen (14.61%) participants did not specify their nationality. Participants were students from the University of Glasgow or their friends who happened to be interested in this project. This did not provide educational variety. However, the sample was diversified in terms of age, where the range was between 18 to 47. Twenty people opted out from providing their age. Moreover, the mean age was 24.50 years.

As mentioned above, this research does not argue for the generalisabilty of findings. Within this study, men were not culturally homogeneous; they differed in relation to age, nationality, class, religion or sexual orientation. Here the goal was to map out subjective experiences as well as explore within the sample the collective patterns of gender practice. At the same time, it is not appropriate to claim generalisability as participants also had a range of different reasons for volunteering, from an altruistic desire to help another researcher to being interested in the research topic *per se*. Here are the examples of Facebook messages where participants declared their intention to join the project:

> *'My own studies coincide partially with yours, I'm currently writing a dissertation on constructions of masculinity in 1950s American literature, so would be happy to help you out!' (05 July at 12:11, e-mail)*

> *'Got your email. I meet the criteria and would be happy to take part. I'd be interested to read the results once you're finished. (05 July at 12:52, e-mail)*

> *… I'm always happy to help out a fellow student. Hopefully I'll build up some good karma. :)' (06 July at 00:10, e-mail)*

> *'[participant's name], 4th Year Undergrad at the Crichton Campus is Dumfries ready and willing to help with your research.' (06 July at 03:15, e-mail)*

People who disclosed their Facebook profiles and personal viewpoints for the purposes of this study had an opportunity to benefit in the development of new and innovative approaches of researching gender. Their stories, honesty and insight contributed to

obtaining rich data and brought different perspectives on masculinities to life, where volunteer participation increased the authenticity of responses.

6.6 Loss of participants

In the case of the Internet- based research it is common to experience greater problems of drop-out, because participants can abandon study with a simple click of a mouse (Cohen, *et al*., 2008). Similarly, in the context of Facebook, there is an option to easily delete a person from a friend list by pressing the button 'unfriend'. Within this project, all drop-outs occurred at the very beginning of the research where 3.37% of participants (3 people) decided to withdraw before the process of data collection began. They disappeared from the study without providing any explanation or justification. Cohen *et al.* (2008) suggest that initial drop-outs occur because participants might be unclear, confused or overloaded with information about the project. In later stages, participants can lose their interest and motivation depending upon how appealing and engaging the research is. With the non-compulsory nature of this project where volunteers were not offered any financial or other incentives, there was a constant threat that some individuals would drop out of the study. In order to reduce this problem, after receiving an informed consent form with a participant's electronic signature a particular Facebook profile was saved on the external hard drive to ensure accessibility to data under any circumstances. In the case of questionnaires, failure to complete and return forms might have led to significant data loss. However, this subject matter will be further elaborated in the 'Responses to the questionnaire' section. It has to be pointed out, that one volunteer could not be taken into consideration as a participant of this project on the grounds of language issue. His Facebook profile was written mostly in Hebrew and he admitted of not being able to fill out the questionnaire in English. He did not meet the sampling criteria.

Another attempt to eliminate the withdrawals was to maintain research relationships with volunteers at a personal level. Each person willing to participate in the project was sent an e-mail with words of gratitude for their help and brief description of research goals, methods and procedures. This message also invited participants to write a reply if any of the points needed further explanation.

Loss of participants mostly occurs when the study takes place over time (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006). Within this project, recruitment and a process of data collection took place for over a month from 05 July 2011 to 08 August 2011. During this period, the aim was to

create a friendly and personal environment in order to increase and maintain the participants' engagement and interest in the project. For that reason, volunteers were notified in a form of daily Wall posts about research progress, achievements or any problems encountered. This stage of disclosure developed into stimulating and interesting Wall discussions with participants.

To some extent, issues of privacy shaped the structure of research procedures and increased the probability of drop-outs. Initially, the Facebook research profile was located in a public domain so as everyone interested in the project could freely access the page and information about the study. At this stage, 'friend requests' could not be accepted because otherwise participants' names would be shared with a wider audience. Consequently, volunteers had to wait to be accepted as a friend and as a participant of this research until the targeted number of people reported a willingness to join the study. Then, privacy settings could be changed into private and a research friend list could be made visible only for the researcher. The idea of not being able to define the duration of recruitment might have had a polarised effect on participants. It could either build up their interest or decrease levels of motivation. In the context of this study, volunteers were waiting for the research process to begin on their very own Facebook 'territory'. Participants were familiar and experienced with this social networking website and their general attitude towards the computer-mediated research was enthusiastic. Moreover, they were continuously informed, on the research Facebook Wall, about the number of people who joined or withdrew from the project as well as about any undertaken research decisions. This range of tactics and continuous flow of communication attracted their attention and increased curiosity.

6.7 Research relationship with participants

The nature of social research is distinctive and unique as it involves a wide range of human emotions, rights and life experiences of both the researcher and participants. Similarly, content analysis focuses upon issues that are products of human practice, further interpreted through the lens of the researcher's own reasoning. Research encounters ought to provide an opportunity for obtaining rich perspectives and experiences where mutual understanding is a key factor to produce an adequate and detailed data analysis. Consequently, research relationships with participants require careful consideration and reflection (Deacon *et al*., 1999). In this study, volunteers were aware that the research was taking place. They were fully informed about the purpose of the investigation and methodological procedures. Despite assuring the principles of ethical standards (see

Chapter 5), initially volunteers had doubts about the character of the research and felt unsure about the possible risks to which they might be exposed:

> '…when I first got your email I was initially worried it might be an elaborate scam to get access to my facebook account.' (08 July at 07:13, Wall)

Participants were ensured that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Moreover, the researcher, to establish trust, apart from being open about the purpose and process of the study, disclosed some personal details and information. In the context of CMC just as in the case of face-to-face interactions, the researcher has to create and maintain honest and a trustworthy self-presentation (Hine, 2005). As volunteers decided to share their personal web-pages, the research Facebook profile could not be left blank. The researcher uploaded private pictures of herself as well as revealed information such as hobbies, favourite books or films. The aim was to provide volunteers with the general idea about the researcher's personality and cultural preferences to dispel personal distance. At the same time, the researcher had to make judgements of what was appropriate to establish trustworthiness but would not overly influence the decision to participate. Facebook facilitated a special and sympathetic form of communication but the researcher had to uphold her presence as a bona fide person (Hine, 2005):

> '…Btw is it really your birthday today or is that a random DoB for your research profile? :P' (07 September at 00:20, Wall)

The decision about the researcher's self-exposure was undertaken to establish a hospitable setting and to encourage participants to freely share their questions and opinions. Nevertheless, volunteers had to be continuously reassured about the sincerity of the research relationships and research standards.

In the context of this study, volunteers did not have to adapt to a technological mode and learn how to use software, as they were active users of Facebook. Participants enthusiastically replied to information posted on the Wall often linking their personal experiences with the researcher's situation or offering words of reassurance and encouragement. It has to be pointed out, that the intensity of research encounters and participants' commitment were established at different levels, depending upon volunteers' individuality and charisma. Participants' involvement in the Wall discussions or one-to-one email exchanges with the researcher did not indicate that particular person was also eager to complete the questionnaire. On the other hand, many 'silent' volunteers lengthily

responded to the open-ended questions. It might indicate that different individuals prefer diverse forms of communication where Facebook as a research setting allowed meeting these expectations.

CMC research facilitated dialogue that was based on equal terms, mitigating hierarchical relations between the researcher and participants (Mann and Stewart, 2000). This is not to say that power issues are not experienced within the online environment. Gender binaries are still inscribed into the character of technology (see chapter three). Accessibility to the Internet is determined by one's gender, race, country of birth or level of literacy. Similarly, recruiting participants through the University of Glasgow WebMail was likely to select a particular type of users; middle-class and well educated. This excluded experiences of men from outside the academia or men who opted out from having a Facebook profile. However, at the same time the nature of the Facebook setting encouraged a friendly flow of communication and enhanced mutual understanding between the researcher and participants. It developed a democratisation of interaction where volunteers were not reluctant to provide advice on for example recruitment of participants, technical problems, or data analysis:

> *(a) 'If you want more people [to participate in the study] then I suggest getting heads of departments to send your email request out…' (08 July at 07:13, Wall)*

> *(b) 'If you go to your page of "see all messages" and click "new message" then you will get a window with the clip to attach files' (21 July at 16:19, Wall)*

> *(c) 'Have you tried QSR NVivo software? Excellent for analysing qualitative data (08 September at 12:47, Wall)'*

In the context of this study, the researcher aimed to adopt a role of a friend, a person who is willing to listen and learn from others. However, many times the researcher had to interact with volunteers on the professional grounds. Following the stereotypical thinking that suggests differences between online and offline self-presentation, one of the participants wrote:

> *'… I would also add that not everyone on Facebook is who they say they are so be careful of fake profiles.' (05 July at 12:52, email)*

While replying to this message there was a need to explain the theoretical assumptions of this project. An online researcher, just as the offline one has to present a range of social

skills. In the context of this study the researcher had to deal with the dynamics of the Wall discussions and maintain the flow of one-to-one interactions. It required to respond to situations diplomatically, non-judgementally and with great thoughtfulness, as an expert and as a friend at the same time (Mann and Stewart, 2000).

6.8 Rethinking the notion of content analysis

Ezzy (2002) in *Qualitative Analysis: Practice and Innovation* argues that, content analysis involves the testing of pre-existing knowledge as the units of analysis and codes are defined in advance. In many cases, researchers are aware of what data they are looking for in the studied materials. For Ezzy (2002) pre-existing categories limit the scope of interpretation and theoretical conclusions. It has to be pointed out that within this study, the categories and units of analysis had been determined before the analysis began. Categories and units of analysis were not drawn from previous theories. They were extracted directly from the research materials. The formulated categories attempted to capture how men portray their gender identities as well as to establish absent elements of men's self-representation that can also depict a new line of interpretation.

Content analysis in its early stages relies upon previously formulated categories and codes, but it does not eliminate the possibility of generating knowledge inductively from the data obtained. Claims that content analysis is reduced to deductive approaches appear to be uncharitable and dismiss basic qualities of this research methodology (Cohen *et al*., 2008). It provides a structure for large quantities of text without scarifying the flexibility of interpretation. Similarly, in the context of this study, extracting numerical data from Facebook profiles was a preliminary step of the research analysis. Counting the frequency of occurrence of particular units produced numerical data in a form of percentages that could be presented in a short and economical manner. However, this study also used a qualitative analysis of Facebook profiles to supplement frequency distribution by capturing the complexity of the participant's social relations and interactions.

6.9 Handling of the Facebook profiles

Facebook profiles are not static, they change over time as users add or remove posts. The profile pages had to be saved in order to make data available for checking and verification. Wall discussions cumulate a large number of information where the content of an individual Wall might be too large to be analysed in full. For that reason, a decision was

taken to focus upon content that has been posted during the period from January 2011 to August 2011. Moreover, the analysis included all Profile Photographs and Information about participants' cultural preferences (favourite books, games, films, etc.).

A qualitative study can produce a substantial amount of research material where its preparation and analysis is a laborious process. It took 17 days and 136 hours to save 89 Facebook profiles. The average amount of time required for saving a single Facebook profile was 1 hour and 31 minutes.

Currently, there are a number of computer software packages for processing qualitative data such as AQUAD, ATLAS.ti, Hyper-RESEARCH, NUD*IST, NVivo, ETHNOGRAPH etc. (Cohen *et al*., 2008). These programs allow researchers to systematically classify and arrange large quantities of descriptive information. They locate specific words, phrases and sentences, group text, retrieve and compare information according to the selected criteria. However, the use of computer packages is more to assist a qualitative researcher in organising and structuring materials rather than analysing it. Being based on word-processing instruments, they fail to recognise the significance of context (Cohen *et al*., 2008). Besides, it is impossible to apply it for counting the occurrence of particular themes in materials that are not in a written form, for example photographs as well as other multimedia such as videos or songs.

In this study, the collected data were in a form of electronic folders, organised *vertically* as an individual 'story' of each participant. What was a problematic issue here was the question of how to link data *horizontally*, across respondents (Drever, 1995). The prearranged coding frame established horizontal connections by generating numerical data and highlighting the importance of particular patterns and trends. Mapping the emergence and re-emergence of diverse codes in texts and photographs was a complex and time-consuming task but it reduced the risk of producing an oversimplified and superficial analysis. Counting the frequency of exact words or words with similar meanings cannot reflect the comprehensiveness of the data. It might lead to a substantial data loss because 'words are not often repeated in comparison to the concepts they signify' (Cohen *et al*., 2008, p. 480). Put differently, counting words would neglect meanings aggregated within the text. Therefore, analysis within this study attempted to cover both obvious (unambiguous) data as well as meanings underlying the content of Facebook communication. Computer software would dismiss this duality of interpretation. A human,

thoughtful, detailed and attentive approach allowed capturing subtle insights and selecting accurately quotations for the final report.

6.10 The nature of Facebook profiles

An ethnographic investigation by Chandler (1998) on constructions of identities on the Internet, focused upon exploring personal home-pages and how they are used as a form of self-expression. He compared home-pages to the teenager's bedroom wall covered with snapshots, posters and collages that become to some extend a reflexive mode of self-presentation. While personal web-pages might not have any external value, they usually carry significant meanings to their authors.

Similarly, in this study, the researcher had an insight into very personal Facebook accounts. As observed during the process of data collection, each profile was unique in its nature because users established their very own standards of interaction. They adopted various forms of self-expression and shared perspectives with one another through different modes of communication. Constructions of the self were reflected by:

- Posting comments on the own Wall to engage with wider circles of friends
- Posting random thoughts on the own Wall to write them down as a note that does not necessarily intend to trigger extensive conversations with others
- Posting links to songs, news or other web-pages to reflect for example personal perspectives, feelings or mood
- Leaving feedback on friends' profiles
- Communicating their own identity through uploading pictures

Participants' profiles employed either a single method of self-expression or a combination of the above, depending upon individual preferences. Personal Facebook accounts became a medium through which people attempt to communicate their personality and identity. Users choose how to present themselves and which information to reveal to the wider circles of friends in order to sustain own self-creation project (Giddens, 1991). At the same time, they try to avoid messages that bear negative connotations either on social or personal grounds. Consequently, people face some challenges and dilemmas while negotiating and developing the conception of the self.

However, personal identity is not just a subject of how one perceives and presents himself/herself. It is also a larger question of how his self-conception is interpreted by

others. Each person can assign different understanding to the presented information. Thus, Chandler (1998) concluded that home-pages 'may involve both intentional and unintentional disclosures (as well as sometimes leading to misinterpretation)'. Similarly, Facebook profiles cannot be restricted to a single reading. The process of interpretation is about the negotiation of meanings, where usually the receiver of the message supports a particular explanation and interpretation over others.

6.11 Responses to the questionnaire

The first part of this research that focused upon the content analysis of Facebook profiles and did not require any time commitment from participants (although they had already posted information about themselves on their Facebook profiles). On the other hand, the questionnaire took up to two hours to complete. Some participants extensively elaborated their perspectives, while others provided brief answers. Twenty-nine forms (32.58%) out of thirty-one were returned before the scheduled deadline.

Initially, there was a need to pre-test a questionnaire to redefine its content, length or clarity. Five pilot questionnaires were not intended to be included in a research sample. Rather, they were conducted to reveal any ambiguities, badly worded sentences and to identify attractiveness of questions (Cohen *et al*., 2008). Obtaining feedback from a small number of respondents and experts resulted in improving the final content and format of the questionnaire.

Thirty-one participants out of 89 (34.83%) filled out and returned open-ended questionnaires. Put differently, many volunteers contributed to this study by providing access to their Facebook accounts rather than by revealing their reflexive opinions on manhood. Non-response to questionnaires may be caused by a number of reasons such as lack of time, forgetfulness or unwillingness to answer personal questions (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006). In this study, participants were asked to discuss issues of masculinity they probably hardly ever need to take into consideration. Even if the subject matter of the research attracted volunteers, completing open-ended questionnaires is a much more time-consuming and challenging task than putting a mark on the rating scale. Respondents have to be eloquent in articulating their own thoughts and capable of transferring them into a written form. However, it was intended to collect word-based data that captures personal viewpoints rather than generating measurements and frequencies of response.

Those volunteers who made their unique contributions by returning questionnaires revealed some personal stories and sensitive topics that they might have been unwilling to share during a face-to-face interaction with the researcher. CMC has the potential to develop an atmosphere of trust and mutual disclosure and to facilitate an openness of discussion. The character of open-ended questionnaires sent via Facebook e-mail, contributed to greater authenticity of responses. It may have defused timidity and a fear of judgement that might characterise one-to-one interactions (Mann& Stewart, 2000).

At the same time, one of the volunteers was not enthusiastic about the open-ended questionnaires and expressed his dissatisfaction with the chosen method of data collection:

> '... I think questionnaire is the wrong method altogether to use here - your questions looks like an interview guide and I think that interviews would be way more appropriate here. That would also allow you an opportunity to explain your questions in case people have problems understanding and/or to probe further if you are not totally sure what respondents mean with their answers. A questionnaire prohibits both of these ...' (04 August at 18:31, e-mail)

In the context of this study, questionnaires do not impede an opportunity of communication between the researcher and participants (or *vice versa*). Moreover, offline communication with volunteers would not contribute to obtaining new sets of data. Facebook environment as a research setting ensures not only initial but also continuous co-operation. If the research topic and questionnaires *per se* appear to be relevant to people's experiences, participants will be willing to support and maintain contact with the researcher:

> a) 'If any of the points need more detail of clarification let me know good luck with the research :-D' (07 August at 18:55, e-mail)

> b) 'Hey- sorry for waiting until the absolute last day to actually fill out and respond to your questionnaire. It's all there, though, and hopefully it helps. Best of luck with your research- please don't hesitate to get in touch if you have further questions, or feel as though something needs clarification.' (08 August at 13:55, e-mail)

Fraenkel & Wallen (2006 p.403) point out that the questionnaire and the interview schedule are usually identical except the former one is self-administered by participants while the latter one is managed by the researcher. Methodological decisions have to be rooted in the research conceptual and ideological assumptions. Here, as indicated above, the aim was to create an environment in which participants have confidence and feel comfortable in responding freely without any limitations. In the format of interviews,

participants could be more reluctant to discuss issues of masculinity, which would reduce authenticity of responses.

There is also a question of reflexivity and a question of providing space for expressing and articulating own experiences. The open-ended nature of questions invited genuine and personal comments and enabled respondents to explore complex issues of masculinity to which straightforward answers cannot be provided. In comparison, closed questions (dichotomous, multiple choice, rating scales, etc.) would categorise people into groups by allowing them to select an answer from a number of options without giving an opportunity to make any personal comments or remarks. Open questions enabled respondents to explain personal perspectives and to avoid restrictions of the pre-set categories. It allowed more individualised accounts and viewpoints to come out (Cohen, *et al.*, 2008). *... I just took some time off to think about my masculinity and stuff, you'll get mine [questionnaire] this week (02 August, 2011 at 10:37, Wall).* Respondents could complete questionnaires from home and over a period of two weeks. This ability to overcome time and space barriers triggered reflexivity and depth of the research process. It did so in the instance cited here and may well have done in others.

After completing the form one of the respondents concluded: *not a bad questionnaire. Really made me think* (note left on the questionnaire form). In this study, participants were encouraged first to define 'how' they understand the question and then to provide an answer on their own terms. Put differently, open-ended questionnaires invited the free flow of reflexivity by producing only a general framework for discussion. Volunteers themselves had to choose concepts through which they wished to express their experiences and their understanding of masculinity.

6.12 The strategy of analysing questionnaires

The nature of open-ended questions enabled participants to explore their own feelings about masculinity in relation to a number of themes and captured authenticity and depth of responses. However, this open-ended nature also carried the problem of data analysis, because extensive word-based data are open to a variety of interpretations. In the case of qualitative and critical data analysis, interpretation of gathered materials relates also to a researcher's reflexivity and creativity. This is to point out that the process of analysis is influenced (to some degree) by the researcher's preferences and agenda (Cohen *et al*.,

2008). Not only participants' personal experiences, but also the researcher's perspectives became an essential part of this research.

With the qualitative data there is no one correct method of analysis. Instead, the researcher has to be guided by the principle of 'fitness for purpose' (Cohen, *et al*., 2008) and clearly defines the objective of the analysis. It has to be clarified again that this part of the research did not attempt to understand norms and the dynamic of the group, but aimed to capture personal experiences of men. Therefore, the analysis of questionnaires had to explore individual perspectives on manhood as well as to explain similarities and differences in participants' accounts. The decision was taken to generate in the process of the inductive content analysis (Dey, 1993) key themes emerging across individual responses and then explore similarities and differences that cross the trajectories of men.

The qualitative and critical analysis is a process of developing meanings and constant interpretation (Gray, 2006). There are different possibilities of handling the research materials. However here, the first step was to extract motifs that were distinctive and unique to a single questionnaire. The researcher examined each form, extracting concepts directly from the material. This approach was flexible enough to expose the richness of the data, to understand men's individual perspectives and personal experiences in relation to gender issues. Each questionnaire was re-read and re-evaluated a number of times to avoid losing the sense of individual responses in the context of the entire investigation. However, extracting these individual themes also allowed making links and connections between the responses and highlighting similarities and differences in personal accounts.

Thus, the second step was to identify whether there were any common perspectives that reappeared in most of the questionnaires. At this stage, the researcher treated the questionnaire data as a whole in order to distinguish consistency and diversity of participants' reasoning. Comparing participants' responses offered the opportunity to look across subjective interpretations of manhood. The aim of this two-dimensional interpretation was to put analysis into a new, deeper level of explanation and theory generation and to move away from the simplistic features of summary and description. It also attempted to capture whether men's reasoning moved beyond the traditional gender norms and recognised flexibility and variation of masculinities.

6.13 Challenges in researching and analysing the notion of masculinity

The discussion in a previous chapter raised questions about challenges in doing online research. However, what might be the potential considerations and difficulties in researching and analysing the subject of masculinity?

First, there might be various doubts about studying men and masculinity *by women*. One can argue that women's research about men can structure strong ideological assumptions. Being more specific, the study of men by women might serve as a tool to criticise patriarchal culture, to formulate moral dilemmas of women and their sense of subordination. A female researcher might attempt to present that in contemporary society masculine perspectives shape feminine identity and experiences. This line of researching would exclude men's subjective viewpoints on gender and limit understanding of masculinity to the hegemonic realm. We ought not to think that women cannot make an important contribution to research on men and vice versa. A researcher's theoretical perspectives rather than one's sex per se influence the framework of the research. There are pro-feminist men that attempt to look at the nature of masculinity through the lens of feminism without denying that their position as men has been constructed on gender inequalities. There are also anti-feminist women that support traditional gender arrangements. It might sound paradoxical, but in order to challenge and analyse gender issues and to see beyond the social conventions, one has to detach oneself from own gender system and own culture (Jarviluoma *et al.*, 2003).

Next, gender analysis should also draw attention to the researcher's interaction with participants. Salimkhan *et al.* (2010) while investigating an adolescent engagement with social networking websites, decided to conduct same sex interviews. They believed that in such environment participants (18-22 years of age) would speak more freely and openly. However, in the context of Salimkhan *et al.* study there is no risk of stigmatisation or discrimination. There is no intrusion into deep and private spheres of life. The avoidance of mixed-sex communication is not likely to contribute to obtaining information that is more relevant or significant. At the same time, this is not to say that doing the same sex interviews would be an irrational practice in the case of highly sensitive investigation like for example Teela Sanders' (2005) ethnography of sex workers in Britain. Then, the decisions whether to restrict research to the same sex communication with participants depends upon the research focus and research sensitivity. As argued above, in current investigation CMC developed an atmosphere of trust and mutual disclosure, facilitating openness of discussion.

However, studying men and masculinity by a woman can raise issues of power where men may impose hierarchy by not treating female researcher as equal. In the context of this investigation, the researcher during the process of data collection attempted to eliminate hierarchy in relationships with participants and maintain friendly contacts. There were also no declarations of having full control over the research process, as a researcher could not influence what participants posted on their Facebook Walls or how they replied to questionnaires. These were participants' individual experiences and perspectives. At the same time, the researcher claimed the right to control research questions, choice of methods or character of analysis (Hammersley, 1995). Nevertheless, as indicated above one of the volunteers tried to challenge this form of researcher's domination. He attempted to establish interaction on the researcher-researcher conditions, but surprisingly he treated chosen for this study method of data collection as subordinated to his own research ideas (see 'Responses to the questionnaire').

Another problematic subject is that gender analysis might easily fall into ideological extremes. Morgan (1992) classified these tendencies as reductionism. The core idea is that masculinity can be explained through the universal similarities ignoring cultural and individual differences. This line of reasoning leads to proposals that formulate the notion of manhood in the realm of the fixed gender matrix. Meanings of masculinity become reduced to a common characteristic that often asserts patriarchal models and the ideology of male power; they perpetuate the stereotypes rather than challenge them. The desire to move away from these general gender traits might pose another approach of over-individualisation of men (Morgan, 1992). Here, the understanding of gender refers to the need to research and to theorise masculinity through men's subjective experiences of masculinity without making any kind of generalisations. This perspective is useful to capture men's individual opinions, concerns and needs but at the same time, it might neglect the impact of widespread social values into one's understanding of reality. People's experiences are mediated by cultural constraints and recognise more or less masculine qualities or behaviours. Hence, within this study two perspectives, social and personal will interact and overlap with each other to a different extent, creating a complex network of relationships.

6.14 Problems encountered during the research process

Obtaining the access to the sample became a source of initial difficulty. As indicated above, in this study participants were recruited via the University of Glasgow student's

WebMail. However, beforehand the Head of each College had to give a permission to gain access to research participants (see Appendix E). The College of Social Sciences and the College of Science and Engineering granted the permission to circulate an invitation e-mail to both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Access was denied by the College of Arts. This decision was justified on the grounds of student feedback indicating that students do not wish the Graduate School to provide blanket access to their mailing lists. Further, the College of Medicine, Veterinary and Life Sciences distributed the invitation e-mail only among undergraduate students. It was indicated that students in professional courses such as medicine, dentistry or veterinary have additional responsibilities in terms of professional behaviour when using social networking websites. Moreover, organisations such as the Medical Defence Union have warned medical students and doctors to be cautious when using Facebook-like sites about their ethical duties (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8389458.stm). Consequently, the College advised them to make an amendment to the consent form, reminding students of their professional responsibilities. The researcher added the following statement:

> *'Students from the College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences are reminded that normal requirements of professionalism in relation to the use of social networking sites apply.'*

Circulating the information about the research project to the wider public became a problematic issue. Due to a wide range of reasons and access restrictions, many potential participants were simply not aware that this study was conducted. Those participants who were lost because of the limited access could have responded differently from those from whom data was collected. For example, students from the Collage of Arts who did not have an opportunity to share their opinions and perspectives on issues of masculinity could have provided a different set of information.

During the computer-mediated research, it is also common to face some technical problems with the hardware and/or software (Hewson, *et al.*, 2003). In this study, technical difficulties were encountered and related to the unreliable character of the Facebook application. Being more specific, researcher opting for simplicity decided to send informed consent and questionnaire forms as an attachment to Facebook email. However, it was not taken into consideration that Facebook users can have incomplete version of the application. After the recruitment of participants, when there was a need to distribute informed consent, it became apparent that on the research Facebook profile there was no

paper clip icon to attach files. The decision was taken to paste the consent form in the main message area of the e-mail and ask participants to respond by typing their name.

However, the same solution would not be suitable for sending questionnaires as it could distort a carefully considered layout and create difficulties for respondents to navigate the pages of the form (Cohen *et al*., 2008). A reasonable solution was to share the questionnaire using Google Docs. A link to Google Docs was sent by Facebook e-mail and by clicking on it, participants could directly access the questionnaire. Nine volunteers received this type of message directing them to the Google document. Then the paper clip button to attach files unexpectedly appeared on the research profile. Consequently, the rest of the questionnaires were distributed as initially planned, as an attachment to the Facebook e-mail. Completed forms could be returned to either the research Facebook profile or to the researcher's university e-mail address. CMC research requires not only sociability skills to facilitate meaningful online communication but also technical competence and ingenuity in handling software packages that are used for the research purposes.

6.15 Conclusions

The success of online data collection depends largely upon research interactions with participants. In this study, contacts were established on trustworthy and personal levels where the Facebook environment enhanced the possibility of mutual disclosure and provided an opportunity for continued co-operation. At the same time, this is not to argue that any Internet platform would be a meaningful research setting and deliver relevant and sufficient data. However, Facebook can be considered as a site for generating rich data as it intersects with people's offline social ties and experiences. Moreover, the character of open-ended questionnaires lets participants to articulate their own answers in their own terms. Open questions put a great demand upon respondents but provided more personal and sensitive insights into their perspectives.

Incorporating CMC into the design of this study brought benefits to both the researcher and participants. The asynchronous nature of communication eliminated difficulties of arranging face-to-face meetings at mutually convenient times. Volunteers could contact the researcher from home or any other self-chosen place at a time to suit themselves. Similarly, they could complete questionnaires over time rather than all at once, which contributed to greater reflexivity of responses. However, CMC posed methodological problems in

maintaining participants' interests as well as a technical one with the Facebook platform *per se*. In the context of computer-mediated research, participants can easily abandon the project with a single click of a button. The dilemma was to find appropriate methods to preserve their attention and willingness to contribute to the research. Daily posts on a research Facebook Wall about the encountered problems and the research progress as well as one-on-one communication via e-mails tended to generate participants' excitement and motivation. However, the researcher was not able to have a full control over the complexity of Web technology. There was a problematic issue with Facebook software where initially the research profile has no paper clip icon to attach files. To resolve this problem, additional technical tool in the form of Google Docs was used. In the context of a computer-mediated study, a researcher has to appropriately deal with social encounters and has creativity and sufficient skills to handle technologies.

This chapter was an attempt to reflect on the process of data collection by considering the advantages and challenges of using computer-mediated research. The Facebook environment became an effective setting for conducting research where online interactions increased mutual understanding as well as enhancing authenticity and the depth of research interactions. However, these advantages do not occur automatically as the direct consequence of involving technology in the research design. Generating rich data depends mostly upon a human factor, participants' reflexivity and openness, as well as the researcher and her understanding of the research process.

Part Three

Analysis of Data: The Consumption of Masculinity in the Context of Social-Self and Individual-Self

This part of the study consists of four chapters of analysis that present previously collected data. The aim was to analyse and interpret dominant codes of masculinity that are consumed by participants in both public and private spheres of life. The first three chapters of this part describe the participants' Social-Self, captured in the context of Facebook profiles.

Chapter 7 explores men's Narrative-Self that is reflected through personal posts on the Facebook Walls. The analysis of these posts highlighted which masculine traits, participants consume and attempt to conceptualise on a daily basis within their social environment. Chapter 8 focuses upon an analysis of participants' Visual-Self. In the context of social-networking websites, photographs are an important aspect of self-presentation. Similarly, in the context of this study Facebook profile pictures were understood as a source of information that displays users' personal characteristics and emphasises their understanding of their own gender identity. Consequently, photographs were used to strengthen the narrative perspectives on consuming gender.

Chapter 9 describes men's Cultural-Self, or in other words cultural choices and preferences that participants decided to include in their Facebook Info sections. In this study, consumption choices of for example favourite music or books are understood through the lens of a communication system that reflects participants' desired masculine identity. Investigating participants' personal interests allowed tracing which commodities contribute to creation and validation of men's gender identities.

The final chapter of this part relates to respondents' Individual-Self that was reflected through their answers to the open-ended questionnaires. The aim was to generate key themes emerging across individual responses and then explore similarities and differences that cross the trajectories of men. Moreover, another purpose of undertaking this new perspective was to define whether men conceptualise their manhood differently in social and more private settings.

In this study, the analysis of data is based upon content analysis that contributed to greater understanding of consumption of contemporary masculinities.

Chapter 7

Narrative Self: Analysis of Facebook Walls

7.1 Introduction

Understanding the concept of masculinity is not a straightforward process as each individual might have his or her very own vision of appropriate and inappropriate gender behaviours. Human experiences and perceptions are dictated by for example one's nationality, age, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, world events or economic realities (Connell, 2005). People are products of their culture and have gender identities constructed for them, while simultaneously they construct gender identities through individual and unique experiences. Consequently, conflicting visions of masculinity can arise on both personal and cultural levels, which to a greater or lesser extent acknowledge dominant codes of male behaviour.

Drawing on Jerome Bruner's 'Life as Narrative' (1987) or 'Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life' (2002), individuals construct themselves through narrative. It is an act of self-making that is underpinned by subjective understanding of the individual self and experienced situations. For Bruner (1987; 2002), narration is a mode of self-defining, thus self-hood cannot exist without the ability to tell stories about the self. Narrating the identity provides meanings to autobiography. Similarly, in the context of this study, the Narrative Self is understood as a form of displaying one's own personality and perspectives through making posts on Facebook Walls. It is also a conceptualisation of one's own identity by sharing life stories and daily observations with friends. This self-narration becomes an illustration of experiences that have some personal significance. At the same time, through chosen narrations participants frame themselves within or outside a particular canon of social expectations. Narrative Self is a rich documentation of personal experiences and subjectivity. Consequently, the analysis of participants' Narrative Self provides an understanding of which aspects of hegemonic masculinity are consumed or otherwise on a daily basis. By consuming and reproducing particular ideologies, participants uphold messages that are in line with their 'self- creation project' (Giddens, 1991). Thus, the examination of participants' self narratives captures which aspects of hegemonic masculinity are consumed as important elements of identity and which aspects are avoided

in participants' self-conceptualisations. Narrating the self aspires to convey desired identities where putting own subjectivity into words is a rich source of data.

Masculinities are diversified and multiple, however, there are some general patterns of behaviour that suppress differences created by variables such as class, race or age. There are some common practices and consumption choices through which men and boys want to achieve certain recognition of their masculinity (Harris, 1995). Analysis of Facebook Walls captures these dominant elements of male attitudes and behaviours presented by participants in the context of their social reality. In this part of the study the aim was to capture dominant codes of masculinity that are consumed and reproduced in a social context of Facebook Walls. This is not to say that masculinity is a fixed concept that can be easily described by the set of social norms but to argue that there are some common behavioural tendencies and standard practices that reflect men's gender identity (for more discussion see Chapter 2).

It was also necessary to provide an explanation to the obtained frequency of responses. In this chapter, percentage distribution of references was enriched by the analysis, which exposed meanings of the observed situations. Frequency of responses (see Chapter 5, p. 97) was enriched by interpretive analysis, which allowed capturing the complexity of participant's social worlds. It became possible to investigate to what extent men consume hegemonic or non-traditional forms of behaviour. Here, the concept of hegemony related to articulation of stereotypical gender roles that affirm male domination and sustain patriarchal relations. Hegemonic patterns of behaviour aim to maintain men's control and dominance over women and subordinated masculinities (Connell, 2005; Whitehead, 2002). In other words, hegemony involves masculine activities that attempt to confirm the stereotypical definition of a 'real man' and assert images that function as a contrast to women and femininity. There are some culturally valued masculine norms where men are seen as independent, unemotional, self-confident, adventurous, rational or successful (Franklin II, 1984, see also Chapter 3). However, the analysis of Facebook profiles highlighted which masculine traits, participants want to consume and conceptualise on daily bases. In this study, the definition of hegemony is linked with the actions that confirm traditional and unequal gender dichotomies. Consequently, this chapter discusses how participants portray their gender identities under current cultural norms.

Finally, as Connell (2005) observed masculinity varies over time and settings. In this study, participants' profiles might be affected by the fact that most of them are university

students. Some aspects of student life might shape men's experiences and perspectives, because to some extent people consume the dominant ideas from their social space. Similarly, within this social setting men have to define their very own notion of maleness and masculinity where their actions might be judged through the lens of appropriate gender behaviours. Thus, the campus culture might influence how men conceptualise their gender identities.

This chapter focuses upon the analysis of 89 Facebook Walls. The frequency of postings is collectively presented for all Facebook Walls conveying the wholeness of masculine identities. This technique captures messages of hegemonic masculinity that participants consume or otherwise on a daily basis. It has to be highlighted that the percentage distribution of postings in relation to individual profiles could provide potentially interesting data. Nevertheless, the purpose of this chapter was to focus upon collective experiences of participants. Individual perspectives are discussed in Chapter 10 through the analysis of open-ended questionnaires.

The frequency distribution of postings produced an overview of the situation without encompassing the rhetorical meaning of the message (Deacon *et al*., 1999). Consequently, the percentage distribution is also discussed in relation to gender issues through the interpretive discussion. The discussion is organised by headings that arose from the data in the process of the inductive content analysis (Dey, 1993). The coding units, presented in a form of percentage distribution, were grouped into headings that aimed to represent the main themes/ideas that emerged from the data. Consequently, some of the headings literally relate to the coding units, others connect a number of units that overlap one another to a certain degree. Following Dey's (1993) reasoning, in this chapter, the formulated headings aim to provide a meaning for the coding units in order to generate new perspectives.

Moreover, according to Corden and Sainsbury (2006), the use of citations might strengthen the interpretive discussion and conceptualise the main themes/ideas generated from the data. Similarly in this research, quotations support the undertaken line of interpretation. In the context of this chapter, another aim of using quotations is to illustrate the dominant perspectives among participants in order to demonstrate the trend among the sample.

7.2 Self in relation to daily activities and interests: discussion of coding units

As can be seen in Table 7.2 there were eighteen coding units generated from the Facebook Walls that relate to consumption of participants' daily activities and interests. Within this study, there were no predefined codes of analysis. In order to avoid distorting information, coding units were extracted directly from reading and re-reading participants' Facebook Walls. Then, once again, Facebook Walls were analysed this time from the perspective of this coding system where the researcher ticked on the check-list each category as it occurred. This procedure exposed the frequency of postings or in other words, which activities and interests participants decide to consume or otherwise on daily bases. Consequently, in the context of this study, high as well as a small number of postings became a significant indicator of gender identity, because the resistance to consume certain meanings also communicates vital aspects of the self.

Table 7.2 Percentage distribution of Wall postings that relate to specific daily activities and interests

Contextual category	Coding unit	Count	Percent
self in relation to daily activities and interests	using media (playing computer games/ watching TV/using the Internet)	658	18.84%
	involvement in politics/social activism	525	15.03%
	drinking alcohol	464	13.29%
	listening music	443	12.69%
	travelling for recreation, holidays, weekends	325	9.31%
	meeting friends (e.g. in the pub, house, park)	265	7.59%
	reluctance to studying	224	6.41%
	commenting sports events	176	5.04%
	acquiring cultural knowledge (reading newspaper articles, non-academic books)	141	4.03%
	talking about cars/ gadgets	80	2.29%
	acquiring academic knowledge (studying)	60	1.72%
	playing sport/going to the gym	54	1.55%
	doing housework e.g. cleaning/cooking	36	1.03%
	sleeping	17	0.49%
	dancing	16	0.46%
	not being able to sleep/insomnia	5	0.14%
	talking about dreams	2	0.06%
	being bored	1	0.03%
	TOTAL	3,492	

A total of 3,492 activities and interests were marked across 89 Facebook Walls (for explanation and justification see Chapter 4, point 4.9.1.1). The findings suggest that participants are involved most frequently in using media (18.84%), political and social activism (15.03%) and drinking alcohol (13.29%). Other high-rated categories refer to

listening to music (12.69%), travelling (9.31%) or reluctance to studying (6.41%). Moreover, categories such as talking about sport (5.04%) are presented as more important than that of playing sport/going to the gym (1.55%). Among the least common activities, one can identify being bored (0.01%). The discussion below considers the concept of consuming hegemonic masculinity in relation to percentage distribution of Wall postings presented in the Table 7.2.

7.2.1 Involvement in politics/social activism

This part of the study suggests that through the narrative modes of self-presentation, participants highly express their interest in politics and social activism (15.03% of postings). Participants passionately discuss world events such as the Arab Spring, Norway's mass killing at Utoya Island, the meltdown at Japan's nuclear power plant or the 2011 London riots. They also relate in their narratives to the local events such as the University of Glasgow cutting courses, jobs and departments, the occupation of the Hetherington building[1] at the University of Glasgow or the 2011 Scottish Parliamentary general elections:

> *'I would tell you how to vote, but instead I'll tell you why. People are dying and have died in places like Syria, Libya, and Egypt for the right to have a democracy. If you're aged to vote, and have a polling card, go and vote for something we seem to take for granted: our freedom.'*

It has to be pointed out that in the case of 'Cultural Self' participants were reluctant to display their political affiliations. It might be explained through the fact that participants might avoid presenting sensitive information in concise manner that is imposed by the Facebook Info section. Political views might cause conflicts on personal grounds. It appears that participants prefer implying political discussions in order to avoid misunderstandings. Moreover, from a stereotypical perspective (Harris, 1995), politics is regarded as a masculine topic of daily conversations. In the case of men, ignorance affiliated with current political issues might be seen as a sign of incompetence. Consequently, for these participants consumption of world and local political news has become a desirable element of masculine identity. They consume activities and interests that ensure integrity with their social environment.

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[1] Occupation of Hetherington building at University of Glasgow took place between 1st February 2011 and 31st August 2011. The aim of occupation by students, staff and community was to protest against cuts to higher education in Glasgow and nationwide.

Similarly, in some narratives it is visible that participants want to invest their time in activities that will have a lasting social value. Participants' competence in political issues intertwines with social activism (15.03% of postings). By volunteering in different projects, participants express their own attachment to duty and social responsibility:

> *'I'm going to be abseiling off the finneston crane in glasgow and raising money for the Beatson Appeal[2]. Please give me a little something, even a pound to help me raise £100!'*

The data indicates that participants might derive satisfaction from making a positive contribution to lives of other people. In their narrative accounts, one can observe a need to improve the world. Participants attempt to strive for social justice and are willing to actively volunteer for numerous charities. They are consumers of practices that are socially admired and bear positive connotations. Nevertheless, apart from politics and individual desire to work for social causes, also consumption of university lifestyle depicts participants' self-images.

7.2.2 University lifestyle

Most western universities combine a diversity of individuals, cultures, religions and attitudes towards life. People are exposed to different gender performances and norms. Frank Harris III and Laura Struve (2009) argue that at the campus men interact with a multiplicity of masculinities and attitudes that are influenced by different social backgrounds, sexual orientations and age. Consequently, students gain a rich panorama of gender performances and become more tolerant about the perspectives and behaviours of others (which do not necessarily comply with socially desirable standards).

Nevertheless, on their Facebook Walls, participants most frequently consume activities that are linked with using media (18.84% of postings). Technological advancement related to online environment took place within the last twenty years and contributed to the development of a networked society (Castells, 2000; see also Chapter 3). In the West, the Internet became an integral part of human life, daily activities and social communication, which is clearly visible in participants' Wall narratives:

> *a) 'if it weren't for youtube and wikipedia I'd probably be finished with my dissertation by now, haha'*

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[2] The Beatson Pebble Appeal is a fundraising campaign to build the Glasgow Centre for Cancer Research.

b) 'Look, if I wanted to learn things, I'd be studying, or doing my research. Clearly, however, I'm much more content to spend my time playing Tiny Wings[3].'

It appears that participants' interests in consuming possibilities offered by the technological advancement, might parallel to some degree with stereotypical perspectives on manhood. Being more specific, traditionally playing computer games, surfing on the Internet or watching television are seen as male activities that are useless and unproductive (Berger, 2005). These activities are often defined in the realm of 'wasting' time. However, it has to be borne in mind that a myriad mass media or websites can be also a source of information and a vehicle of knowledge-transfer. Playing computer games can be an important means of socialising with others as nowadays people often play in groups of friends or with strangers over the Internet (Berger, 2005).

It has to be pointed out that consumption of musical trends has also a strong influence into participants' lives (12.69% of postings). It is also visible in the Cultural Self (see Chapter 8) where participants mentioned in total 1,201 music entries, the highest number among all listed cultural choices. In this study, one can observe that participants openly articulate their reluctance to studying (6.41% of postings):

a) 'motivation to study: died and is decomposing by now'

b) 'I "started" my proposal work 3 hours ago. I have written 40 words. Call me king of the procrastinators.'

c) 'Just walked 4.5 Miles around Hamilton in order to Avoid my Dissertation Proposal lol'

These kinds of narratives were frequently posted especially during examination sessions. Participants expressed their lack of motivation to study but they never raised the theme of academic inabilities or difficulties. For participants consuming and conveying the message of being intelligent is an important principle of own identity. While excessive interest in studying is traditionally associated with femininity (Harris, 1995), participants attempted to link own images with intelligence, but not with involvement in book learning. Participants value cultural knowledge (4.03% of postings) that relates to reading newspapers, magazines or non-academic books. They seem to be up to date with current media messages and trends (see Chapter 8). Moreover, for participants consumption of activities

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[3] In the case of 'Tiny Wings' it is possible to play online or buy the game for iPhone, iPod or iPad.

such as travelling (9.31% of postings) is an important aspect of life that broadens their knowledge of the world what is reflected in their frequent discussions about journeys.

Another facet of being a student relates to academic knowledge that might imply potential power (1.72% of postings). For some participants performing up to specific academic levels is linked with consuming success:

> a) 'just discovered that I'd pass each course of this semester and get into Honours in Philosophy and Politics even if I (just) FAIL every exam! LOL! :D :D :D'

> b) 'I have been awarded with the title of Doctor of Philosophy. If you have an odontological problem I will still be useless, but an ontological one might be another business'.

The quotes above reflect participants' desire to be above average and to impress others with own intellectual abilities. However, academic knowledge and academic degrees might expose relations of power aggregated within masculine group. As Connell (2002) points out the concept of hegemony relates to a dominant position of a certain group of men that is constructed in relation to subordinated masculinities (as well as femininities) (see Chapter 1). For instance, most of work environments are hierarchically organised where only a limited number of people (usually white, heterosexual men) can be in charge of taking the final decisions. Others remain under control of management and have little or no influence over companies' future directions (Harris, 1995). Similarly, in the university context there are students striving for success and better academic qualifications than others. They have a need to be in a position of intellectual power that might also result in obtaining prestigious jobs after graduating. Nevertheless, Gardner (1996) claims that the definition of intelligence cannot be confined only to the idea of logical abilities. It has to be elastic and incorporate interpersonal as well as intra-personal traits. Consequently, establishing positive relationships with other students through the consumption of specific sets of values is a necessary element of participants' gender identities.

University environment is a place within which participants construct their social life. Students share the same experiences and stories that constitute to building mutual understanding and a good atmosphere (Harris III & Struve, 2009). Their connectivity is centred around socialising with many people but without getting too personal. For participants, student life becomes an interesting subject matter for discussions. Nevertheless, participants use further methods of socialising and establishing meaningful relationships with colleagues, namely, meeting people on more personal grounds than in a

university setting (7.59% of postings) and drinking alcohol (13.29% of postings). Capraro (2000) argues that in the case of college men, drinking is not only a matter of socialising. He suggests that excessive use of alcohol is related with both masculine power and masculine weaknesses.

From a stereotypical point of view, heavy drinking is associated with masculine behaviour (Capraro, 2000). Consequently, men might consume alcohol in order to prove their manhood and highlight their manly nature. According to Capraro (2000), overuse of alcohol might be also a method of coping with difficulties of everyday life. Being more specific, the university setting exposes young people to a diversity of cultures, religions and moral principles. Students become more independent and modify beliefs they have learned at home. Men search for approval of their gender identities by testing and shifting their criteria of masculine behaviour. For Capraro, consumption of alcohol helps some male students to overcome these stressful situations where a habit of drinking becomes a form of emotional escapism. At the same time, in this study participants willingly socialise (and drink) with people they barely know:

> *'It's funny when you say your going for 'a couple of pints' then end up in the pub for ten hours. Must be fate...'*

This type of male bonding that takes place in a pub between two or more strangers is inscribed (to some degree) in a British culture. Participants place themselves in the light of easygoing individuals and produce the message of 'being cool'. Similarly, participants associate certain places with a student lifestyle:

> *'Viper [nightclub], I know I've neglected you over the past couple months, it's been because I've been having an affair with the library! But she means nothing to me and I swear I'll never go near her again! As of tonight, I'm all yours again! Love you!'*

It becomes apparent that consumption of particular places, especially those in the proximity of the university, plays an important social role, functioning as meeting points for friends. It appears that the development of technology and social-networking websites such as Facebook did not overtake traditional forms of socialising. Nevertheless, also socialising in the context of the male-group only might be depicted by the consumption of different types of social relations (Robinson, 2008).

7.2.3 Male friendships

Men's need for social connectedness can also relate to male friendships. As this study indicates, participants have a positive attitude towards life; they are open to new friendships, experiences and opportunities. They construct warm relations with others and at the same time promote a positive social environment. Male friendship is another important factor sustaining men's gender identity (Robinson, 2008). Messner (1992) points out that from a stereotypical perspective women are believed to develop deep and lasting friendships based on intimacy, while men are unable to form meaningful social relations in the context of same-sex friendship. Messner suggests that these gendered perspectives are poorly defined. Being more specific, people might have different approaches to friendship. Women tend to share their deepest thoughts and worries through mutual and personal conversations while men concentrate on 'doing things' together, what does not necessarily indicate that the latter model of friendship is less valuable (Messner, 1992). In this study, participants highlight their need of, using Messner's terminology, 'doing relationship':

> ' Does anyone want to get trashed tonight? I had a semi-productive week and want to reward myself, haha.'

As data suggests, participants' relationships with other men are not based on competition. It is not an emotionally oriented bond, but companionship based on spending an active time together whether it is cycling, playing computer games or studying together. Participants place high values on consumption of activities that allow them to spend quality time with friends. Moreover, men's friendship is often rooted in humour and banter. It is not surprising; as participants throughout all parts of this study depict their gender identities in the light of humour (see for example Table 7.3 and Table 8.3). The core element of male friendship is also based on providing and receiving support from others in order to cope with the difficulties and uncertainties of everyday life:

> 'I think tonight will finally be the night i sit down and watch Requiem for a Dream. If no one heres from me it's because I've sank into a major depression.'

This type of friendship relates to openness and honesty that might not be freely displayed in a public context of Wall discussions. It has to kept in mind that there are specific private issues that require one-on-one interaction. Consequently, it appears that the nature of friendship is context-specific (Robinson, 2008) and might have different facets in different social environments. Nonetheless, it becomes apparent that nowadays in the context of unpredictable reality participants consume social contacts and friendships that can offer support and mutual understanding. Competitiveness and uncertainty in all areas of

contemporary life can cause emotional distress and depression (Giddens, 1995). Consequently, for many participants, friendship becomes a lifeline and a road map. Similarly, intimate relationships with a significant other can be a source of mutual support. Nevertheless, it has to be pointed out that the theme of dating did not occur even once. Nevertheless, as data indicates, it is not the only 'silent' area of participants' lives.

7.2.4 Unpopular activities and interests

In this study, one can observe activities and interests through which participants do not want to depict their gender identities. Thus, consumption resistance might also symbolise participants' sense of self. It appears that there are collectively avoided behaviours as they might bear negative social connotations. Being more specific, doing any kind of housework (1.03% of postings) is one of participants' undesirable self-images:

a) *'I'm being a 1950's Housewife today. Doing washing and making cookies.'*

b) *'Check me out- up before noon, revising econometrics, vacuming the hallway. It's like I don't even know who I am anymore.'*

c) *'[Participant's name] Is defrosting the freezer lol living the dream!'*

Participants formulate housework duties through the prism of humour and irony. Stereotypically, men's lives were associated with the public domain whereas the private realm belonged to women (Whitehead, 2002). However, with changing conditions of current lifestyles, where men and women raise their age of first marriages, and where women work on a full-time basis, one can observe a decline of stereotypical division into bread-winning and housework duties (Ehrenreich, 1995). As seen in this study, men take responsibility for home tasks but at the same time, they avoid consumption and production of messages that place them within the domestic sphere.

Another traditional perspective relates to possession of trendy electronic gadgets that are stereotypically seen as confirmation of 'real' manhood (Whitehead, 2004). In this study, participants do not project themselves through the consumption choices such as cars, mobile phones or laptops. Participants do not highlight materialistic fulfilments; instead, they eagerly discuss technological innovations and news:

'Borrow library books for free on your kindle (or iphone with kindle app) - cool. USA only just now but I guess this will come to the UK soon.'

Here, similarly as in the case of Visual Self participants avoid materialistic approaches to life. In their reasoning, there is a shift from the need to possess tangible goods to more experiential purchases (Boven and Gilovich, 2003). People invest in acquiring life experiences that broaden their knowledge of the world such as travelling (9.31% of postings) because materialistic orientation is socially undesirable. Participants attempt to develop meaningful relationships with others and therefore avoid consuming messages that project negative social connotations.

Finally, according to stereotypical models men are supposed to be interested in sport (Harris, 1995). However, in this part of the research only 1.55% of postings relate to the message of being involved in sport activities:

a) 'Winter is gone, cycling is back! 32.6kph average - not bad for the first quick ride of the season!'

b) 'Undoing the good work I did at the gym with chocolate milk and pizza'

This study indicates that participants prefer consuming messages related to sports events (5.04% of postings). In the context of this study it is clear that participants do not have a need to prove themselves in sport. Instead they highlight own student identity and intellectual abilities that appear to be a greater indicator of their identities (see Chapter 8). Nevertheless, as Messner (1997) points out, men do not have an appropriate life balance. Their habits of drinking, smoking or excessive working contribute to a life expectancy that is about seven years shorter than women's (see Chapter 1). Messner (1997) highlighted that men should pay more attention to a healthy lifestyle, because intellectual effort required for instance by university courses ought to be balanced with physical condition and suitable diet. For him men themselves have to take greater responsibility for their own health. Nevertheless, the next part of this chapter relates to narrative self-presentation of participants.

7.3 Self-presentation of participants: discussion of coding units

As can be seen in Table 7.3 there were fifteen coding units generated from the Facebook Walls that relate to participants' self-presentation. In this study, there were no predefined codes of analysis. All coding units were extracted directly from reading and rereading participants' Facebook Walls. Then, once again, Facebook Walls were analysed this time from the perspective of these coding units where the researcher ticked on the check-list each category as it occurred. This procedure exposed the frequency of postings that relate to participants' self-presentation. In the context of this study, high as well as a small

number of postings became a significant indicator of consuming hegemonic masculinity. Both consumption and the resistance to consume communicate vital aspects of gender identity.

Table 7.3 Percentage distribution of participants' self-presentation

Contextual category	Coding unit	Count	Percent
self-presentation of participants	making jokes	432	66.87%
	talking about work	48	7.43%
	interested in own physical appearance	29	4.50%
	talking about women	29	4.50%
	expressing feelings/emotions	25	3.87%
	describing himself as active/adventurous	24	3.72%
	talking freely about sex	21	3.25%
	emphasising things he is afraid off	11	1.70%
	being broke	7	1.08%
	presenting himself as self-confident	6	0.93%
	giving advice	5	0.77%
	asking for advice	3	0.46%
	emphasising own courage	3	0.46%
	being superstitious	2	0.31%
	comparing/ competing with other men	1	0.15%
	TOTAL	646	

On Facebook Walls, the majority of references relate to only one category: making jokes (66.87%). Other popular themes, however ranked on a lower level of percentage distribution relate to talking about career (7.43%). There was only one mention of comparing/competing with other men (0.15%). Similarly, being superstitious (0.31%), emphasising own courage (0.46%) or asking for advice (0.46%) are among the least popular categories. The discussion below considers the concept of consuming hegemonic

masculinity in relation to percentage distribution of Wall postings presented in the Table 7.3.

7.3.1 Narrative sense of humour

This study suggests that through the narrative modes of self-presentation, participants, similarly as in the case of Visual Self, are most likely to reflect their sense of humour (66.87% of postings). It appears that in the context of Facebook Walls men implement humour that sustains solidarity among users. They strategically consume and use a sense of humour to perform their gender identities in a positive light of friendliness and social connectivity. It has to be pointed out that; mixed-gender context of Facebook might impose on users an appropriate style of remarks. Research on humour in relation to gender (Hay, 2000; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 2006; Rogerson-Revell, 2007) indicates that men use aggressive, competitive and offensive jokes while women tend to be supportive, friendly and personal. However, Facebook is a mixed friendship group where participants attempt to apply different types of jokes in order to sustain group solidarity. First, participants similarly as in their Visual Self use self-targeted humour that includes funny stories about their everyday life situations and experiences:

> (a) *'Went for a nearly two hour bike ride. For exercise? Hell no... I was totally lost.'*

> (b) *'Do i order a chinese, or don't I? Damn you first world problems!'*

In the former comment participant appears to define his inability to find a way home. It might make him feel anxious that other people (for example friends or flatmates) might broach the subject. Consequently, he decides to turn the whole situation into humorous narrative to 'protect' himself from being a joke-target of others (Hay, 2000). The latter quote requires from the audience logical reasoning in order to understand the joke. For instance, background knowledge of western capitalism and consumption would be helpful in interpreting the message. In other words, an irony of the comment is related to western lifestyle that for the participant is reduced to making meaningless consumption choices. One can observe that both humorous remarks disclose information about the narrator. Letting others know about own mistakes or individual perspectives might generate mutual trust and solidarity. Nevertheless, participants also employ paradoxical comments in order to create enjoyable atmosphere:

> a) *'It's Friday the 13th which can only mean one thing! Tomorrow will be Saturday the 14th;)'*

b) 'Vegetarians eat vegetables, so does that mean humanitarians are cannibals?'

This sense of humour based on the absurd is harmless and safe to be applied in mixed-gender contexts. Participants attempt to establish themselves as good performers who are familiar with the common idea of wittiness. This solidarity-orientated attitude helps participants to create a positive self-image. Finally, some users make fun of strangers that do not belong to participants' circle of friends:

a) 'to the guy opposite me on the train: who the fuck eats a tin of sardines on a train! Not cool dude!' (via iPhone)

b) 'Guy talking on the news about the Japanese nuclear power plant is called dr.pepper hahaha'

The first example of spontaneous humour relates to the situation where a stranger on the train exceeded the limits of social tolerability. The participant highlights undesirable behaviour that does not fit into realms of his social environment. It might be an attempt to display a perspective that is common for his circle of friends, automatically developing greater interpersonal connectedness. Another quote is rooted in ambiguity where the name of the specialist on the nuclear power plants correlates with the name of a soft drink. Such a sense of humour promotes friendly relationships and solidarity among peers. Participants project their gender identities through positive and cheerful qualities. It appears that men in this sample are consumers of traits such as coolness and wittiness. At the same time, it has to be pointed out that humorous comments can be used to maintain relations of power within a particular group (Hay, 2000). In the case of Narrative Self, participants appear to avoid gendered humour that draws from gender stereotypes or jokes that reinforce xenophobic perspectives. There is no sexual or racial humour, no reinforcement of conservative outlooks. Men, in this part of the study, attempt to maintain solidarity with others and avoid consumption of behaviours that could foster any conflicts on personal grounds.

7.3.2 Participants and emotionality

In this study, men through Narrative Self seldom express own emotions (3.87% of postings) and often reject consuming intimate feelings and connectedness with a special loved one. Stereotypically, gender differences in emotional behaviour are constructed on binary oppositions (Harris, 1995). Being more specific, many researchers have stated that women are emotional, open and sympathetic in relations with other people (e.g. Harris, 1995; Robinson, 2008). They argue that traditionally, femininity is linked with the

domestic sphere; consequently, women are expected to be responsible for creating emotional warmth for the whole family. On the other hand, men are believed to be emotionally incompetent and distant (Duncombe and Marsden, 1993). They relate to the world logically and rationally, striving to stay in control in every aspect of their life.

In this study, participants attempt to sustain a certain range of emotions that could be identified, from a stereotypical point of view, as the consumption of feminine emotions. Some users were openly expressing feelings of attachment to their favourite musical instrument, homesickness or loneliness:

   a) *'i love my guitar. that is all.'*

   b) *'My time in the States was great. It's a little strange to be back- an interesting feeling of both homesickness and homecoming at the same time.'*

   c) *'The awkward moment you're thinking about your life and blurt out "I really need a hug right now", when the only other person in the room is the carpet cleaner you met an hour ago.'*

The data suggest that emotional characteristics of participants might centre around warm, caring and friendly behaviours. It seems that some men are in connection with their feminine side[4]. They do not have a need to repress emotionality in order to produce their gender identity. Participants' emotional literacy is also emphasised when they openly discuss things they are afraid off (1.70% of postings). For some, expressing fear or own incompetence might be seen as 'non-masculine' because 'real' men do not show any signs of weakness or own limitations. Others, might value this ability to combine feminine and masculine feelings within their own personality and regard it as sign of maturity and adjustment to the contemporary life (Harris, 1995).

Moreover, feelings of love might transform the notion of masculine identity. Those who aim to maintain their relationships constantly search for inner consensus between giving and taking, between autonomy and dependence (Duncombe and Marsden, 1993). In this study, many participants did not have a long-term partner. Those who were in relationships consistently avoided displaying any intimate feelings about their significant other. On participants' Walls, one could read posts made by their partners who publicly reflect affections. However, participants used to leave statements such as *'I love you'* without an

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[4] Some researchers (for example Bradley, 2007) indicate that each individual has both feminine and masculine qualities. However, in order to comply with social expectations people often repress unwanted feminine or masculine side.

answer. Instead, they just tended to press 'Like' button. Possibly, publicly reflect devotion or commitment might be regarded as a sign of weakness and lack of control. Masculine identity is stereotypically linked with the concept of public life and work environment that requires from them to be competitive and impersonal (Whitehead, 2002). As data indicate, participants feel ambivalent about consuming and expressing emotional attachment to their partners on Facebook Walls (what does not necessarily indicate that they are unemotional in private one-on-one interactions). Nevertheless, as Seidler (1992) observed, for men it might be a challenge to embrace disparity between public and private self, between instrumental and expressive environments. He suggests that more attention has to be given to men's emotional development.

It appears that participants avoid expressing emotions and feelings about their romantic relationships. Nevertheless, it has to be pointed out that occasionally they also consume stereotypical perspectives on femininity.

7.3.3 Women in the eyes of participants

In their narrative conversations participants also related to the subject of women (4.50% of postings). As Robinson (2008) argued, through the popularisation of certain social messages patriarchal ideology creates false pictures of femininity. Similarly, in this study, it is evident that some participants do not attempt to eliminate from social beliefs the distorted portrayals of female population:

a) 'There's a bird outside, and it's no for shutting up. I bet it's female!'

b) 'Oh god...just watched an old woman take 4 attempts at reversing along a straight bit of road to park, she failed and is now parked right across the junction haha'

The first quote suggests that gossiping or talkativeness would be the best term to describe female identity. Aries in *Small Group Behaviour* (1976) analysed the interaction patterns of male, female and mixed groups. The conclusions suggested that during the mixed-sex conversations; men tend to interrupt women frequently in order to control discussions' topics. The masculine interruptions caused silence in women. In contrast, females made minimal responses such as *mhm*, *yeah* to show support and solidarity for the speaker. Aries research indicates that women tend to ask more questions to clarify information; however, men talk more. Consequently, the belief in females' talkativeness might be a cultural myth that sustains the message that women cannot be eloquent.

The second quote expresses another stereotypical perspective associated with the images of women, namely inability to drive cars. Study by *Quality Planning*[5] (2008) focused upon analysis of traffic violations recorded in 2007 in the United States. The findings suggest that men break more traffic rules and drive more dangerously and aggressively than women. It has to be also mentioned that Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world with a ban on female driving. Nevertheless, this prohibition is not explained through the notion of abilities. As Bloxham (2011) indicated, the 'scientific' research conducted by the Saudi Arabia's highest religious council and Kamal Subhi former professor of King Fahd University (2011) stated that letting women drive, would lead to development of social diseases such as prostitution, pornography, divorce and homosexuality. It seems that regardless of the ideology that underpins social messages, an individual recognition of distorted information would contribute to greater gender equality.

Another aspect of hegemonic masculinity that has been consumed is assessing women's physical appearance. Some participants are eager to publicly create standards of female beauty:

> *'Apart from my burd[6], there are no girls more beautiful than the mod girls of the 60's. Bob cuts, white faces, black eyes and huge eyelashes with a fred perry polo? Boom! Eyeshot.'*

The concept of the attractive appearance is promoted and widespread among women as a fundamental determinant of success and happiness. Through such declarations, men persuade women that to be beautiful is more advantageous than to be clever and certainly more desirable by men (Ussher, 1997). Both womanhood and manhood are constructed not only by social norms but also by people's individual response to social norms and beliefs (Connell, 2002). Consequently, critical reflection on existing status quo could reveal different types of discourses.

Finally, participants in their Narrative Self also proclaimed a pro-feminist stance:

> *'I've said it once and I'll say it again - if you don't think the gender gap exists, sit on a train to London or go to a business car hire company first thing in the morning. Men do the jet setting, the boardroom bluster, the meetings, the decision making. Women do the phoning, emailing and admin back at the office to get them there.'*

In this account, the participant attempts to look at the nature of masculinity through the lens of feminism, highlighting that gender relations are constructed on inequalities. He is

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[5] Quality Planning is an ISO company that works with auto insurance companies to provide them with information on rating errors.
[6] The Glaswegian word meaning 'the current girlfriend'.

sensitive to women's subordination and seems to appeal to his friends to rethink the notion of their manhood. Such an attitude contributes to individual self-development and expands the borders of gender tolerance. Nevertheless, nowadays there is a continuing debate if societies in the twenty first century reveal greater understanding of issues of gender. It appears that people have to extend their critical awareness so they could recognise and challenge patriarchal ideologies. Giroux (1997) argues that educational institutions have to create conditions for students to become autonomous thinkers to respect and be able to analyse independently the strengths and limitations of political, cultural, and social relations. As the findings of this study suggest, some participants (consciously or otherwise) consume hegemonic perspectives and refuse to acknowledge a distorted reality.

7.3.4 Sexual comments

Participants in the social context of Facebook hardly ever talk about sex (3.25% of postings). It has to be pointed out, that in the mainstream culture, there are two contradictory messages about men's sexual behaviours. According to hegemonic norms promoted for example by a myriad media, the macho type is involved in sexual practices with many women without emotional commitment. On the other hand, there is also a type of a faithful and loyal partner (Whitehead, 2002). Nevertheless, stereotypical social messages embrace the idea that men should have perennial sexual desire (Harris, 1995). Of course, it is too simplistic and misleading to assume that all men could be categorised in this manner. In this study, participants' sexual narratives appear to be individual reflections rather than provocative statements:

> *'don't understand why people would abstain from pre-marital sex.'*

As Lyon observed (1994), current social conditions seem to form new aspects of reality such as relativity of knowledge and nihilism. The citation above reflects that participant distances himself from religious and social norms. He attempts to highlight own individualism that to some degree might contribute to creation of new standards. This reasoning is also in line with 'Cultural Self' where participants revealed a great acceptance for individual lifestyle choices (see Chapter 9).

In stereotypical terms, men's sexual behaviours can be associated with violence and the objectification of women (Whitehead, 2002). Dworkin (1981) or Griffin (1985) argued that, mass media became another product of culture, which insistently, treats women as objects, exposing feminine sexuality and feminine pleasure. They argued that a public

depiction of sexual imaginary is created, controlled and consumed by men and is another form of women's oppression. The media promote men's position of authority and sexualised control over women. Similarly, sexual harassment is about power relations and male domination. As discussed in Chapter 1, men can be sexually abused. However, in the realm of ongoing domestic and sexual abuse 89% of victims are women (Wakelin and Long, 2003). Consequently, sexual behaviours might be a sensitive topic in the multicultural context of Facebook Walls. In this study, men collectively do not consume or project any sexual comments about women. Instead, they employ self-directed sexual narratives:

> *'This is the song that plays in my head everytime I have sex.'*
> *[This participant provided a You Tube link to The Battle Royale –Requiem- Prologue]*

Spontaneous thoughts like the one above convey the participant's connectives with his social environment as well as youth culture. This public openness about own sexual needs is another aspect that might be seen through the realm of contemporary Western lifestyle. It has to be also noted that in this study participants often posted on their Walls music videos to express their frame of mind. It seems that for them it is an alternative method of communicating certain messages to their circles of friends. Moreover, in this study participants made ambiguous remarks with sexual connotations that invited other users to post comments. The following quotes were extracted from two different Facebook accounts:

> *'What do you use when a 15cm ruler is too small to measure....'*

Playful tone and ability to distance themselves from their own sexual behaviours might be a sign of confidence and an element of male bonding. At the same time, participants sustain their sense of male identity by avoiding behaviours that might generate negative social connotations. For instance, they do not consume aspects of hegemonic masculinity that relate to sexual behaviours in terms of man's conquest. There is no aggressiveness or patriarchal domination in their sexual comments. Of course, such assumptions might relate to some men, while not to others. It has to be pointed out that men can also encounter problems in terms of sexual relationships. They might feel anxiety, fear of failure or fear of rejection (Seidler, 1997) as men's sexual performances and sexual experiences sustain their sense of masculinity. Consequently, their fear and insecurity related with sexual humiliation might be hidden behind a playful tone and humorous remarks.

7.3.5 Physical appearance and 'unmanly' behaviours

In their Narrative Self, men express relatively little interest in physical appearance or fashion (4.50% of postings) which is in contrast to 'Visual Self' (16.79% of postings). It appears that participants prefer to display attractive photographs of themselves rather than describe their own physical appearance. Nevertheless, in their narrative accounts one can identify contradictory messages where some participants hold negative expressions about their looks while others appear to be overly-confident and narcissistic:

   a) *'My face feels so small, and I look like a wee boy'*

   b) *'fell in love with my own reflection...like Narcissus did'*

The lack of confidence among men questions stereotypical accounts of masculinity seen through the prism of power and authority. The first quote is a manifestation of insecurity in relation to their own physical appearance. The participant openly shares his anxiety about not being masculine enough with a circle of friends. He seems to acknowledge his inner vision of self and communicates it to others. This non-traditional attitude of recognising and expressing own insecurities validates to some degree his sense of masculinity. Being more specific, Seidler (1997) pointed out that self-awareness and the ability to openly discuss different sorts of emotions and problems can help men to reconnect with their silent and repressed elements of identity. This process of consciousness-raising gives the opportunity for both men and women to reconsider and redefine their perceptions on manhood.

At the same time being overly interested in own physical appearance is socially categorised as 'non-masculine' behaviour (Harris, 1995). Traditionally, men should not be concerned about their looks because such acts could be linked with homosexuality (for more discussion see Chapter 10). As Connell (2002) pointed out, people have different attitudes towards homosexuality, effeminate heterosexuals or 'metrosexuals' (men who invest a lot of effort and money to look good). In other words, categories of manhood that do not fit into the hegemonic realm are socially undesirable. Consequently, men consume contradictory messages that they ought to be good-looking and relate with distance to own physical appearance. One of the participants when praised for his profile picture replied:

   'I'm mildly fond of it [profile picture] as well'

In the quote above, the participant attempts to negotiate his gender identity between the concept of indifference and being sexy. Traditionally, in media culture men are seen

through the lens of attractiveness when their physical appearance appeals to women. Male body is associated with power and strength but men's attractiveness is also related to men's personal qualities such as confidence or social position.

In general, in the social context of Facebook Walls participants do not compare themselves or compete with other men (0.15% of postings). Their masculine identities are not underpinned by consumption of emotions such as jealousy or envy about attractive physical appearance, gadgets or intelligence. This is not to say that participants do not experience such feelings. Simply, individuals on public grounds might repress emotions that are not in line with hegemonic masculine norms. Moreover, a notion of male identity is often maintained by the ability to solve problems without the help of others (Whitehead, 2002). In this study, some participants (0.46% of postings) did not hesitate to ask for an advice:

> *'light suit or dark suit. help me people! you know i can't even dress myself.'*

Stereotypically, men are not expected to be familiar with current dress codes (Harris, 1995). Ironically, their lack of style and inability to make fashion choices is socially acceptable (if not desirable). It is a common practice to relate to women to take responsibility for men's fashion. However, in other cases asking for help might be seen as a sign of weakness. Men ought to be self- reliant and handle any difficult situations without showing fear. From a traditional perspective talking about own fears might be seen as unmanly behaviour (Whitehead, 2002). Nevertheless, in this study some participants openly discussed things that they are afraid off (1.70% of postings):

> a) *'An hour to go and the exam fear is full on.'*

> b) *'Finally startin to feel kinda nervous about moving out, on the day that i'm ment to be moving. Fuckin weirdo that I am.'*

Stoic attitude towards life is another trait of hegemonic masculinity (Harris, 1995). Men are persuaded into thinking that they have to stay 'tough' and provide support for those who are emotionally fragile (e.g. women or children). Nevertheless, consumption of hegemonic messages that relate to being mentally strong and emotionally unresponsive to any good, bad or difficult life events means denying own feelings. Some participants of this study were willing to express their fear of exams or nervousness related to shifting flats. In the case of the second quote, the participant appears to identify his own attitude as

abnormal and 'weird'. However as Seidler (1997) argued, in order to generate greater respect for diversity it is important for men to recognise, accept and honestly share their experiences of manhood.

7.3.6 Professional careers

This study suggests that through the narrative modes of self-presentation participants relate to the theme of work (7.43% of postings). While discussing the concept of career it has to be kept in mind that the sample of this study consists mostly of university students. Consequently, their current life circumstances might not be favourable for the construction of professional careers. They might not be in a stage of life where work defines their sense of existence. Nevertheless, among participants' Wall Narratives, it is possible to distinguish different messages that relate to their professional careers:

'Do you think companies file everything into shredders or is it just my CVs?'

This participant appears to be in transition from education to employment. In the light of current economic crisis, many European Union countries report the rise of youth unemployment (see Chapter 2, 'Crisis of masculinity', p.24). Nowadays, educational qualifications cannot promise future employment. Such circumstances might negatively influence one's self-esteem, sense of ambition and men's ego. Life became less predictable and people have to learn how to deal with daily uncertainties (Giddens, 1991). The participant appears to present his difficulty in finding a job through the prism of irony what might help him coping with disappointment. At the same time, some participants managed to achieve careers that were in line with their expectations:

'[Participant's name] has gotten tired of unemployment and got a job in Bank!!! Yaaassss'

The participant takes pride in his ability to obtain a job and suggests that for him it was not a difficult task to be hired. He acts as if being unemployed was his own choice rather than consequence of highly competitive labour market. His new position in a bank helps him to build a positive self-image. However, it is not always that job brings satisfaction:

'Here plain and simple.. Works shite!'

For many participants their academic life is intertwined with a part-time employment often in sectors such as hospitality or retail. Many students need to learn how to skilfully

synchronise their working hours with education. Of course, those who are financially supported by parents have greater possibility of filling their time with leisure activities ((Furlong *et al*., 2011). Types of jobs undertaken by participants seem to overlap with their student lifestyle. They include part-time professions of bartender, waiter or sales assistant as well as research assistant, teaching assistant or student ambassador. Moreover, the idea of 'being broke' that stereotypically might be linked with male incompetence (Seidler, 1997), irresponsibility or laziness is well known to some participants. In total of 1.07% postings, men openly concluded:

a) *'So that's me skint. Again'*

b) *'[Participant's name] is a broke postgraduate. Time to look for a part-time job.'*

According to traditional perspectives, for men, earning money is an indicator of a real manhood, a sign of success and social status (Seidler, 1997). In contrast, the inability to manage own finances and to satisfy own basic needs is a sign of weakness. One might argue that at different stages of life men might have diverse existential reasoning and different consumption needs. It seems that in this study, participants through their public narratives highly value their student identity whereas money message seems to be unimportant. It has to be pointed out that paradoxically, there is a relationship between 'having money' and student identity. Being more specific, those who lack the financial resources have limited access to college and university education. Similarly, in later life those with university degrees have greater chances of finding well-paid and stable employment (Harris, 1995). For participants the consumption of a student identity has a powerful influence upon their lives. For participants the status of a university student indicates intellectual power and success. Nevertheless, the next part of this chapter discusses roles consumed and exposed by participants on a daily basis in the social context of Facebook.

7.4 Roles adopted by participants: discussion of coding units

As can be seen in Table 7.4 there were thirteen coding units generated from the Facebook Walls that relate to roles adopted by participants. In this study, there were no predefined codes of analysis. All coding units were extracted directly from reading and re-reading participants' Facebook Walls. Then, Facebook Walls were analysed from the perspective of these coding units where the researcher ticked on the check-list each category as it occurred. This procedure exposed the frequency of postings that relate to roles adopted by participants. In the context of this study, high as well as a small number of postings is a

significant indicator of consuming hegemonic masculinity. Both, consumption as well as the resistance to consume, communicate vital meanings of the self.

Table 7.4 Percentage distribution of specific roles adopted by participants

Contextual category	Coding unit	Count	Percent
roles adopted by participants	student	621	53.81%
	worker	163	14.12%
	philosopher/intellectualist	148	12.82%
	boyfriend	58	5.03%
	father	42	3.64%
	son	41	3.55%
	friend	21	1.82%
	husband	17	1.47%
	shopper	17	1.47%
	sportsperson	13	1.13%
	brother	6	0.52%
	uncle	6	0.52%
	grandson	1	0.09%
	TOTAL	1,154	

A total of 1,154 roles was marked across 89 Facebook Walls. The predominant role adopted by participants is being a student (53.81%). Other higher rated categories relate to being a worker (14.12%) and presenting oneself as a philosopher/intellectualist (12.82%). On the other hand, categories such as husband (1.47%), father (3.64%) or boyfriend (5.03%) are presented as less significant. The discussion below considers the concept of consuming hegemonic masculinity in relation to percentage distribution of Wall postings presented in the Table 7.4.

7.4.1 Student identity

The current study indicates that through their narrative self-presentation, participants are most likely to consume a role of a student (53.81% of postings). It is not surprising that participants attempt to maintain their academic identity given the university context of sampling. As indicated above (see point 7.2.2), participants present themselves as knowledgeable and clever. Nevertheless, their student identity is not only related to academic excellence or cultural knowledge. It also incorporates reluctance to studying or a need to spend leisure time on partying and drinking. The message of being a student overlaps with the role of philosopher/ intellectualist (12.82% of postings) where the latter one aims to highlight only the concept of being knowledgeable:

> *a) 'do you like good coffee, fundamentally, for its own sake, that is to say its taste, or for the sake of sth else resulting from it, e.g. your caffeine infusion? or something more contentious: do you, at the very bottom, feel affection for a person because you value the person itself, or because you value the outcome, such as happiness, which you (or both of you) get from it?[…]'*

> *b) 'Ah yes, another dead of the night layover in Edinburgh... My nemesis, we meet again'.*

> *c) 'Some people never observe anything. Life just happens to them. They get by on little more than a kind of dumb persistence, and they resist with anger and resentment anything that might lift them out of that false serenity.'*

Participants appear to take satisfaction from their high intellectual performances. Their messages often poetic in tone could be termed as 'philosophies of life' as they reconsider everyday life situations. Participants play with words and concepts in an adventures and a thoughtful manner. One can observe participants' desire to know more, to provoke their audience to respond in order to test different hypotheses. In primary or secondary school, especially peers who are not doing very well academically might see the role of philosopher/intellectualist as eccentric. However, in the context of the university environment participants' curiosity of the world and flexibility of reasoning are desired consumption qualities. The crucial element of being a philosopher/intellectualist is a constant need to search for new meanings that define human existence and contemporary world.

It has to be pointed out that participants establish their gender identities through the prism of intellectual performances that are not purely in line with the consumption of the traditional notion of manhood. Being more specific, the perspectives on subject-choice are still characterised as masculine science/technology and feminine arts/humanities (Francis,

2000). Scientific intelligence is perceived as more valuable than a humanistic one, accordingly reflected in the categorisation of university courses into high and low status. Nevertheless, participants eagerly portray their philosophical/humanistic performances. This reflects greater respect and tolerance for different kinds of intelligence. Nevertheless, among Wall Narratives, one can observe also an importance of connectivity with family members.

7.4.2 Family identity

Nowadays, in the western societies the concept of 'family' relates to complex and often problematic relationships. High rates of divorce, increasing number of single parents, falling rates of marriages and greater social tolerance for same-sex relationships contribute to the diversity, fluidity and instability of family life (Jackson, 2008). The current status quo is linked with the fact that family relationships are less organised around traditional gender roles. Women (in western societies) are no longer dependent on men, challenging patriarchal models of family. Relationships are based on mutual understanding and satisfaction from being together rather than obligation or financial dependence (Giddens, 1991). Moreover, the term 'family' might bear different connotations for different people. It can relate to a husband and a wife, heterosexual or homosexual couples with a child or for example a circle of closest friends (Jackson, 2008). Nevertheless, in this study 3.55% of postings relate to the consumption of the notion of 'being a son'. Three quotes below reflect participants' close relationships with mothers:

a) *'Dont drink, dont do drugs and no getting tattoos. They are for the scum of the earth. - my mom'*

b) *'watching no strings attached with my mum and the dog while doing uni work, I need a life!!'*

c) *'I'm just teaching my mum how to Facebook.... it's a "special process"! She keeps wanting to say lol but I'm refusing to let her as she can't use it right.....oh dear xx'*

The quotes above indicate that a figure of mother plays an important role in participants' lives. Participants present mothers through the prism of love and care, indicating that she is the one who set standards of appropriate behaviour. Participants, consume the message of the filial obedience for their mothers, while at the same time, in some narrative portrayals, one can observe fear of paternal responsibilities:

'One of the advantages of being an uncle - I'm like a second dad but without the responsibility!'

Of course, throughout the life men modify their perspectives and adjust to new circumstances when necessary. They mature and change outlooks that have an impact on their gender identities (Harris, 1995). As mentioned above, in this study, many participants, leading a university lifestyle, did not have a long-term partner and did not think about family responsibilities. Consequently, they hardly ever consumed roles of a boyfriend (5.03% of postings), father (3.64% of postings) or husband (1.47% of postings). Nevertheless, in Wall narratives some participants vaguely mentioned their relationships with fathers:

'Dad: "You not watching Robin Hood?" You mean Doctor Who dad...?'

In the quote above, the father seems to be out of date with current media trends. Son, through the prism of humour, presents his father as a member of an older generation who grew up in different social, economic and historical conditions. The experience of being young has changed considerably. Nowadays, people have an easy access to the world's knowledge through the Internet and consume a wide range of information from other media. Young people do not necessarily need to build their understanding of the world on the opinions and experiences of their parents.

Consequently, relationships between fathers and sons might be problematic and challenging. Traditionally, fathers were seen as 'heads of families' and bread-winners who were given a status of authority and power over any decision taken within the household. The father was a role model and a person of identification especially for the son. At the same time, a father was a cold and rational figure, physically present but emotionally disconnected from his wife and children (Harris, 1995; Seidler, 1997; Biddulph, 1998).

Moreover, traditionally men did not take any responsibility for the upbringing of children and they did not show any feelings of love or care. As Seidler (1992) points out, many men who attend male support groups reveal disappointment with their fathers' indifference about parenting responsibilities. Moreover, according to Seidler, fathers are blamed for an inability to acknowledge achievements and the success of their sons. Nowadays, in the West, in the light of feminist thought, family life is less organised around the consumption of patriarchal relationships. Consequently, insecurity about a father's role might have

further dimensions. Men are expected to show their commitment to fatherhood and spend active time with their children (Beynon, 2002). Fathers ought to transfer knowledge about the world, but at the same time respect children's right to own choices and individuality. Moreover, expressing emotions of love is a desirable element of father-son relationships (Biddulph, 1998). On the other hand, younger generations of men, similarly to the quoted participants, have to be understanding about some outdated perspectives and behaviours of their fathers. It is challenging to clearly define father-son relationships because they might be based on different levels of interaction and closeness. Moreover, men's associations with their fathers are not always positive. Some individuals produce their gender identities in contrast to their father's manhood. In other words, they avoid being like their fathers (Harris, 1995).

7.5 Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was to understand how men construct their gender identities in the social context of Facebook Walls. The focus was upon defining whether participants consume their masculinity through the stereotypical perspectives on gender or produce non-traditional elements of gender self-presentation.

In this study, participants enthusiastically represent their identity through the consumption of political interests that overlaps with social activism (15.03% of postings). Data suggest that knowledge of the current political issues is an important element of their gender identities. Similarly, participants through volunteering for different charities and undertaking actions for social justice attempt to highlight their attachment to social duty. Their construction of self is achieved through the consumption of stereotypical perspective that associates masculine interests with public sphere of life such as politics or global issues. However, within this context, participants narrate aspects of gender in relation to moral standards (e.g. the need to improve the world) rather than the destructive aspects of patriarchy.

Moreover, this study indicates that constructions of the self are influenced (to some degree) by the context of the university environment. Consequently, being embedded in a particular social environment carries implications for the character of consumed activities and interests. In this study, a small number of men present their academic knowledge (1.72% of postings) through the prism of potential power. More often participants reflect their reluctance to studying (6.41% of postings) which is linked with a wide range of

possibilities of spending leisure time. For example, consumption of media (18.84% of postings) that includes playing computer games, watching TV and using the Internet, is an essential part of participants' lifestyle. Thus, consumption of technological advancement navigates to some degree participants' sense of self. Similarly, participants value social connectedness and attempt to maintain friendly relationships with others (7.59% of postings). This study suggests that the university lifestyle is depicted by the notion of friendship that might take different styles from brief discussions through close interactions based on mutual support. Nevertheless, for participants, friendship is irreplaceable for coping with the difficulties and uncertainties of everyday life.

Participants attempt to maintain an adequate sense of self. For example, they value cultural knowledge obtained through travelling (9.31% of postings). However, at the same time, there are activities and interests such as materialistic purchases (2.29% of postings) or housework duties (1.03% of postings) through which participants do not want to depict their gender identities. The resistance to consume might be explained through the fact that these activities either bear negative social connotations or are seen as stereotypically non-masculine. As participants' gender identities are based on the sense of belonging to a group they avoid consuming lifestyles and messages that are not in line with their social environment. Similarly, commenting on sport events (5.04% of postings) rather than playing sport (1.55% of postings) is more popular among participants. Considering that playing sport is often highly competitive and violent, participants choose to narrate their gender identities in the context of being a sport fan. They consume the ideology of sport through being supporters of for example football or rugby clubs and through watching and discussing events of local, national and international significance.

Moreover, this study suggests that in the narrative modes of self-presentation participants are most likely to value a sense of humour (66.87% of postings). They employ various types of jokes (self-targeted humour, paradoxical comments or making fun of strangers that do not belong to a participant's circle of friends) in order to maintain solidarity and connectedness among peers. They also build a positive self-image by avoiding gendered (sexist) humour or jokes that reinforce xenophobic perspectives. Thus, participants display their reflexive agenda of consumption when deciding which aspects of hegemonic masculinity should or should not become an integrated part of the self.

As data indicate, men have various attitudes towards their own emotionality. In a public context of Facebook Walls, some users reveal their 'feminine side' by making emotional

and warm comments (3.87% of postings). Nevertheless, participants tend to express feelings in relation to their favourite interests and activities and conceal feelings of intimacy and love to a significant other. It might be a result of disparity and lack of balance between men's public and private selves. As Seidler (1992) pointed out, emotional development ought to be an integrated element of educational practice. In order to maintain greater tolerance for diversity, men ought to be provided with space and freedom to reconsider their gender identities without judgemental comments. Similarly, Seidler (1992) observed that nowadays many social messages sustain the idea that men ought to stay mentally strong in order to provide support for others (those who are emotionally fragile). This perspective seems to influence to some degree participants' sense of identity, as they avoid consuming 'unmanly behaviours' such as asking for help (0.46% of postings) or revealing own fears (1.70% of postings). In general traditional manhood ought to be defined by independence in making decisions. Similarly, according to hegemonic norms, men's excessive interest in own looks is often seen as 'non-masculine' behaviour (Harris, 1995). It appears that participants, following this line of reasoning, are also unwilling to engage in discussions about own physical appearance (4.50% of postings). They avoid consuming statements related to own attractiveness.

Moreover, participants in their narrative accounts discuss issues related with femininity (4.50% of postings). Some Wall Narratives seem to promote stereotypical views on women. There were references to female talkativeness or inability to drive cars. Some users defined women through the traditional prism of beauty and attractiveness rather than intellectual abilities while others refused to consume these stereotypical standards. For example, one of the participants promoted pro-feminist approach by identifying gender inequalities. Some of the Wall posts provided a challenge to the existing *status quo* and encouraged others to extend their critical awareness about gender relations. It seems that it is difficult to find unambiguous social practices because participants' sense of self and their various standpoints are influenced by consumption of social and individualistic approaches to life.

On the other hand, in the case of sexual comments (3.25% of postings) participants collectively do not consume narratives that might hold negative social connotations. It seems that next to the need of maintaining individuality there are some aspects of social life that are collectively seen as unacceptable. While public openness about own sexual needs is no longer perceived as a potential area of conflicts, narrative sexual abuse against women or men would be intolerable in the public and multicultural context of Facebook

Walls. Consequently, participants in the context of sexual conversations refer to individual reflections or employ self-targeted narratives, helping them to maintain social connectedness. They do not consume messages that are harmful for others.

It seems that for many participants it is not an appropriate timing for developing professional careers. At this stage, they consume university as a place of preparation for the future work place. In the meantime, they combine rigid education with a flexible part-time employment in sectors such as hospitality or retail. They do not present themselves through the lens of stereotypical norms as men striving for success and money. They have chosen to connect their gender identities with current work experiences rather than future and desired professions (a role of worker was mentioned in 14.12% of postings). Consequently, it is not surprising that through their narrative self-presentation, participants are most likely to consume a role of student (53.81% of postings) and take pride from their philosophical/intellectual abilities (12.82% of postings). Participants consume roles that provide a sense of meaningfulness in a particular moment of their life. Consequently, participants build their gender identities also in relation to family life and present themselves through the role of son (3.55% of postings).

To sum up, the concept of gender identity is an omnipresent element of all human activities, interests and conversations. This part of the study indicates that gender identity is not a simple set of socially desirable behaviours. Participants have multiple and complex identities that are influenced to different degrees by consumption of social norms, individual perspectives, university environment and media messages. However, this study demonstrates that participants attempt to construct positive gender identities, full of respect for diversity. They reject perspectives that might be harmful for others. It can be observed that participants employ informed consumption choices and take responsibility for development and negotiation of their gender identities. They symbolically consume activities and beliefs that are in line with their self creation project. However, at the same time, participants by avoiding consumption of particular concepts also aspire to uphold the symbolic project of the self. They search for concepts and behaviours that they truly value in a particular moment of their life. They consume attitudes and roles that provide them with a sense of meaningfulness.

Chapter 8

Visual Self: Analysis of Facebook Profile Pictures

8.1 Introduction

'A picture speaks 1000 words, 1000 words tell a story, a story is an insight, an insight gives you depth, depth gives you soul, soul gives you life...' (20 April 2011, Facebook Wall)

People perform their gender identities on a daily basis through speech, actions, mannerism or written texts on Facebook Walls. However, human experiences, perspectives and life stories are also visible in photographs. For that reason, one can claim that Facebook pictures display users' Visual Self, their personal characteristics and understanding of own gender identity. In the context of social networking websites photographs are an important aspect of one's self-presentation. These types of visual images should be regarded as a significant component of research practice because nowadays technologies, text, images and people's experiences overlap each other creating a complex and multi-layered reality (Pink, 2005).

Historically photographs were believed to capture truth about reality. The press and broadcast media rely heavily on photographs, assigning them a status of 'evidence'. However, recently it has been observed that images are produced to serve specific aims and purposes (Holm, 2008). A picture is a product of choice where the author decides what to capture and how to frame it. It often undergoes a technological manipulation before it is displayed in a particular context (e.g. magazine, exhibition or Facebook profile) that is also not ideologically innocent because the context conveys specific meanings. Consequently, photographs cannot be neutral (Gray, 2003; Holm, 2008). Similarly, participants from this sample, by taking control over their own images, decide which photographs are worth sharing with their wider circle of friends and what messages about personal characteristics they want to consume and communicate to others. Of course, pictures may or may not reflect participants' intended meanings because the interpretation is also a subject to the opinion of others (or as in the context of this study, the researcher's impressions).

In this part of the study 2,765 profile pictures were analysed in order to examine how participants reflect their gender identity through photographs and which aspects of hegemonic masculinity have been consumed in participants' Visual Self expression. A profile image is a common component of all Facebook profiles and is located in the upper left-hand corner of the page. It serves as the main indicator of users' identity because it is visible to everyone on the Internet (even if the users' privacy is set to 'private'). A cover image appears with every post and comment written by the user. Previously displayed profile images are generated in the Facebook album entitled 'Profile Pictures'. In the context of this study, participants' profile pictures were subject of the research analysis. In the sample of 89 Facebook accounts, a number of profile pictures displayed by users ranged from 1 to 166 with the average of 31 images per person. It has to be noted that coding units did not exclude each other as a single picture could have been assigned to more than one category. For example, the following image was coded as:

- image shows participant drinking alcohol
- image shows participant smiling/being happy
- image reflects participant's friendly nature
- image shows participant being relaxed
- image shows participant with male friends only

Picture 8.1 An example of image displayed in the Facebook 'Profile Pictures' album

This is not to say that pictures hold fixed or predictable meanings. Each person could assign different understanding to the presented image, but there are some dominant elements evident at a first glance. Of course, the researcher is not able to capture the whole 'truth' about a particular photography; rather one can present his own interpretation and point of view for others to be considered. Different people might have different understandings of reality that either coexist or contradict each other. For that reason, in this study, there was an aspiration to define a situation through the researcher's subjective perspectives (for further discussion see chapter 4). However, to reduce the possibility of misinterpretation of the data, a sample of twenty random profile pictures was judged for reliability by two independent reviewers. The aim was to test whether other researchers with a similar theoretical background would have categorised and understood the presented materials in the same way. Two independent reviewers were introduced and given the

explanation of how the researcher classified particular responses and particular pictures. The purpose of these inter-judge procedures was to reach the consensus of categorisation and interpretation as well as to identify any potential problems that might have arisen during the process of analysis (Cohen et al., 2008).

There were also cases where it was impossible to identify more than one theme. Being more specific, many pictures could have been described only in terms of 'participant alone'. Photographs without accompanying text or any explanation are limited. Nevertheless, researcher's first impression is in itself data that provide bases for further analysis. Following Goffman's (1959) argument, human interactions are based on 'impression management' tactics. People adjust their gestures, facial expressions, behaviours, and clothing to a particular situation in order to satisfy their various audiences. Similarly, management of Facebook profile photos plays a curtail role in users self-presentation. They choose to consume images that convey particular messages that are in line with their self-creation project but automatically fall into criteria of social approval.

Nowadays people are surrounded with visual images. However, men are commonly associated with the concept of 'male gaze' (Mulvey, 1975) and high responsiveness to visual stimulus. Men (according to some feminist perspectives of, for example Dworkin, 1981 or Griffin, 1985) obtain pleasure from looking at bodies of half-naked and topless women that appear in magazines, advertisements, films or pornography. In the context of media culture, the male act of looking is understood through the perspective of erotic desires where female bodies become sexual objects for male consumption. Paradoxically, in this part of the study, the issue was to define how men frame their own masculinity in visual images and which aspects of hegemonic masculinity are consumed on a daily basis. The idea was to provide a thoughtful analysis of men's gender codes encapsulated in their Facebook profile pictures. Facebook users make choices of what concepts and messages they want to consume and transmit to others. Therefore, the analysis of pre-existing photographs captured activities, self-presentation and roles consumed and reproduced by men in their visual images. Photographic images used for the purposes of this chapter are reproduced with participants' permission (see Appendix F).

The percentage distribution is collectively presented for all analysed Facebook pictures. The purpose of using a collective rather than an individual approach was to convey the wholeness of masculine identities. Of course, the percentage distribution in relation to individual profiles could provide potentially interesting data for further study.

Nevertheless, in the context of this research, individual perspectives are discussed in Chapter 9 through the analysis of open-ended questionnaires.

The frequency distribution of postings produced an overview of the situation without encompassing the rhetorical meaning of the message (Deacon *et al*., 1999). Consequently, the percentage distribution is also discussed in relation to gender issues through the interpretive discussion. The discussion is organised by headings that arose from the data in the process of the inductive content analysis (Dey, 1993). The coding units, presented in a form of percentage distribution, were grouped into headings that aimed to represent the main themes/ideas that emerged from the data. Consequently, some of the headings literally relate to the coding units, whilst others connect a number of units that overlap one another to a certain degree. Following Dey's (1993) reasoning, in this chapter, the formulated headings aim to provide a meaning for the coding units in order to generate new perspectives.

8.2 Self in relation to daily activities and interests: discussion of coding units

As can be seen in Table 8.2 there were 10 coding units generated from the Facebook Profile Pictures that relate to participants' daily activities and interests. All coding units were extracted directly from participants' Facebook Profile Pictures. Then Profile Pictures were analysed from the perspective of coding units where the researcher ticked on the check-list each category as it occurred. This procedure exposed the frequency of images that relate to participants' daily activities and interests. In the context of this study, high as well as a small number of posted images is a significant indicator of consuming hegemonic masculinity. Both, consumption as well as the resistance to consume, communicate vital meanings of the self.

Table 8.2 Percentage distribution of specific daily activities and interests

Contextual category	Coding unit	Count	Percent
self in relation to daily activities and interests	image shows participant on holidays/or unique location	407	39.48%
	image shows participant in the pub/club /partying	248	24.05%
	image shows participants drinking alcohol	197	19.11%
	image shows participant playing sport	75	7.27%
	image shows participant in his cars/using electronic gadgets/ laptop	33	3.20%
	image shows participant playing guitar	33	3.20%
	image shows participant studying/ reading	17	1.65%
	image shows participant at work/ bartender	8	0.78%
	image shows participant dancing	6	0.58%
	image shows participant doing housework/cooking	7	0.68%
	TOTAL	1,031	

The most frequently presented images relate to three themes, namely participants being on holidays/ or in a unique location (39.48%), participants spending time in the pub/club/partying (24.05 %) as well as participants drinking alcohol (19.11%). The categories of dancing (0.58%) or doing housework/cooking (0.68%) appear to be the least important among categories. The discussion below considers the concept of consuming hegemonic masculinity in relation to percentage distribution presented in the Table 8.2.

8.2.1 The meaning of experience

The current study indicates that through visual images, participants are most likely to present holiday memories and unforgettable places (39.48% of photographs). Perhaps, it illustrates Boven and Gilovich's (2003) explanation that experiential purchases that have a purpose of acquiring life experiences such as going to a concert, dining or travelling, foster enjoyment and make people happier. On the other hand, the aim of material purchases is to obtain a physical object that can stay in one's possession. This approach carries mainly the practical point of reference and consequently lower levels of contentment. In contemporary post-materialistic culture, people tend to choose activities that offer personal

improvement and self-actualisation over tangible objects (Hassenzahl, 2011). Similarly, in this study, consumption of experiences rather than material goods became participants' identity markers. A small number of photographs displayed participants in their cars, using electronic gadgets or laptops (3.20% of photographs). Men in this sample might be unwilling to apply this type of stereotypical self-presentation as it bears negative social connotations. Being more specific, materialists are stereotypically perceived as self-centered, selfish and judgmental, while people with experiential attitudes create an impression of being open-minded, outgoing and friendly (Van Boven *et al*., 2010). The materialistic orientation is socially undesirable, potentially creating a barrier for developing meaningful relationships with others. Similarly, poor social functioning is a relatively unfavourable element of masculine identity. For this reason, participants attempt to locate their self-presentation in the realm of experiential purchases and consume activities such as travelling, dining out or going to the concerts.

Individuals with a lower level of income might strive to fulfil basic needs such as food, accommodation or clothing (Maslow, 1943). For them, material purchases would bring greater happiness and well-being. Satisfaction of fundamental needs appears to be a necessary condition for developing the post-materialistic orientation. However, taking into account the collected data, it might be stated that the majority of participants have sufficient resources for leading post-materialistic lives where their choice of experiences depends upon age, interests and cultural background. Nowadays life experiences are no longer assigned only to exotic trips or expensive holidays. They can relate to less sophisticated pleasures that are not necessarily associated with material wealth. Through their visual images, Facebook users displayed consumption of social activities and events in which they are involved on a more frequent basis, including going out to the pub/club or partying (24.05% of photographs), drinking alcohol (19.11% of photographs) or playing sport (7.27% of photographs). It has to be noted that participants' visual representation of activities can be classified as traditionally masculine. These findings are also in line with participants' Narrative Self and indicate that participants highly value successful social interactions.

Photographs serve as an activator of pleasant, fun and memorable activities. However, another issue here relates to events and memories that did not become a part of the Facebook profile albums. Being more specific, participants reject consumption of images that reflect less happy or unpleasant life experiences. This corroborates with Sutton's (1992) findings that people are most likely to erase photographs that bear negative

connotations. He observed an irony about visits to Disney theme parks. People expect their trips to theme parks to be exciting and stimulating, but at the same time, they might bring less cheerful moments spent in queues or disappointment with provided attractions. According to Sutton, visitors after returning home start repelling unenthusiastic and unpleasant moments and remove photographs that revive those negative memories. Consequently, individuals rebuild their experiences through the more positive lens that to some degree distorts reality. The pursuit and consumption of happiness is another media myth that sets artificial goals of 'having it all'. Participants' selection of photographs might be explained through this notion of contemporary culture that emphasises the message of being happy and fulfilled.

In short, people's life stories, their symbolic consumption choices and sense of self are commemorated in photographic collections. However, as this part of the study suggests, individuals avoid consuming non-masculine aspects of daily life such as monotony or sadness and focus upon rather positive or even idealised experiences. This is accomplished by photographing a very specific range of situations, namely holidays or social events that convey the impression of being happy. Simultaneously, participants communicate their ability to form and engage in social activities as this type of experience carries for their male identity greater value than materialistic possessions.

8.3 Self-presentation of participants: discussion of coding units

As can be seen in Table 8.3 there were thirteen coding units generated from the Facebook Profile Pictures that relate to participants' self-presentation. All coding units were extracted directly from participants' Facebook Profile Pictures. Then Profile Pictures were analysed from the perspective of coding units where the researcher ticked on the check-list each category as it occurred. This procedure exposed the frequency of images that relate to participants' self-presentation. Moreover, in the context of this study, high as well as a small number of posted images is a significant indicator of consuming hegemonic masculinity. Both, consumption as well as the resistance to consume, communicate vital meanings of the self.

Table 8.3 Percentage distribution of participants' self-presentation

Contextual category	Coding unit	Count	Percent
self-presentation of participants	image is a humorous shot	406	25.34%
	image shows participant in a sexual/attractive way	269	16.79%
	image shows participant smiling/being happy	192	11.99%
	image shows participant being serious	174	10.86%
	image shows participant elegantly dressed	120	7.49%
	image shows participant being romantic	108	6.74%
	image reflects participant's individualism and originality (e.g. image branding, visual effects)	96	5.99%
	image reflects participant's active/adventurous personality	85	5.31%
	image shows participant being relaxed	59	3.68%
	image reflects participant's being friendly with others	52	3.25%
	image reflects participant's gloomy/dark nature	21	1.31%
	image shows participant as a child	17	1.06%
	image shows participant dressed as a woman	3	0.19%
	TOTAL	1,602	

In the context of Facebook profile pictures, the majority of references relate to only two categories, namely, images being a humorous shots (25.34%) and images showing participants in a sexual/attractive way (16.79%). Other popular themes, however ranked on a lower level of percentage distribution relate to images portraying participant smiling/being happy (11.99%) or participants being serious (10.86%). Among the least popular categories, one can identify images where participants are dressed as a woman (0.19%). The discussion below considers the concept of consuming hegemonic masculinity in relation to percentage distribution presented in the Table 8.3.

8.3.1 Visual sense of humour

Research investigations on the sociology of humour often relate to the feminine and masculine use of language in everyday life conversations or workplace environments

(Holmes, 2006; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 2006; Rogerson-Revell, 2007). However, very little work explores humour in relation to visual constructions of gender. This study suggests that through the visual modes of self-presentation, participants, similarly as in the case of Narrative Self, are most likely to reflect their sense of humour (25.34% of photographs).

Lyman (2010) in his essay about the fraternal bonds argues that joking relationships among men sustain a sense of connection but automatically create an emotional distance that prevents from discolouring more intimate and personal feelings. He points out that sexist and vulgar jokes have a prominent role in the formation of male interpersonal relationships. It is justified by the idea that other male bonding activities (for instance sport or games) are depicted by rule-governed aggression and cruelty. Consequently, men understand the dynamic of jokes through a similar prism. Moreover, it might be considered as a specific defence against forming individual and intimate relationships with women that could considerably weaken fraternal ties. Correspondingly, in the case of Facebook photographs men attempt to uphold this type of male solidarity by consuming sexual themes.

Picture 8.3.1.1 Sexist jokes

While the sense of humour is a necessary element for creating and sustaining male bonds, the picture above could be regarded in terms of the 'risqué' joke. Humour varies considerably depending upon cultural and geographical settings. In addition, age, class and gender influence one's interpretation of jokes. Facebook is a mixed-sex environment where women might understand this visual joke in terms of aggressiveness and inappropriateness because female body became objectified both in sexual and sexist manner. Extreme close-up, which focuses solely on a particular part of the female body, conveys negative connotations with pornographic images. The woman's nakedness carries strong erotic message that is offensive rather than intimate. At the same time, men could excuse the picture as a type of playful and 'just for fun' behaviour that does not necessarily aims to sustain patriarchal power relations. However, according to Freud (1960[1905]) jokes are analogous to dreams and contain elements of unfulfilled and repelled needs. For Freud there is a disparity between social standards and human instincts. Social prohibitions on expressing sexual and aggressive desires repress instinctual urges from people's consciousness. For him, *innocent* jokes tend to focus upon a simple wordplay that does not engage deeper psychological functions. However, a majority of jokes is *tendentious* and releases suppressed cruel and sexual impulses. These impulses are not morally or

ideologically innocent. Following Freudian argument, one may assume that the consumption of sexist jokes (whether visual or not, whether told consciously or otherwise) preserve stereotypical social order that sustain male domination.

In general, men use more aggressive and cruel humour that is intensified in the context of the all-men group (Lyman, 2010). On the other hand, men in the presence of women do not reduce an amount of humorous behaviours, but their jokes tend to change character from teasing/mockery observations to self-directed remarks (Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 2006). It is to avoid violation of social norms about vulgar and aggressive attitudes towards women. Female humour is believed to be supportive and non-aggressive and for this reason, male teasing could cause misunderstandings and tension just as the picture above. Facebook, apart from being a mixed-sex environment, is also a setting of inter-cultural communication where it might be complicated to transfer humour across national and cultural boundaries (Rogerson-Revell, 2006). Participants have to handle their humorous behaviours with tact, strategically achieved by consuming self-targeted humour.

Picture 8.3.1.2 Self-targeted humour

Jokes have to meet a certain criteria in order to achieve a humorous result including for example ambiguity of a message, appropriate timing and situational context (Hay, 2000).

The above picture facilitates humour by surprising viewers with unusual idea and its comic visual effect. The participant by sharing his idea of what is funny attempts to create a positive self-image and develops a deeper interpersonal connection with others. It is, using Freudian phraseology, an innocent joke that could not be interpreted as an insult. The above picture is an example of self-directed humour that can be explained through the rules of male bonding, according to which men have to 'stay cool' (Lyman, 2010). In other words, as humour (often abusive and violent) is an important element of communication and negotiation among men, they have to be able to distance themselves from mockery of others. Similarly, consumption of self-directed humour aims to reflect a participant's confidence ('coolness') and positive self-image. It also has a more sensitive side that contributes to greater integrity in a mixed friendship group.

Simultaneously, jokes can challenge a notion of traditional masculinity. Goffman's (1959) theory implies that people attempt to comply with social norms to avoid public embarrassment. This fear of embarrassment is closely linked with the idea that one of the purposes of humour is to laugh at others' misfortune and mistakes (Rogerson-Revell, 2006). In this context, humour might aggregate an asymmetrical relationship and negative feelings of inferiority in the mocked person, which is not in line with stereotypical masculine traits of strength and power. Any behavioural errors can be easily captured on a photograph. However, it has to be noted that Facebook users have a choice to approve or reject any picture on which they are tagged in. It gives them control over visual teases directed at them. Consequently, visual jokes at the expense of others do not occur frequently in the social context of Facebook. Humorous shots relate mostly to different usage of camera angles, funny facial expressions, visual effects or presenting external images extracted from the Internet websites.

In short, participants consume elements of visual humour to strengthen social bond with other users. At the same time, their sense of humour can be seen as a Janus-faced act that evokes both positive and negative effects. The context of sexual jokes facilitates traditional fraternal relationships, but automatically might be considered in the realm of social faux pas. Through the self-directed visual humour, participants also aim to sustain an image of a 'cool and confident guy'; however, it is less likely to provoke unenthusiastic assumptions. It serves as a basis of friendship in an informal, mixed-sex group of Facebook friends.

8.3.2 Sexualised bodies

Interestingly, in contrast to Narrative Self, participants willingly display their physical attractiveness through photographs (16.79% of photographs). In western societies, there is a strong focus upon the body. It embraces themes of being healthy, looking fashionable, fit and sexually desirable. The understanding of the female body has been an important aspect of feminist thought (Richardson, 2008). Bodily matters, seen as an arena of women's subordination, relate to biological processes such as hormonal flows, menstruation, pregnancy, birth or abortion (Sheldon, 2002). At the same time, the canons of physical attractiveness are mostly associated with femininity. Women are persuaded into thinking that physical beauty is the most important aspect that determines life success and happiness. However, it seems that an increasing number of men struggles for bodily perfection, muscular torsos and a legendary six-pack (Ross, 2010). Bodies are shaped by gender, age, race, sexuality, but media through idealised images of masculine bodies promotes a notion of desirable masculinity. Nowadays men are expected to take care of their physical looks. One might argue that they became objectified and pushed into regimes of physical attractiveness in a similar manner to women (Whitehead, 2002). Appearance has become an integrated element of self-esteem and grounds for expressing own gender identity that either confirms or rejects the social boundaries of approval. In other words, physical appearance may have an impact upon social interactions between individuals and their environment.

In the context of the Internet research, Siibak (2007) indicates that women have a tendency to display idealised images of female beauty on online dating websites, while men attempt to emphasise their individualism rather than physical attractiveness. However, for some authors (Lury, 1996) women are limited in their ability to express identity through the body images because women follow patriarchal expectations that reflect male desires. It is a continuous projection of external norms rather than self-expression. On the other hand, Giddens (1991) points out that consumer culture provides both men and women with universal meanings and canons of beauty. The body became (for both males and females) an object of consumption exposed to the gaze of others. Simultaneously, it is also a product signifying deeper meanings. For Bourdieu (1979) the body is perceived as a reflection and manifestation of particular class taste. Following his line of reasoning, each social class has a particular code ('habitus') of physical appearance. For example, working class men aim to have a muscular shape that reflects physical strength and for that reason, they engage in body-building or weight lifting. On the contrary, middle class men prefer a slim figure and

sporting activities such as jogging, swimming or trekking that improve both look and health (Jagger, 2000). For Bourdieu, cultural activities, interests or relationships with own body are embedded in a class belonging.

Nevertheless, the participants' enthusiasm in presenting attractive images of themselves might be linked with contemporary consumer culture. The media and advertising industry sexualise everyday life and set particular role models. However, the contradictory nature of images provided by magazines, television programmes or Internet sites creates some kind of confusion of what visual gender representations are socially expected and valued (Ross, 2010). This range of self-presentation is visible in participants' choices of photographs that capture and highlight different elements of physical attractiveness. It has to be pointed out that there is also an ideological connection between male body and male power. Men understand the social pressures and messages of how the body images play a crucial role in marking boundaries of gender, sexuality, class or race. Similarly, women assess men's bodies through a critical lens, connecting body representations with stereotypical assumptions about gender norms (Morgan, 1992). Nevertheless, the following examples illustrate the most popular themes in relation to attractiveness that are consumed by participants' their profile photographs.

Picture 8.3.2.1 Sensitive and protective male character

In Facebook accounts, users attempt to portray themselves through the symbolic consumption of gentle masculinity. They have chosen to establish their personality on a romantic, passionate and loving level. This model of masculinity is desirable by women because as social practice indicates, sensitive and emotionally mature men are more appropriate as life partners. The researcher's perspective suggests, that the image above, capturing picturesque scenery and participant as he is punting on a river, presents the softer part of male identity. Participant's posture and pose are relaxed indicating that he is not taking a part in a race but simply enjoys punting as a leisure activity. At the same time, he is holding a pole to navigate a boat with confidence and professionalism. Gazing into the horizon with lips slightly open, he seems to be willing to express the emotional and tender side of his personality. In this full-body shot, there is a sense of peacefulness and trust. Taking this suggestion a stage further, one might assume that he is a type of pro-feminist man who feels comfortable about his sensitive and caring nature.

However, in Facebook profile albums this good, kind and thoughtful man appears in comparison with the rough and aggressive male character. It has to be noted that this juxtaposition of images does not occur only across different profiles but often becomes an element of the same account.

Picture 8.3.2.2 Rough and aggressive male character

Some participants attempted to characterise themselves in the relatively confident and daring manner of a Macho Man. The above photograph is an interesting example of consuming this type of self-representation. First, looking at the picture the attention is drawn to its formal design that resembles a professional magazine advertisement. This creativity and sophistication is further deployed by the close shot of the man's head and shoulders. The participant stares coldly at the viewer; his serious facial expression reflects the sense of authoritative and despotic masculinity. The woman's position is in the background. Standing behind him with her arm across his chest, she appears to be saying 'please do not leave me'. However, he is unresponsive to her sensitivity and tenderness. He is not interested in intimate human relations, because for him traditional views about love and romance are sign of weakness. Of course, it is only one possible interpretation of the image. However, from the researcher's perspective, this photograph communicates a certain kind of male attitude that cultivates sexist perspectives. Here the conception of masculinity is established through the patriarchal notion. He is a man with power and with his anti-feminist approach, he expects his woman to be submissive and obedient. At the same time, his angry image is shrouded with the aura of attractiveness and sexual experience. This perspective arose out of the various media messages that sustain the belief that male indifference is a sign of passion and love.

The differences in participants' self-presentation could be explained through Baudrillard's (1981) theory of reproduction of signs. Globalisation and consumer culture blur symbolic meanings of social signals by providing people with unlimited lifestyle options and (to some degree) a freedom of choice (Featherstone, 1991). Hence, Baudrillard would argue that the body is marked with different cultural messages. For him, the relationship between the self and the body is dynamic, fluid and moves beyond the Bourdieu's materialization of social status. Individuals are immersed in the culture that lacks consistency, culture that is fragmented and uncertain. Media through the production of multiple messages, invite people to test different identity models and canons of physical appearance (Jagger, 2000). Consequently, for Baudrillard, people, being engaged with those endless superficial and contradicting codes of practice, develop the sense of shifting and fragmented identities. Similarly, this study found that participants' through visual images attempt to consume multiple gender identities and gender messages. They do not strive to uphold continuity or coherence of self-representation. Moreover, in their visual representations of attractiveness participants engage stereotypical images of maleness. To define own gender identity they

consume cultural scripts and media messages of ideal masculine self that often contradict each other.

Media formulas promote two types of male characters that satisfy women's expectations. It is either a brutal man whose unpredictable and dark nature is presented in the realm of excitement or a kind and considerate man who is a committed husband and father (Christian-Smith, 1990). The former image actively sustains the notion of male authority and patriarchy. The latter is based on the concept of respect and trust. However, these superficial images of men are destructive for both males and females, as they establish norms that are impossible for most men to measure up to. The fatalism of the situation is rooted in the fact that real lives become shaped by unrealistic stereotypes and generalisations that confuse rather than enlighten. The inability to feel and become a particular role model might cause strong dissatisfaction, feelings of unworthiness and disappointment (Ussher, 1997). Portrayals of men within sampled for these research Facebook profile pictures, do not challenge the traditional images of masculinity. As attraction is related with both physical appearance and personal qualities participants predominantly present themselves according to simplistic schemes based on binary oppositions (violent versus tender, indifferent versus carrying, immature versus sensible) in order to become an object of female attention. As has been shown, participants do not define their gender identity with consistency, but characterise themselves through various, often contradictory messages about masculinity.

8.3.3 Fashioning the body

In addition, fashion remains an integrated part of the body that constitutes to the creation of embodied identities. This active relationship between body and dress might operate on different grounds. First, it offers the possibility to express distinctiveness of the self. It is a visualisation of own uniqueness and individuality. On a social level, dress code is a subject to cultural norms and moral pressures. It also encapsulates certain social meanings (Davis, 1994). Fashion is not a fixed concept, but a dynamic one that might differ from place to place depending upon social situation (for example wedding, funeral, job interview). It is not a surprise to note that variables such as race, class, age or sexual orientation influence attitudes and tastes in fashion. Particular dress standards operate within every society marking the boundaries of appropriate feminine and masculine embodiment. In Western countries, most fashion magazines promote images that sustain this dichotomy of feminine

and masculine dress code. Less frequently, they support androgynous ideology that rejects the idea of gender difference in relation to clothing (Entwistle, 2002).

Interestingly, within this study, 3.37% of images confronted dominant Western stereotypes of masculine clothing by presenting participants being dressed as a woman. Due to the sporadic consumption (three pictures in three different profiles) of this type of self-representation, one might argue that particular participants did not attempt to express their cross-dressing or transgender identity. As dress reflects information about a social situation, one could assume that shots had been taken during an informal fancy dress parties. However, it has to be highlighted that participants have no sense of humiliation of failing to meet heterosexual standards of fashion. There is no embarrassment associated with 'incorrect'/'feminine' dress code because otherwise, these images that challenge traditional notion of masculinity, would not be a part of Facebook profile albums. Following Giddens' (1991) argument, nowadays people define themselves not through traditional social roles but through deliberate choices of for example what to wear. It is not a naïve reproduction of stereotypes, but a complex negotiation of social and individual expectations. Participants who present themselves wearing female clothes might attempt to highlight their tolerance, acceptance of diversity and appreciation of individualism.

At the same time, consumption of male splendour (in relation to fashion) was another element of participants' Visual Self. In this research, 7.49% of images presented participants being elegantly dressed in business suits, white shirts and ties. In addition, images of men wearing kilts, through which participants attempted to articulate their national and cultural belonging, were also classified under the category of 'elegantly dressed'. Both business suit and kilt were regarded as a symbol of duty, rigour and discipline. Men who wear these kinds of uniforms want to be seen as self-confident, powerful and reliable, hiding behind the layers of stylish clothes any moods and troubles. Similarly, in public spaces, men are often uniformed for example as soldiers, police officers, fire fighters or businessperson. Tailoring of uniforms redirect attention from the body's line and highlights the importance and prominence of the public role (Morgan, 1992). However, through the consumption of unemotional and confident images of masculinity, participants enhance their attractiveness and sexual appeal. Here, their masculine power is not located in physical strength but in other stereotypical attributes of masculinity such as maturity and responsibility.

8.3.4 Visual relationships with others

Photographs capture proximity and distance as well as the degree of physical contact between people, indicating their bonds and the type of the social relations (Cronin, 1998). In this research, through displayed photographs, participants do not communicate their sense of attachment to others, whether it is a romantic relationship (6.74% of photographs) or friendship (3.25% of photographs). Moreover, nearly half of the analysed images present participants being alone (see table 8.3.3).

Romantic body language includes elements that reveal sexual intimacy and chemistry such as being in each other's personal space, direct eye contact between a couple, holding hands, hugging or kissing. In this study, most participants are unwilling to present photographs that convey messages of consuming romantic relationships. Contemporary culture cultivates the notion of independence where emotional attachment is regarded as a threat to male identity (Seidler, 2006). Participants might repress intimate self-representation that is socially associated with vulnerability rather than power, irrationality rather than reason. However, the relationship stage might also affect whether users post photographs with a significant other (Guerrero and Andersen, 1994). It seems that seriously dating and married participants are more likely to publicly define themselves through the lens of a relationship than casually dating participants. Emphasising personal commitment and faithfulness to one woman has a positive social effect. It symbolically marks men's maturity and generates respect. Nevertheless, only 6.74% of images project this type of romantic relationships. It indicates that men who participated in this study might not be ready to express their intimate dedication and affection in the public context of Facebook (what might not be relevant to their private lives).

On the other hand, friendship body language contains patterns that reflect integrity and friendly interests such as leaning towards another person, patting on the back, touching the arm or putting an arm around another person. As discussed above sustaining successful social relationships is an important element of male identity. It is also the main objective of using social-networking websites such as Facebook. However, participants' reluctance to symbolically consume a friendship bond through the body language might be explained by the research findings on gender differences in tactile behaviours. Research suggests (Guerrero and Andersen, 1994; Derlega, *et al*., 1989) that during social interactions, women tend to have negative attitudes towards opposite-sex touch more than men. The same research has shown that males report greater avoidance of same-sex touch than

females. This can be linked with the idea that men who are engaged in the same-sex touch are more likely to be perceived as homosexuals. Heterosexual men might fear this labelling because hegemonic notion of masculinity (or in other words, social and cultural stereotypes) naturalises and approves only heterosexuality as a standard behaviour (Robinson, 2008). Moreover, friendship on Facebook is not limited to same-sex interactions. Men might avoid presenting photographs on which they enter women's personal space because it could breach rules of social appropriateness. In short, the construction of masculinity is context-specific and facilitates consumption of different patterns of self-representation. While participants attempt to cultivate friendship through their Narrative Self or visual jokes simultaneously, they avoid picturing friendship through the body language that might evoke unfavourable social attitudes.

8.3.5 Visual negotiation of cultural distinctions

Facial expressions captured on the photograph are open to the analysis of those who perceive it. They become meaningful social signals and might indicate emotions of fear, sadness, surprise or for example, boredom. However, in this study the researcher's judgement was directed toward two basic facial expressions of happiness and seriousness. Interestingly, Facebook profile pictures reflect men being serious (10.86% of photographs) nearly as often as smiling (11.99% of photographs). These results ideologically correspond to the above discussion on the 'sensitive man' and 'Macho man' because facial expressions carry strong connotations with physical attractiveness and above all one's personality.

However, within the multicultural context of this study, one interpretation could be that men from Pakistan or India were more likely to consume serious images without spontaneity or naturalness. They present themselves in a self-important manner and with some kind of dignity in posture. It has to be noted that all Southern Asian men who took part in this study were not born and raised in the United Kingdom, but arrived here to obtain a specific University degree (information derived from their Facebook profiles). Through their visual images, they uphold a certain social values and expectations of being productive individuals that care about their formal education and life success. In other words, through their visual representations, Southern Asian participants convey the status of 'standard bearers' (Harris, 1995). They attempt to set an example for others by promoting dedication to knowledge and moral principles. They want to become guardians for the next generation with an altruistic vision of the world, caring about the needs of other people more than their own happiness. However, all their actions are embedded in

the appropriateness of social standards. They have a strong need for social approval where obedience to particular social norms is the major element for establishing their identity.

At the same time, for participants from Western countries consumption of unsophisticated and cheerful qualities as well as lack of formality become an integrated part of their visual self-presentation. Their facial expressions often denote naturalness, openness and happiness. This is not to say that Western men do not build their gender identities on the notion of 'standard bearers'. They also have a need to improve the world by helping others or by dedicating themselves to an academic excellence what is reflected in their profile pictures or Wall narratives. However, the difference is that in the West, one can observe a loosening of social rules and a rise of the individualism (Giddens, 1991). Possibly, for this reason Western men are more likely to reflect their active and adventurous personality. Adventure, according to Green (1993), is about willingness to take risks and to test new ideas that breach social standards. For instance, participants from Western countries freely present images of wild parties and binge drinking, which does not necessarily conform to social cannons of appropriate behaviour. Their consumption of manhood and gender identities is highlighted by distinctiveness from social norms. Similarly, adventure relates to pushing the limits of physical abilities and desire to live on the cutting age. It is displayed through participants' spontaneous photographs of rock climbing, rafting or mountain biking. It is also their visual attempt to liberate themselves from ordinary existence. Consequently, this study indicates that in Western culture the need for conventional approval is decreasing. Western participants are willing to define themselves through the realm of nonconformist/nonconventional experiences, in contrast to Adorno's (1991) pessimistic vision that under capitalism people will be shaped by sameness. It has to be noted that the notion of being adventurous asserts stereotypical traits of masculinity, namely power and authority. However, in this context male power and authority are beyond social approval or ordinariness.

Moreover, next to the negotiation of social expectations, there is a trend towards focusing upon a personal understanding of reality. There is some kind of complex relationship between identification with social rules and individualistic approaches. One can observe that Western participants are more likely to acknowledge the significance of individuality and originality by image branding, visual effects or unusual angles of shots. In this study participants styled their pictures in various modes, for instance by putting own face onto someone else's body, by cloning the part of the image or by manipulating facial shapes.

Those obvious changes aimed to mark distinctiveness in the representation of the self. The purpose was not to create immaculate photographs with undetectable adjustments, but to produce an illustration of own identity, different from the general mass. To sum up, there is a paradox here, as Western participants through their visual images consume the notion of individuality, a desire to fit into social framework and/or rebellious behaviours against social standards. On the other hand, Southern Asian participants through their photographs reinforce mainly a sense of formality and seriousness that is line with social norms. This discussion implicates that visual consumption of masculinity is embedded to some degree in culture, in participants' parental country of origin. The difference in self-presentation might be associated with different understanding of student life, masculine responsibilities and the status of gender equality in the Western societies and Third World countries.

In the case of Southern Asian participants, it might also be a negotiation of power relations. They might attempt to draw boundaries of importance between themselves and those male friends who stayed back home or boundaries of distinction between themselves and other white men (or Western culture).Within the Asian culture, the need to be academically successful is very strong (Mac An Ghaill, 1988). The concept of living and studying abroad carries an element of prestige. It automatically constructs hierarchical relationship of dominance over other Asian men who are not intellectually or financially capable of this kind of investment. In the context of their own culture, they might have a sense of being dominant. On the other hand, as Carrigan *et al* (1985) observed, within the Western framework of gender relations racial prejudice and negative public stereotypes about Asian, Latino or African masculinities sustain unequal relationships that privilege white men. This profound division between superior white race and subordinated men of colour influences participants' self-understanding and self-presentation. As argued above, Southern Asian participants depict their visual identity through the message of 'standard bearers'. This approach might be a reaction to the notion of 'racial patriarchy' that maintain unequal relationships among men. It could be claimed that participants aim to consume particular patterns of behaviour in order to articulate strong identification with own cultural norms and to demonstrate resistance to a Western, hegemonic vision of masculinity. The Western, hegemonic model affirms interests of white, middle-class, heterosexual men and it seems that Southern Asian participants do not necessarily have a need to assimilate with these cultural patterns (Archer, 2001). It is not surprising, because as Alexander (1996, p.7) claims Asian cultural identity 'can be a source of defiance and pride'. In short, this study indicates that participants present images that acknowledge their masculinity within national boundaries. They use photographs to communicate personal

statements of gender identity as well as to negotiate cultural distinctions. Consequently, hegemonic masculinity is a cultural construct that, at least to some extent, seeks to maintain what one might call cultural integrity. Participants unselfconsciously and willingly consume those aspects of masculinity that enable them to contribute to the preservation of cultural integrity.

8.4 Roles adopted by participants: discussion of coding units

As can be seen in Table 8.4 there were nine coding units generated from the Facebook Profile Pictures that relate to roles adopted by participants. All coding units were extracted directly from participants' Facebook Profile Pictures. Then Profile Pictures were analysed from the perspective of coding units where the researcher ticked on the check-list each category as it occurred. This procedure exposed the frequency of images that relate to roles adopted by participants. Moreover, in the context of this study, high as well as a small number of posted images is a significant indicator of consuming hegemonic masculinity. Both, consumption as well as the resistance to consume, communicate vital meanings of the self.

Table 8.4 Percentage distribution of specific roles adopted by participants

Contextual category	Coding unit	Count	Percent
roles adopted by participants	image shows participant alone	1375	49.73%
	image does not show participant	474	17.14%
	image shows participant with female friends only	354	12.80%
	image shows participant with male friends only	318	11.50%
	image shows participant with one or more friends (mixed-sex)	181	6.55%
	image shows participant with children	33	1.19%
	image shows participant with family	14	0.51%
	image shows participant with his wife	11	0.40%
	image shows participant with a famous person	5	0.18%
	TOTAL	2,765	

In this study, the majority of profile pictures portray participants alone (49.73%). At the same time, 17.14 % of images do not show participants at all. Pictures with female friends

only (12.80%) predominate over the category of images with male friends only by 1.30%. The discussion below considers the concept of consuming hegemonic masculinity in relation to percentage distribution presented in the Table 8.4.

8.4.1 Individuality and group identity

In their Facebook profile albums, participants most frequently display photographs of themselves (49.73% of photographs). By appearing alone, participants claim ownership of their Facebook accounts. It can be understood as an acknowledgement of independence or power over own visual biography (this is the case for men of all cultures). At the same time, users do not uphold continuity and consistency of self-representation. They are negotiating a fine line between individuality and a group identity. As discussed above (in 'Visual relationships with others') participants do not enthusiastically maintain a visual impression of friendship through the body language. However, they are willing to express aspects of social attachment by presenting group photographs on which they pose together with female friends (12.80% of photographs), male friends (11.50% of photographs) or a group of mixed-sex friends (6.55% of photographs). Consequently, when constructing their masculine identities participants have a need to consume messages that cultivate bonds with other people (it is also evident in other areas of Facebook profiles).

It has to be noted that family photographs (0.51% of photographs), pictures with wife (0.40% of photographs) or children (1.19% of photographs) appear to be insignificant indicator of participants' identity. Participants avoid consuming visual representations that place them in a realm of domesticity, traditionally regarded as a female environment. On the other hand, these domestic aspects might not correspond to realities of participant students' lives.

8.4.2 Symbolic expression of identity

Consumption of images that display a concept rather than a participant himself is another method of expressing gender identity (17.14% of photographs). Being more specific, in this study the symbolic expressiveness included images of a national flag, comic strips, humorous posters, cartoon/film/game characters or photographs of famous people (often because of participants' physical resemblance to a famous person). Some of these concepts could be seen as a metaphor of identity statements, other appears to be mere products of media culture. However, this is not to say that the latter one does not hold personal or

symbolic values. In other words, using concepts allows participants to express abstract thoughts, emotions and feelings (Gauntlett, 2008). Following this line of reasoning, one of the Libyan participants represented his identity through the image of his home country's flag. This individual metaphor was mediated by the current political climate depicted by uprisings, tragedy and the fall of regimes in the Middle East. The participant builds his self-representation in the realm of strong national identity and solidarity with people who challenged a corrupt and oppressive government. It is a symbolic reflection of an idea that despite of being away from Libya, he is not indifferent to political affairs of his country. This symbolic involvement complies with stereotypical portrayals that classify politics as a male domain. Similarly, participants reinforce another desirable masculine trait, a sense of humour, by using comical images extracted from the Internet websites. It metaphorically communicates their cheerful and optimistic personality.

Finally, participants' identification with celebrities indicates that their sense of self merged to some degree with media stories. Paul Ricoeur (1992) claims that literary works, which can be related to narratives of popular media, provide contexts that engage with people's inner emotions and influence their behaviour and life-style choices. Literature and media allow exploring different aspects of existence by offering an insight into possible ways of living. People relate to these narratives as if they were revealing some sort of truth that expands knowledge about the world. It helps negotiating different aspects of own identity and choosing desirable character traits. Participants' identification with celebrities highlights that media provide a template for understanding own identity. It seems that some participants (especially those who posted as their profile picture an image of a famous person) consume lives of celebrities what provides them with a frame for constructing an individual biography. It stimulates their experiences and encourages them to rethink personal opinions and outlooks. Moreover, their self-presentation encapsulates desired rather than realistic masculine attributes of fame, wealth and popularity.

It has to be noted that in this study the analysis of Facebook photographs is based on the researcher's interpretation. This approach is limited as participants' were not invited to explain meanings that they attempted to convey through images. However, as mentioned above (see Introduction to Visual Self) pictures may or may not reflect participants' intended meanings because the interpretation is also a subject to the opinion of others. In this context, it would be difficult to assess whose account (the researcher or a participant) is more 'accurate'.

8.5 Conclusions

This part of the research shifted from participants' Narrative Self to consumption of hegemonic masculinity in the context of Visual self-representations. Facebook profile photographs became the focus of content analysis that acknowledged photographs in relation to participants' gender identity. The use of the pre-existing Facebook pictures became the source of information about the notion of masculinity where the visual materials were treated as a data in their own right. Of course, the interpretation of images is not fixed or stable as diverse audiences can view a particular photography differently. However, following Goffman's (1959) understanding of social interactions, researcher's subjective impression about images was regarded as a valuable source of information. In order to accomplish the objectives set by the research questions, photographs were used to strengthen the narrative perspectives on gender identity.

In this part of the study, participants appear to depict their own identities through the positive lens of social connectedness. Participants make reflective consumption choices and most frequently present photographs linked with their holiday memories and unforgettable places (39.48% of photographs), indicating that they invest time and money in acquiring life experiences. Similarly, participants display their successful social interactions by images that include activities and events such as going out to the pub/club or partying (24.05% of photographs), drinking alcohol (19.11% of photographs) or playing sport (7.27% of photographs). They enthusiastically represent own gender identity through the consumption of positive interpersonal skills.

At the same time, participants avoid projecting their masculine identities in relation to material goods (for example cars or electronic gadgets) because these kind of images might bear negative social connotations and correlate with traits such as self-centeredness or selfishness. They avoid consuming messages that are not in line with their social environment. Moreover, in the visual modes of self-presentation participants are most likely to value sense of humour (25.34% of photographs). They employ self-targeted visual humour in order to maintain solidarity and connectedness among peers. However, their reflexive agenda of consumption becomes sporadically overshadowed by chauvinist sense of humour. In some cases, participants build a masculine self-image by usage of 'risky' (in a mixed-sex environment of Facebook) gendered jokes that might reinforce only the male bonding.

Through their visual self-representation participants eagerly present attractive images of themselves (16.79% of photographs). However, participants do not define this aspect of gender identity with consistency but characterise themselves through the contradictory messages about masculinity. Users within a single Facebook profile often consume a mixture of images that reflects opposing masculine characteristics such as brutal man with dark nature and kind and considerate man. Their construction of attractive self is achieved through the consumption of stereotypical perspectives based on binary oppositions. It also indicates that participants consume multiple messages provided by media and society and develop the sense of shifting and fragmented identities.

It has to be pointed out that photographs capture proximity and distance between people. In this study photographic data indicates that in a public context of Facebook profile pictures, participants tend to conceal feelings of intimacy and love as the romantic body language was visible only on 6.74% of images. Participants might repress intimate self-representation that is socially associated with vulnerability. Similarly family photographs (0.51% of photographs), pictures with wife (0.40% of photographs) or children (1.19% of photographs) appear to be an insignificant indicator of men's identity. Surprisingly, through their visual images participants were reluctant to display also a friendship bond through the body language (3.25% of photographs). However, in the Western culture men who are engaged in the same-sex touch are likely to be perceived as homosexuals and heterosexual men might fear this labelling (Robinson, 2008). It indicates that the decision whether to consume a particular aspect of life is influenced by social beliefs. Participants avoid consuming behaviours that are socially regarded as non-masculine.

Within the multicultural context of this study one could observe that Southern Asian participants through their photographs reinforce mainly a sense of formality and seriousness what is line with Asian social norms and expectations (Alexander, 1996). Through visual representations they uphold an image of being productive individuals who are preoccupied with obtaining formal education and life success. Participants from Western countries conceptualise unsophisticated and cheerful qualities. Their photographs connote the lack of formality, naturalness, openness and happiness. Western participants are willing to define themselves through the realm of nonconformist/non-conventional experiences in order to expose their individuality and uniqueness. Thus, the consumption of masculinity is also context specific and linked with participants' place of birth.

Finally, it has to be mentioned that participants in their visual representations identify themselves with celebrities that might indicate that their sense of self merged to some degree with media stories. This phenomenon highlights that media might provide a template for understanding own identity. Thus, this study indicates that participants make informed choices of what concepts and messages they want to consume and transmit to others. They negotiate different aspects of own gender identities and choose to consume only desirable character traits.

Chapter 9

Cultural Self: Analysis of Facebook Info Section

9.1 Introduction

Consumption practices are an important indicator of masculine and feminine self-presentation. Not only material commodities, but also cultural activities and preferences are chosen to express certain symbolic meanings. In other words, people may consume particular products for their sign-value (for what they signify) rather than use-value (usefulness) qualities (Baudrillard's, 1981). At the same time, individuals are not passive receivers of cultural information but play an active role in their self-creation project by adopting meanings that are adequate to their personal beliefs (Giddens, 1991). They have an ability to reflect and critically assess cultural concepts and modify them according to personal tastes. This part of the study focuses upon participants' Cultural Self, their cultural preferences and consumption choices. People engage with symbolic consumption to sustain desirable connections with others and to mark their group identity (Wattanasuwan, 2005). Similarly, in this study, consumption choices are understood through this lens of communication system that reflects participants' desired masculine identities.

Users, by revealing on Facebook profiles their cultural preferences such as favourite books, movies, music or sport, construct and sustain their sense of self. People make consumption choices that reflect and sustain particular symbolic meanings and cultural tastes. Thus, investigating these personal interests allows tracing hegemonic concepts that contribute to creation and validation of participant's gender identities. Consequently, in this part of the study, 89 Facebook Cultural Info sections became a domain of content analysis. Similarly, as in the previous chapters, in this section the percentage distribution is collectively presented for all participants. The purpose of using a collective rather than an individual approach was to convey the wholeness of masculine identities.

In this chapter headings and sub-headings correlate with the Facebook organisation of Cultural Info section. One might argue that categories seem to stand alone rather than create a narrative structure. However, an organisation of data follows the Facebook structure where the first analysed category relates to Education and Work.

9.2 Education and Work

Educational background and work environment shape to some extent gender identities. These two domains enable consumption of intellectual and practical knowledge as well as guide people how to express own masculinity or femininity (Harris III and Struve, 2009). Education and work also expose individuals to different cultures, practices and experiences, expanding horizons of tolerance. They are crucial elements of life through which people construct positive (or otherwise) self-images (Harris, 1995).

9.2.1 University

This study indicates that educational background has a strong influence on formation of self-identity. Only 19.10% (n=17) of participants opted out from providing information about their higher education background. The rest of the sample (80.90%, n=72) detailed in total 114 colleges, universities or institutes of technology. Similarly, in the case of Narrative Self (where 53.81% of the sample adopted role of a student) participants eagerly linked their cultural and gender identity with academia. Moreover, in discussed section participants often specified the level and type of undertaken courses (e.g. BSc (Hons), Zoology; MLitt, Medieval and Renaissance Studies; PhD, Sociology) what highlighted their intellectual interests and rank of degree. Through their Cultural Self participants consume and convey the message of being academic individuals.

9.2.2 Work information

Stereotypically, men are expected to have astonishing careers and work that provides a comfortable standard of life (Whitehead, 2002). These two aspects of life build men's positive self-identity. However, in different stages of life men might consume different existential values. Within the sample, 45 participants (50.56%) displayed 141 work positions, where the number of jobs per person ranged from 1 to 6. Types of consumed jobs seem to overlap with the student lifestyle and mostly included part-time professions of bartender, waiter, sales assistant, kitchen porter as well as research assistant, teaching assistant or student ambassador. Nearly half of the sample (n=44, 49.44%) left the work information blank. In comparison, in the case of Narrative Self the role of a worker was the second highest-ranked category (14.12%) adopted by participants. However, narrative discussions most often related to searching for summer jobs, being bored with current

employment as well as reflected participants' desired occupations. One might claim that for most participants the aim is to prove themselves in academic environment what is in line with their current life circumstances.

9.3 Philosophy

Gender identities are defined by individual consumption choices that relate also to philosophical standpoints. Facebook category of 'Philosophy' is a domain that requires from users precise articulation of individual perspectives relating to religion, political views, inspirational people and favourite quotations. These philosophical considerations often stimulated by individual experiences conceptualise meanings of gender identity.

9.3.1 Religion

Only 34 participants (38.20%, n=34) opted to provide their religion affiliations. The majority of participants (61.80%, n=55) left this field blank. The findings suggest that among those participants who included information about their religion views, most rejects the belief in existence of God. They used a wide variety of terminology to reflect this religious world-view: Atheist (n=14), Agnostic (n=3), Anti-theist (n=1), Common Sense (n=1), Darwinism (n=1), Heathen (paganism) (n=1), Pantheist (n=1), Physics (n=1) or Devout Secularist (n=1). Others portrayed themselves as Christian (n=3), Catholic (n=3) and Buddhist/ Humanist (n=1). In other words, most participants, who specified their religion, reject to consume spirituality in favour of stereotypical masculine attributes, namely rationality and logic (Harris, 1995).

In this section, there were also attempts to sustain humorous-self through the consumption of atypical and ironic entries. One participant identified himself with Pastafarianism (n=1), parody religion that worship the Flying Spaghetti Monster who created Earth after heavy drinking from heaven's beer volcano (Henderson, 2006). Another person, acknowledged the Cult of Cthulhu (n=1), a group based upon Howard Phillips Lovecraft's short story 'The Call of Cthulhu' (1999, [1928]) where the eponymous cosmic entity is worshipped by it members. Finally, among religion views one could find Eskişehirspor (n=1) a Turkish football club.

Some users decided to add in the description field short statements such as 'I AM MY OWN GOD!'[original emphasises], 'Someone brings me coffee they are my God' or 'God

is dead'. Participants by questioning the existence of God challenge rigorous belief system that guides and orders people how to live. In other words, for them religion to some extent lost its prominent role in private, social and public arenas of life. There might be various sources of ethical and moral authority; every concept might be seen from multiple perspectives and different conceptual frameworks. Similarly, faith became an individual and reflective consumption option rather than inherited trait. This claim is in line with Barry Schwartz's (2004) concept of religion as a consumption choice. People, according to Schwartz, consume religious beliefs that are attractive by offering personal freedom rather than restriction of lifestyles. Participants' radical doubt in spirituality can be a consequence of continuously reshaped and re-analysed self-identities.

Nevertheless, in this study most participants (n=55) opted out from constructing their identities through the lens of religion. It has to be noted that also in the case of Narrative Self participants were not involved in discussions about religion issues. It might indicate that in the multicultural context of Facebook as well as the University environment participants attempt to communicate their respect for diversity. The concept of religion is a delicate subject matter (bearing in mind for example current religious conflicts and wars). Religion affiliation defined in a concise manner of Facebook information might activate negative religious stereotypes, bringing for example conflicts on personal grounds. Consequently, participants might not want to reveal this kind of ethically and morally problematic details that demand comprehensive discussion. Consequently, establishing positive relationships with other students through the refusal to consume specific philosophical values is an element of participants' gender identities. Alternatively, as the importance of religious institutions is redefined and the range of spiritual practices expands (Schwartz, 2004), participants might simply not know where to locate their faith.

9.3.2 Political views

Politics is a prestigious domain that allows men to demonstrate their masculine attributes such as domination and power (Harris, 1995). Men (particularly white and heterosexual) still control most of the world's political parties, religious institutions, media, companies and corporations, taking decisions that influence lives of millions of people (see Chapter 1). Similarly, passionate political discussions are typically associated with masculine area of life (Harris, 1995). Surprisingly, in this part of the study, 68.54% (n=61) of participants did not disclose their political affiliations. The rest of the sample (n=28, 31.46%) identified themselves with Scottish National Party (n=4), Scottish Green Party (n=1), Glasgow West

End Scottish Socialist Party (n=1), Liberal Democrats (n=11), Labour Party (n=1), Conservative and Union Party (n=1), Far-left communism (n=1) or apolitical stance (n=2). There were also vague entries such as complex (n=1), questionable (n=1), undecided (n=1), freedom (n=1) or hippie (n=1). Probably, to highlight his individualism one of the participants listed the Party of the Justified Ancients of Mu Mu (n=1), a British acid house band from the late 80's and early 90's that provoked many anarchic situations and acts of vandalism.

Moreover, in the description field, one could observe contradictory opinions on politics such as 'who cares, they're [politicians] all lying bastards', 'The worst thing is to be indifferent!', 'Filth is my politics. Filth is my life'. These statements implicate that self-identities are formed on multiple 'truths'. Each individual has different life experiences and consumes different intellectual sources in order to formulate personal meanings. Thus, it is difficult to understand reality through universal laws.

Interestingly, in Narrative Self political and social activism was recorded as the second most popular activities (15.03%) among participants. However, at the same time men are not willing to display their political views in a straightforward and concise manner that is imposed by the Facebook Info section. It might be understood as an attempt to sustain egalitarian relations in the circle of friends. This study implies that politics is a popular social theme consumed by participants, but a theme that requires discussion. Presenting political views in a precise form without any explanation or dialogue might cause misunderstandings (as diverse people view particular political affiliations differently). Consequently, by omitting this information on their Facebook Info Section, participants might try to build bridges of integration.

9.3.3 People who inspire you

Within the sample, 23 people (25.84%) listed names of 118 inspirational people. The rest 66 participants (74.16%) did not have a need to include this information into their Facebook profiles. Interestingly, names of only few inspirational people were mentioned more than once, namely:

Stephen Fry (n=4),

Carl Sagan (n=3),

Albert Einstein (n=2),

Friedrich Nietzsche (n=2),

Noam Chomsky (n=2),

Stephen Hawking (n=2)

Richard Dawkins (n=2).

The other 102 names were listed only once. It has to be mentioned that a number of provided names per person ranged from 0 to 20. Moreover, as can be seen in Table 8.3.3 there were 14 types of inspirational people extracted from the data.

Table 9.3.3 Types of inspirational people extracted from the data

Types of Inspirational People	Number of Entries (n= 118)	%
scientists and academics	22	18.64
authors/journalists	17	14.41
political leaders/politicians	16	13.56
musicians	14	11.86
actors	11	9.32
film/cartoon characters	11	9.32
philosophers	10	8.47
spiritual leaders	4	3.39
sportspeople	4	3.39
soldiers	3	2.54
artists	2	1.69
feminists	2	1.69
friends	1	0.85
social activists	1	0.85

To express own identity people have to make satisfactory consumption choices. However, as there is a wide variety of available options, people before taking a decision, gather information and calculate possibilities. This process of evaluation might be based for example on own experiences, recommendations of magazines, television, friends or the Internet (Schwartz, 2004). In the case of this study, it might be assumed that the names of inspirational people are closely linked with the interests of those who provided them. It also appears that there are two main sources that provide ideas for participants' consumption choices, namely, the academic environment and media.

For participants, lives of inspirational people might offer a frame for constructing an individual biography. Participants' choices focused upon public and powerful people. Thus, desired identities, similarly as in the case of 'Visual Self', centred around stereotypical masculine attributes of fame, wealth and popularity. At the same time, the closer circles of family and friends did not provide a template for understanding own identity. Conventionally, father as a head of family used to be seen through the prism of

prestige and importance (Whitehead, 2002). However, it seems that academic and media influences overshadowed this traditional role model.

9.3.4 Favourite quotations

The findings suggest that 52.80% (n=47) of participants did not provide any favourite quotations. Within the rest of the sample (47.20%, n=42) participants listed a total of 146 citations where the number of quotes per person ranged from 1 to 23. Most of the quotes related to reflections on humanity and human abilities:

> *a) "Man is not truly one, but truly two".*
> *Robert Louis Stevenson*
>
> *b) "Human beings are given free will in order to choose between insanity on the one hand and lunacy on the other."*
> *Aldous Huxley*
>
> *c) "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function."*
> *F. Scott Fitzgerald*

It seems that for participants fragmented and fluid identities are defining aspects of contemporary culture. The quotes above convey the meaning that the construction and re-construction of own identity is a reflective process where people have power to choose and consume relevant styles and desired personality. Other citations captured existential dilemmas as well as defined qualities of meaningful life:

> *a) "Life is not an easy matter... You cannot live through it without falling into frustration and cynicism unless you have before you a great idea which raises you above personal misery, above weakness, above all kinds of perfidy and baseness."*
> *Leon Trotsky*
>
> *b) "All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit."*
> *Thomas Paine*
>
> *c) "Gay, straight, black white... What does it matter? We all finish ourselves off in the end anyway."*
> *Karen Walker*
>
> *d) "When I was 5 years old, my mother always told me that happiness was the key to life. When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wrote down "happy". They told me I didn't understand the assignment. I told them they didn't understand life."*
> *John Lennon*

Participants appear to acknowledge the sense of multiple realities and individual perspectives. The above citations relate to the strong notion of relativity, subjectivity and loss of shared principles defined for example by religion. Finally, participants also made humorous entries that highlighted cheerful side of their self-identity:

a) *"To have a great idea, have a lot of them"*.
Thomas A. Edison

b) *"I'm going out of my mind, (mind speaks) Good idea, its getting pretty crowded in here..."*
Terry Pratchett

c) *"Why pay a dollar for a bookmark? Why not use the dollar for a bookmark?"*
Steven Spielberg

It has to be pointed out that participants quoted a wide range of individuals beginning with authors and scientists through directors, musicians and film characters. It might be an attempt to consume and convey the impression of being well-read and up to date with current media messages.

9.4 Arts and Entertainment

The human sense of being is enriched by the consumption of cultural choices such as arts and entertainment. People select cultural experiences that contribute to their self-creation project (Giddens, 1991). For this reason, participants' choices of favourite music, books, movies, television programmes or games, enrich their gender identities. Leisure-time pursuits are seen as a meaningful practice that upholds one's desirable self. Cultural consumption is also a mean of socialisation and integration with others.

9.4.1 Music

The findings suggest that only 16 (17.98%) participants opted out from providing any favourite music artists or bands. The rest of the sample (82.02%, n=73) made in total 1,201 entries. Among the most popular artists and music bands one could identify:

Lady Gaga (n=12)

Muse (n=10)

Queen (n=10)

Daft Punk (n=9)

Eminem (n=9)

Linkin Park (n=9)

The Rolling Stones (n=9)

Johnny Cash (n=7)

Michael Jackson (n=7)

Paolo Nutini (n=7)

AC/DC (n=6)

David Bowie (n=6)

David Guetta (n=6)

Red Hot Chili Peppers (n=6)

The Beatles (n=6)

Adel (n=5)

Arcade Fire (n=5)

Biffy Clyro (n=5)

Bob Dylan (n=5)

Elvis Presley (n=5)

Foo Figthers (n=5)

Justice (n=5)

Katy Perry (n=5)

Kings of Leon (n=5)

MGMT (n=5)

Pink Floyd (n=5)

Radiohead (n=5)

Rihanna (n=5)

Shakira (n=5)

The Smiths (n=5)

U2 (n=5)

Moreover, 719 music artists/bands were mentioned only once, 77 entries appeared twice, 27 music artists/bands were listed three times and 12 entries four times. These findings suggest that participants attempt to sustain their sense of individuality. Educational institutions, media and widespread growth of the Internet influenced the nature of

consumption choices. Fast flow of information expands knowledge of the world and horizons of individual perspectives. Nowadays, people take advantage of opportunities they never had before. Multiplicity of choice in every area of life prompts participants to make reflective consumption choices that are in line with their self-creation project and allows them to uphold a unique self (Giddens, 1991).

Participants' music tastes were categorised into particular genres to recognise masculine music preferences. As can be seen in Table 9.4.1 there were 24 music genres extracted from the data.

Table 9.4.1 Music genres extracted from the data

Music Genre	Number of Entries (n=1,201)	%
Rock	480	39.97
Pop	214	17.82
Metal	129	10.74
Electronic Music	75	6.24
Folk	59	4.91
Hip-Hop	45	3.75
Rock&Roll	30	2.50
Punk	25	2.08
Jazz	22	1.83
Acoustic Guitar	18	1.50
Classical Music	13	1.08
World Music	12	1.00
House	11	0.92
Reggae	11	0.92
Soul	10	0.83
Techno	10	0.83
Blues	9	0.75
Trance Music	9	0.75
Rap	6	0.50
Film Music	5	0.42
Disco	4	0.33
Gospel/Spiritual	2	0.17
Anti-Folk	1	0.08
Anything goes [comment]	1	0.08

It has to be pointed out that consumption of music trends appears to be an important part of participants' life. It is the category where students made the highest number of entries (n=1,201). Moreover, within this study, it was observed that different music genres do not occur only across different Facebook profiles but often become an element of the same account. As Bocock (1993) argues, it seems that nowadays class, ethnic or age bounded

'appropriate' consumption choices are less static and fixed. Previously defined division that marked these social hierarchies collapses (to some degree) as patterns of cultural consumption are more integrated. Previously, certain kind of music, books or television programmes were intended for a specific audience. Currently, what is evident in this study, is that an individual person might play classical music on piano, listen to metal and at the same time be a big fan of pop music. What seems to mutually exclude each other, develop into holistic experience. In other words, the consumption margins between various groups and within a personal understanding are more flexible (Bocock, 1993). People simply mix various sensations to project a sense of self what is reflected for example in one of the participant's comment in relation to music choices; *'Anything goes'*. This kind of open-minded attitude maintains connectedness with others and builds cross-cultural bridges of communication.

9.4.2 Books

According to stereotypical perspectives, reading is more feminine rather than masculine activity (Wragg, 1997). In this study, the findings suggest that 39 participants (43.82%) did not list any favourite books. Two of the 'non-readers' in order to reflect their attitudes, made short and precise comments: 'Don't really read Tbh [to be honest]', 'Books Sucks'. The rest of the sample 56.18% (n=50) made in total 357 entries that include either a title of a book or a name of a favourite author. One could argue that similarly as in the case of Music, the concept of multiplicity of choices is also applicable to participants' reading choices, because only few book titles were mentioned more than twice and these were:

Animal Farm by George Orwell (n=7),

Harry Potter by J.K. Rowling (n=7),

1984 by George Orwell (n=6),

The Lad Bible (n=5), the Internet guide

His Dark Materials Trilogy by Phillip Pullman (n=4),

Lord Of the Rings Trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien (n=4),

The Catcher In The Rye by J.D. Salinger (n=4),

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini (n=4)

The God Delusion by Richard Dawkins (n=3).

The list of above titles indicates that educational institutions influence participants' reading choices. Some of the above titles are typical class readers or books read as a homework

tasks. Similarly, knowledge of another book by the same author (for example by George Orwell or J.K. Rowling) and satisfaction with his or her style might encourage participants to read another title by this author. It has to be pointed out that within the entries that were listed only once, there were names of authors that could be found among recommended academic readings such as Anthony Giddens, Antonio Gramcsi or Paulo Freire. It might be an attempt to sustain one's student identity and to consume intellectualism by highlighting interest in professional literature.

Moreover, one participant mentioned Wikipedia as a reading source what might indicate that the Internet has an influence into reading choices. It has to be kept in mind that nowadays students consume many of non-fiction texts such as mentioned above '*The Lad Bible*'. It is the Internet guide in a form of commandments on how to maintain a 'true' masculine identity. These findings suggest that the Internet offers an alternative source of reading materials that are often recommended by word-of-mouth. Media have an impact into participants' reading preferences. Apart from media that promotes recent publications or 'cult literature', it seems that also screen adaptation of books might encourage participants to read the original source (or vice versa). Titles listed by participants in this study such as '*Harry Potter*' or '*Lord Of the Rings*' are typical examples of this phenomenon.

Nevertheless, participants' reading choices and named authors were categorised into particular literary genres in order to identify masculine genre preferences. As can be seen in Table 9.4.2 there were 19 genres generated from the data.

Table 9.4.2 Literary genres extracted from the data

Literary Genre	Number of Entries (n=357)	%
Classic books	84	23.53
Fiction	71	19.89
Fantasy	51	14.29
Science fiction	31	8.68
Academic books	23	6.44
Horror and thriller	18	5.04
Comics	16	4.48
Autobiography, biography and memoir	14	3.92
Children and teenage books	13	3.64
Guides	8	2.24
Non-fiction	7	1.96
Satirical articles/humorous essays	7	1.96
Poetry	5	1.40
Religion	4	1.12
Graphic books	3	0.84
The sayings of the Vikings	1	0.28
Shamanism	1	0.28

Specific literary genres might also play an important role in creation of own gender identity. In terms of the most popular literary genres, participants demonstrated a great interest in classic books[7] (23.53%). This leads to conclusion that participants create their gender identities through scholar values such as intellectualism, being well-read and knowledgeable. Similar message participants convey by listing academic books (6.44%)

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[7] It has to be noted, that in this study, classics were understood through the lens of literature and authors that could be found in the canon of Oxford World's Classics (http://ukcatalogue.oup.com/nav/p/category/academic/series/general/owc.do?sortby=bookTitleAscend&thumbby_crawl=10&thumbby=all#productList).

what also illuminates their specific interests. Nevertheless, the nature of student sample might account for this status quo. It has to be pointed out that within the second most popular category, namely fiction (19.89%), there were different sub-genres where one could recognise books such as detective, allegorical, dystopian, historical, philosophical, spy, war or vampire novels as well as crime fiction or short stories. Men who participated in this study also found enjoyment in reading typically masculine genres, namely fantasy (14.29%), science fiction (8.68%) or horror/thriller (5.04%) books. It appears that participants' choices of favourite literary genres are in line with conventional gender reading preferences. While females are believed to demonstrate a greater interest in topics such as love stories, poetry and romance, males are more likely to concentrate on adventure stories, fantasy and science fiction (Hopper, 2005). Nevertheless, in this study participants might not intentionally attempt to sustain traditional notion of masculinity. Possibly, the explanation for why they choose these 'male' genres to project themselves might be simply related with their developmental and emotional needs.

9.4.3 Movies

Within the sample, 23 (25.84%) Facebook users did not mention any titles of favourite movies. The rest of the participants (74.15%, n=66) made in total 649 entries. Among the most popular film titles there were:

The Hangover (n=10) directed by Todd Phillips

Fight Club (n=9) by David Fincher

Star Wars (n=9) by George Lucas

Inception (n=8) by Christopher Nolan

The Lord of the Rings (n=8) by Peter Jackson

Toy Story (n=8) by John Lasseter

Pan's Labyrinth (n=7) by Guillermo del Toro

The Godfather (n=7) by Francis Ford Coppola

Trainspotting (n=7) by Danny Boyle

Gladiator (n=6) by Ridley Scott

Shrek (n=6) by Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson

The Bourne Ultimatum (n=5) by Paul Greengrass

Harry Potter (n=5) by Chris Columbus, Alfonso Cuarón, Mike Newell and David Yates

Pulp Fiction (n=5) by Quentin Tarantino

Serenity (n=5) by Joss Whedon

Avatar (n=4) by James Cameron

Batman (n=4) by Christopher Nolan

Braveheart (n=4) by Mel Gibson

Requiem for a Dream (n=4) by Darren Aronofsky

Rocky (n=4) by John G. Avildsen

Shawshank Redemption (n=4) by Frank Darabont

Step Brothers (n=4) by Adam McKay

The Matrx (n=4) by Andy and Larry Wachowski

300 (n=4) by Zack Snyder

There might be different reasons behind the consumption of these titles. As it was mentioned above (see 'Books' section) an interesting book that is a source of a film script might encourage participants to watch also a screen adaptation (or vice versa). Moreover, most of the films from the list above could be classified as commercially successful films. However, these mainstream movies popularised by mass media does not necessarily create a hegemonic culture. It has to be pointed out that 344 (53%) titles were mentioned only once, 58 (8.93%) movies twice and 16 (2.46%) movies three times. This study indicates that participants' film choices are far from cohesive what highlights their individualistic approach to consuming culture. Nevertheless, as can be seen in Table 9.4.3 there were 18 movie genres generated from the data

Table 9.4.3 Movie genres extracted from the data

Movie Genres	Number of Entries (n=649)	%
Drama	128	19.72
Comedy	127	19.57
Action/Adventure	107	16.49
Horror/Thriller	65	10.02
Animation	59	9.09
Science Fiction	55	8.47
Crime	22	3.39
Romance	22	3.39
Documentary	17	2.62
Fantasy	16	2.47
Musical	16	2.47
Biography	6	0.92
Foreign/Bollywood	3	0.46
Western	2	0.31
Film Noir	2	0.31
Psychotronic Film	1	0.15
Heist Film	1	0.15

It seems that participants consume all types of movies where the most popular are drama (19.72%), comedy (19.57%) and action/adventure (16.49%). It has to be pointed out that students willingly listed romance (3.39%) or musical films (2.47%) that are stereotypically regarded as more 'feminine' genres. It appears that participants by listing freely favourite movies question hegemonic models of behaviour. Moreover, similarly, as in the case of 'Music', users mix various movie genres within the same Facebook account to uphold their sense of self.

9.4.4 Television

Within the sample, 25 (28.09%) people opted out from providing titles of their favourite television programmes. The rest participants (71.91%, n=64) listed in total 664 entries. The most popular titles included:

Family Guy (n=16)

Scrubs (n=16)

The Big Bang Theory (n=14)

South Park (n=13)

Black Books (n=11)

Dr House (n=11)

Friends (n=11)

How I Met Your Mother (n=11)

The Simpsons (n=11)

Peep Show (n=10)

Top Gear (n=10)

American Dad (n=9)

Have I Got News For You (n=9)

Dexter (n=8)

Mock the Week (n=8)

Two and a Half Men (n=8)

Doctor Who (n=7)

Game of Thrones (n=7)

Misfits (n=7)

The Inbetweeners (n=7)

The IT Crowd (n=7)

Father Ted (n=6)

It has to be mentioned that another 196 (29.51%) television programs appeared only once, 52 (7.83%) titles twice, 25 (3.76%) titles three times, 11 (1.66%) titles four times and 5 (0.76%) titles five times. Similarly, as in the case of 'Movies', participants uphold an individualistic conception of self by listing distinctive titles of television programmes.

Nevertheless, among participants' consumption choices that do not necessarily fit into traditional masculine preferences one could distinguish *Ugly Betty* (n=3), *Desperate Housewives* (n=2), *Gossip Girl* (n=2), *Sex and the City* (n=2), *American's Next Top Model* (n=1), *Emmerdale* (n=1) or *Loose Women* (n=1). These television programmes are most of all associated with feminine viewers. However, it appears that some men freely express their interest in these 'non-masculine' series. They deliberately challenge externally imposed gender identities by exercising their freedom of choice.

Table 9.4.4 presents most popular types of television programmes among participants. As can be seen there were 17 television genres generated from the data.

Table 9.4.4 Types of television programmes extracted from the data

Type of Television Programme	Number of Entries (n=664)	%
Comedy Series	240	36.14
Drama Series	143	21.54
Animated/Cartoon Series	98	14.76
Game Show/ Panel Games	35	5.27
Reality Show	30	4.52
Science Fiction Series	25	3.77
News	18	2.71
Documentary Series	16	2.41
Music	12	1.81
Soap Opera	11	1.66
Motoring	10	1.51
Sketch Show	8	1.20
Cooking	7	1.05
Sport	5	0.75
Talk Show	3	0.45
Religion	2	0.30
Soft Porn Televised Sex Line	1	0.15

It seems that the most popular type of television programme is comedy (36.14%). Watching comedy series conveys the message of having optimistic and cheerful nature or in other words qualities that are socially desirable. In addition, by highlighting interest in news (2.71%) and documentary series (2.41%), participants display themselves as being knowledgeable and interested in acquiring political and cultural information from the world.

As can be seen in this study participants collectively avoid presenting themselves through a negative prism. Facebook is a mixed-sex and intercultural environment where it might be complicated to tactfully transfer communication across national and cultural boundaries. Consequently, participants in general do not consume any vulgar or aggressive attitudes towards people (even humorous one). Nevertheless, in this part of the study one of the participants acted in a sexually provocative manner by listing Soft Porn Televised Sex Line among his favourite television channels. It has to be pointed out that these kind of public statements are unusual in the context of this study.

9.4.5 Games

With regard to spending free time, conventionally men are believed to focus mostly on playing computer games (Berger, 2005). However, within the sample, only 29 (32.58%)

participants decided to provide information about their favourite games, listing in total 150 titles. The most popular entries include computer or consol games such as *Halo* (n=7), *The Legend of Zelda* (n=5), *Dead Space* (n=3), *Dragon Age* (n=3), *Final Fantasy* (n=3), *Gears of War* (n=3) and *Uncharted* (n=3). It has to be noted that 83 (55.33%) games were mentioned only once, whereas 20 (13.33%) titles were noted twice. Table 9.4.5 presents the most popular types of games among participants. As can be seen there were 15 game genres generated from the data.

Table 9.4.5 Types of games extracted from the data

Type of Game	Number of Entries (n=150)	%
Action-Adventure	57	38.00
Shooter Games	40	26.66
Role-playing Games	18	12.00
Sports Games	6	4.00
Puzzle Games	6	4.00
Board Games	5	3.33
Simulation Games	4	2.67
Platform Games	3	2.00
Strategy Games	3	2.00
Card Games	2	1.33
Fighting Games	2	1.33
Music Game	1	0.67
Pinball Game	1	0.67
Quiz Game	1	0.67
Racing Game	1	0.67

As can be seen games, involve a range of genres. In this study the most popular types were computer or console games such as action-adventure (38.00%) or shooter (26.66%) games. One might argue that these game genres expose players to violence and can generate aggressive behaviours (Berger, 2005). Similarly, strategy games (2.00%) or fighting games (1.33%) might be seen through the lens of brutality. Role-playing (12.00%) or simulation games (2.67%) invite players to live in a virtual world what can be seen as a practice of self-isolation from social life. On the other hand, games might be regarded through the light of consuming social activities because people often play with friends either sitting together in the same room or via the Internet. To some extent, playing computer games becomes a type of a shared experience that maintains connectedness with others.

9.5 Sport

From stereotypical perspective, masculine identity is created through the consumption of competitive sports (Connell, 1985). Sport is regarded as a male domain that may function as a mean of socialising but above all is seen as aggressive struggle to establish own dominance and a sense of self-worth. At the same time, some people might resist this line of reasoning and question competitive sporting standards that are expected from men. As Robinson (2008) argues, individuals that are more reflective about gendered relationships, uphold masculine identity through consumption of more individualistic and co-operative sports.

9.5.1 Favourite sport

Surprisingly in this part of the Facebook account the majority of participants did not list any sport they play (78.65 %, n=70). The rest of the sample (21.35%, n=19) provided names of 37 different sports, this is excluding one unusual entry of drinking games. Most popular sports among participants were squash (n=4), football (n=3), rugby (n=3), boxing (n=2), rock-climbing (n=2) and running (n=2). Other 21 sports were mentioned only once. It seems that within the University environment consuming the message of being knowledgeable and intelligent is more important than being physically strong. Consequently, participants might not have a need to prove themselves in an athletic and physical manner.

Moreover, participants seem to specify both competitive sports that are played with others as well as sporting activities for example canoeing, skiing or cycling that might be done without company or in cooperation with others, purely for pleasure. The latter type of sport experiences was often noted by participants in 'Favourite Sport' and 'Activities and Interest' sections (see below) what might indicate that users attempt to eliminate competitive tensions and challenge dominant concepts of hegemonic masculinity.

9.5.2 Favourite teams

A small number of participants (23.60%, n=21) listed in total 56 teams they support. The rest of the sample (76.40%, n=68) opted out from doing so. The most popular teams were Juventus F.C. (n=4), Scotland National Rugby Union Team (n=3), Celtic F.C. (n=2), Chelsea F.C (n=2), Saint Pauli F.C. (n=2). Nevertheless, among favourite teams that were

listed only once, it is visible that participants eagerly support their local or national teams where a type of team depends upon popularity of particular sport in a particular country (for example New York Jets, the Indian cricket team, LA Lakers or Greenock Morton F.C). In other words, men consume a sense of belonging to a particular locality and nationality.

It seems that sport might be used to negotiate one's gender identity. For example in Scotland, due to historical reasons, support for either Celtic or Rangers football club, might be closely linked with religious affiliations. Possibly a reason for a small number of entries in this section could be explained through the multicultural context of Facebook as well as the University environment. Participants might attempt to communicate their respect for diversity and avoid displaying consumption choices that might create conflicts on personal grounds.

9.5.3 Favourite athletes

A small number of 17 participants (19.10%) named 71 different athletes. The majority of the sample (80.90%, n=72) did not display any names. Only few athletes were mentioned more than once, namely: Alessandro Del Piero (n=3), Chris Patterson (n=2), Maria Sharapova (n=2), Michael Jordan (n=2) and Roger Federer (n=2). The rest of the 60 names were mentioned only once. Similarly as in the case of Inspirational People it might be assumed that names of favourite athletes are closely linked with sport interests of those who provided them. For this small number of participants favourite athletes, as public, famous and wealthy individuals, might be to some extent role models for constructing own gender identities. In other words, participants might consume the lives of favourite athletes, providing them with a template for constructing an individual biography.

9.6 Activities and Interests

Through the symbolic consumption of particular activities and interests, participants construct own gender identities. Choosing specific aspects of lifestyle indicates not only a personal identity, but also locates people within a particular social group (Wattanasuwan, 2005). Facebook profiles dynamically display users' individual preferences and aspects of gender identities that are collectively consumed and projected.

9.6.1 Activities and interests

On Facebook profiles, there is no precisely defined boundary between Activities and Interests section. In participants' accounts, these two sub-categories often overlap. For this reason, both sections are presented here in a congruent manner.

A total of 266 activities were listed across 89 Facebook profiles where eight participants (8.98%) did not provide a single activity. The highest displayed number of activities for an individual account was 38. At the same time, within the sample, a total of 153 interests were marked across 89 Facebook profiles. It seems that only 40.45% (n=36) of participants filled the interest section out while the majority (59.55%, n=53) chose to leave it blank. Nevertheless, the table below summarises the most popular activities and interests listed by participants.

Table 9.6.1 Types of activities and interests extracted from the data

Type of Activities	Number of Entries (n=419)	%
Academic Interests/Reading	50	11.93
Playing Sport	42	10.02
Listening/Playing Music	34	8.11
Drinking/Partying	26	6.21
Playing Computer Games	19	4.53
Watching Movies	16	3.82
Eating	10	2.39
Travelling	10	2.39
Sleeping	6	1.43
Hugging	3	0.72
Cooking	2	0.48
Other Activities and Interests That Were Listed Only Once	201	47.97

It seems that in Cultural Self, participants consumed similar activities as in the case of Narrative Self. Participants promote claims of academic identities (11.93%) or in other words the message of being knowledgeable. In contrast to Narrative Self, in this part of the Facebook profiles, participants revealed a strong interest in playing sport (10.02%). Possibly, users might have assumed that 'Activities' and 'Interests' is the best section to list sports they play in order to present it as sociable rather than competitive activity. Finally, playing computer games (4.53%) and watching movies (3.82%) appear to be the other most consumed activities.

It has to be pointed out that there are two new categories, which did not appeared in any other section, namely, eating (2.39%) and hugging (0.72%). These are not highly rated

categories, but the former one closely links with 'the meaning of experience' (see Chapter 7) while the latter one appears to be an unusual entry. 'Hugging' might be described through the stereotypical lens as a non-masculine activity (Harris, 1995). However, it seems that some participants might have intentionally opposed to consume these 'appropriate' gender identities.

It could be also observed that in this study many people have a need to maintain social connectedness with others by highlighting their own optimistic personality. In this part of the study, participants' positive attitude is reflected through activities that were listed only once. Participants consumed and conveyed diverse expressions such as 'making new friends', 'making people smile', 'laughing' or 'being cool' to present themselves as socially desirable individuals. At the same time, a multiplicity of realities and the freedom to choose how to live are visible in participants' contradictory preferences such as exploring versus inactivity, pretending to study versus studying Russian language, lazing around versus scriptwriting. These openly expressed identity claims stress the acceptance of individualism and diversity. Moreover, among listed activities, there were also atypical entries such as ballet, family or being a chocoholic. According to stereotypical perspectives, men do not want to reveal their sensitive side or any kind of weaknesses (Harris, 1995). However, it seems that in this study diversity of men's activities frequently challenged these stereotypical assumptions about gender.

It has to be noted, that each Facebook user has a number of 'Likes' that are attached to the 'Activity' and 'Interests' sections by clicking 'Like' button on any Facebook page. These items were not included into the analysis, as they would distort the picture of factual interests. Being more specific, some participants could have as many as 400 'Likes' that are often humorous, nonsensical or even sexually provocative. Some of the typical examples are: 'If Pubs Don't Serve Drunk People Why Do Mc'donalds Serve Fat People,'; 'When I was your age I was catching Pokémon not STIs'; 'I Tried Being Normal Once. Worst 5 Minutes of my Life'; 'Who ever invented the "copy and paste" has saved many hours of my life'; 'Dressing up as a seagull and walking around stealing people's chips'.

9.7 Basic information

The Facebook Basic Information section requires from its users to specify languages they speak as well as inviting them to make self-description statements. Both sub-categories

reflect certain aspects of male identity and display participants' preferred understanding of own character.

9.7.1 Languages you speak

The majority of participants 67.41% (n=60) did not list any languages they can speak. The rest of the sample (32.58%, n=29) made 88 entries, providing in total names of 22 languages. This is excluding four unusual and humorous entries of Galactic Basic Standard (a fictional, intergalactic language in the *'Star Wars'* movie), Klingon (a fictional language used by some characters in *'Star Trek'* movie), Newspeak (a fictional language used in Orwell's book *'1984'*) and Pig Latin (an English language game). Here, once again one can observe consumption and influence of educational and media messages.

Speaking foreign languages might be seen as an indicator of erudition. Being knowledgeable (as discussed above) has an influence into men's lives. Among participants who specified the discussed category, the number of languages per person ranged from 1 to 6. Nevertheless, users understood the Facebook expression 'Languages you speak' in twofold manner. Some of them listed only foreign languages or only mother tongue they speak while others included both. The most popular listed languages among participants were English (n=32), French (n=8), German (n=5), Scots (n=4), Spanish (n=4), Punjabi (n=3), Russian (n=3) and Urdu (n=3). It seems that English is a *lingua franca* of modern world (for example, English is a compulsory school subject in 13 European Union countries). Possibly, participants who opted out from listing any languages might have made a similar assumption and did not want to state the obvious issue. Another explanation for why users do not list languages they speak, is that native speakers of English, which in this study was at least 52[8], are believed to speak a small number of foreign languages (http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jun/13/britons-languages-learning). Nevertheless, it is a separate theme, which will not be discussed here.

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[8]   The calculations were made on the basis of participants' nationality. However, in this study 13 users out of 89 did not specify their nationality.

9.7.2 About me

In this section, Facebook users can directly describe themselves to their circle of friends. Put differently, participants have a chance to make statements about own character and personality. The findings suggest that 46.07% (n=41) of participants provided a short descriptive piece of information about themselves whereas 53.93% (n=48) opted out from doing so. Typically, participants present themselves in a simple manner of one or two sentences. Entries written in a half-serious and half-humorous manner reflect participants' easy-going and cheerful attitude toward life:

   a) *'Sometimes I'm Odd, Generally I'm Awesome.'*

   b) *'Spend too much time partying, too little time studying, plenty of time living.'*

Other users indicate own identity through the prism of profession or education (also with a hint of irony and humour):

   a) *'Freelance writer, editor and translator. I like my coffee black with no sugar, thanks!'*

   b) *'Hey all, am final year zoology @ glasgow uni. Working PT at TISO on buchanan st. spend most of my time drinking and planning my next adventure.'*

For some individuals interests and hobbies play an important role in constructing their identities:

   a) *'other places you can find me: twitter,last.fm, flickr, formspring.'*

   b) *'Member of Glasgow University Rifle Club, Glasgow University Skydiving Club and the Glasgow University Conservative Association.'*

However, participants also make powerful statements about own character traits. The following example reflects a clearly-defined non-conformist and nihilistic viewpoint:

   'I'm Controversial.
   'I will not be dictated to.
   I'll never be what society deems appropriate.
   I'm Self Sufficient.
   I won't ever submit.'

In general, participants produce a positive self-image through presenting themselves in an optimistic light. Similarly, as in the case of Visual Self, they aim to sustain an image of a 'cool guy'. Main characteristics used by men to define themselves are traditional masculine traits such as sociability, friendliness and individualistic approaches to life. At

the same time, one of the Facebook users stated: *'I suppose ud have ur own opinion abt me...so I don't see the point in writing new thing here.'* Those participants who did not make any claims about themselves might have adapted this line of reasoning. Alternately, for some individuals it might be not an easy task to reflect on own personality.

9.8 Number of friends

Within the sample, on average, a person has 320.70 social connections. The highest displayed number of Facebook friends is 1,152 whereas the lowest one is 14. It seems that participants achieve their gender identities by consuming the message of being popular and by maintaining friendly relationships with others (for more discussion on this topic see Chapter 4, section *'Friends'*). Participants by having a high number of friends reflect their outstanding social connectedness. However, six out of the 89 participants blocked their friend lists from a public view. This unusual practice might be an attempt to intentionally question performances of popularity and symbolically express consumption of nihilistic self-identity.

9.9 Conclusions

This chapter argues that gender identities are constructed through the patterns of consumption. To express statements about own gender, personality and character, participants had chosen to reveal cultural preferences that relate to their leisure time and leisure activities while refusing to consume information such as religion or politics that could have negative connotations on social grounds. Table 9.9.1 outlines the popularity of specific consumption choices.

Table 9.9 Popularity of consumption choices: summary

FACEBOOK CATEGORY	FACEBOOK SUB-CATEGORY	Number of Participants (n=89)		Number of entries* (n)
		Left blank (n)	Filled out (n)	
EDUCATION AND WORK				
	UNIVERSITY	17	72	114
	WORK INFO	44	45	141
PHILOSOPHY				
	RELIGION	55	34	34
	POLITICAL VIEWS	61	28	28
	PEOPLE WHO INSPIREYOU	66	23	109
	FAVOURITE QUOTATIONS	47	42	146
ARTS AND ENTERTAIMENT				
	MUSIC	16	73	1,201
	BOOKS	39	50	357
	MOVIES	23	66	649
	TELEVISION	25	64	664
	GAMES	60	29	150
SPORT				
	SPORT YOU PLAY	70	19	37
	FAVOURITE TEAMS	68	21	56
	FAVOURITE ATHLETS	72	17	71
ACTIVITIES AND INTERESTS				
	ACTIVITIES	8	81	266
	INTERESTS	53	36	153
BASIC INFORMATION				
	LANGUAGES	60	29	26
	ABOUT ME	48	41	41
NUMBER OF FRIENDS		6 [blocked access to friends' list]	83	1,152

* Items recorded by participants in their Facebook Info section.

This study suggests that participants make consumption choices in all areas of life, starting with education, work, religion or politics, through music, books, movies or friends. Human existence and self-identity are constructed by people's individual choices. In addition, the cultural mix of the academic environment enhanced by media practices creates a multiplicity of experiences and beliefs. Consequently, this study implicates that there is no one specific gender identity but multiple identities that cannot be clearly defined. This post-modern feminist reasoning might also be seen in the previously discussed work of Butler (1992) and Connell (1995) (see Chapter 2) who claim that people have a range of identities appropriate to different contexts. These identities are continuously shaped and re-shaped depending upon individual, social and cultural circumstances. Butler (1992) and Connell (1995), by challenging the concept of a unitary gender identity define gender in the context of diversity as well as recognising the multiplicity of experiences within a particular gender group. Post-modern identity issues revolve around the relativity of knowledge, a fragmented sense of self and fluidity of life. The spirit of post-modernism rejects the notion of truth or a universal ideological outlook, however, on the whole it promotes independent critical-thinking. This standpoint demonstrates a nihilistic approach that rejects the notion of truth and rationality. There is no superior right as everything has equal value and is based on relative merits. Moreover, objectivity does not exist as human perspectives contradict each other and are nothing more than subjective interpretations (Lyon, 1994).

Similarly, in this study, participants' identities appear to be fluid and constantly reconsidered. This sense of a *fragmented,* but *reflective self* is displayed through particular patterns of consumption. Media, through the production of multiple messages, invite people to test their freedom of choice. Consequently, as this study indicates, the same person might listen to classical music, metal and pop music, where those different music genres, which seem to mutually exclude each other, construct an individual experience. Moreover, in their consumption choices, participants attempt to sustain an individualistic sense of self. It is clearly visible in any cultural preferences they make. For example, while listing names of inspirational people, students made in total 118 entries out of which 102 names were listed only once. Nevertheless, participants reflectively decide which messages are in line with their self-creation project (Giddens, 1991).

However, the notion of identity is fostered by the dominant intellectual trends of the particular time. From a philosophical perspective, the post-medieval period (from the mid-

sixteenth century onwards) was characterised by belief in the power of human reason. Development of technology and scientific knowledge called into question faith in existence of God (Lyon, 1994). Objectivity and rationality became a new frame for understanding reality and personal identity. Previous beliefs cultivated throughout the Middle Ages stressed the significance of religion, church and God in determining an individual's existence. The Renaissance brought a greater interest in the culture of Ancient Greece and Rome as well as re-introducing its influences through the development of humanistic ideas. However, just the period of the Enlightenment highlighted that science and intellectualism are more important than tradition, divine interference, faith or religion. Subjectivity and personal experiences were devalued by scientific knowledge. The concept that the individual as unique and therefore different, gained popularity in the Romantic age. For example it is with Wordsworth, Byron and Coleridge that the 'I' became prominent in poetry and poems came to be seen as expressions of the individual self.

In the context of this study, to some extent, valuing the notion of individuality might be seen as an attempt to liberate society from stereotypical perspectives on gender identities as well as other social dimensions such as politics or religion. Individuals through their consumption choices and nihilistic approaches to life might attempt to transform social expectations and practices, leading to greater democratisation of social expectations. Consequently, people might become more tolerant towards diverse behavioural norms. Behaviours that once used to be seen as unacceptable (e.g. same-sex relationships or transsexuality), nowadays are defined in terms of an alternative lifestyle (Giddens, 1991). Nevertheless, this is not to say that there are no commonalities, which emerge from participants' multi-layered realities. Paradoxically, as this study suggests, contemporary individualism defines collective frameworks of practice. Participants appear to pursue certain elements of shared identity.

First, participants appear to be attentive to the differences within the multicultural context of Facebook and the University setting. They build their identities through the prism of *respect for diversity* that relates to gender, political, religious aspects of life or even favourite sport teams. Tolerance for diversity and belief in multiple 'truths' might produce greater integration and mutual understanding. Despite this strong notion of relativity, there are aspects of life that most people regard as immoral (Lyon, 1994). Moreover, in this study, students collectively avoid projecting their identities through the lens of oppression, exploitation or violence. In other words, participants attempt to consume and maintain *social relationships based on equality*. For example, in this part of the study there was only

one sexually provocative statement (see 'Television' section). It might indicate that men in the social context of Facebook collectively avoid reproducing messages that objectify women. They want to maintain their outstanding social connectedness by building a positive self-image. Participants present themselves in an optimistic light and through the prism of a good sense of humour. Consequently, in order to uphold their desired images they consume and reproduce certain social trends.

Finally, participants eagerly sustain their *multicultural self* or in other words, great awareness of global culture. As indicated in this study, media and educational institutions have an influence into men's gender identities. Participants attempt to consume up-to-date current media messages and academic materials to expand their knowledge about the world. Participants claim their student identities and display themselves as being well-read and intelligent. They want to be seen as citizens of the world rather than narrow-minded individuals. Through paying careful attention to cultural differences, they attempt to build cross-cultural dialogue and mutual understanding. At the same time, this knowledge of the world expands their horizons of individual choices.

The explanation of why participants attempt to consume certain collective frameworks of practice might be philosophically conceptualised. Kant (1784) in the essay *'What is Enlightenment'* analysed the dichotomy between public and private reason. The former term is connected with official restrictions and job responsibilities that all members of society are obliged to obey in order to avoid anarchy. The latter one indicates that everyone is free to reveal private criticism and comments when exercising their opinion in public. The important element of Kant's philosophy is the concept of moral autonomy, which indicates that individuals have to decide about their own laws. To achieve maturity people should not ask for advice, but decide for themselves. In *'Categorical Imperative'*, it is argued that moral rules are depicted according to personal opinions; however, these opinions have to be universalized. This means that one's beliefs could not be separated from rational thinking indicating that others in analogous circumstances would adopt the similar way of reasoning (Meyers, 1989).

A modern expression in line with Kantian philosophy may be found in Dearden's *'Autonomy and Education'* (1975). Dearden pointed out that an autonomous person is able to identify their own decisions, judgements or opinions without the interference of external advisers. However, two types of heteronomy – authority (for example parents or teachers) or inner factors such as phobias – can shake this self-governance. This indicates that

everyone is 'autonomous to the degree' (Dearden, 1975, p. 63) and rejection of all type of laws is impossible. It is also demonstrated that freedom is not a sufficient condition in order to fully develop oneself. The author emphasised the significance of reason and analytic abilities in making everyday life choices that do not have to be necessarily original. According to Dearden's (1975) ideas, which are strongly rooted in the Enlightenment approach, autonomy is valuable in itself.

In short, this study implies that participants have a need for consumption of particular qualities such as social integration (and approval) that overlaps with the need of sustaining own individuality and nihilism. However, these two conditions are not depicted by tension or conflict, but relate to each other in a complex and integrated manner. In the case of participants, their nihilism is not separated from the shared social agenda, which is based on respect for diversity, maintenance of equal social relationships and awareness of global culture. Participants in order to construct and maintain their masculinities make consumption choices that symbolically communicate their self-identification and moral autonomy.

Chapter 10

An Individual-Self: The Analysis of Questionnaires

10.1 Introduction

In the previous three chapters, consumption of gender identities has been considered in the context of participants' social lives. Their public self-representation was explored through the content analysis of Facebook Walls, profile photographs and cultural preferences. The theme of this chapter shifts towards consumption of participants' gender identities and gender ideologies in a context of individual research interaction. The aim of undertaking this new perspective was to define whether participants consume their masculinity differently in social and more private settings.

The concept of Individual Self relates to Goffman's theory (1959) that suggests that people present different personas in diverse circumstances by adjusting their behaviours and self-expression to particular environments. According to Goffman individuals demonstrate some aspects of own identity (that might not necessarily be in line with their feelings) in order to cope with external expectations and to create an illusion of social integrity. However, Goffman (1959) points out that there is also a private area of life, where individuals can honestly discuss their sense of identity, understood in this study as Individual Self. This chapter focuses upon individual experiences and perspectives located away from the Social Self.

This part of the study being in line with conceptual assumptions of the research did not move beyond the Facebook interaction. Participants were sent open-ended questionnaires via private Facebook e-mails. Through this type of personal research interaction, participants were encouraged to present their private interpretations of masculinity. Thus, it was possible to gather data that could not be obtained from the Facebook profiles, namely participants' direct perspectives on masculinity. Thirty-one (34.83%) participants out of 89 filled out and returned open-ended questionnaires. Responses to all questions were optional.

This chapter encompasses a discussion of elements of the questionnaire. The discussion is organised by headings that were generated in the process of the inductive content analysis

(Dey, 1993) in order to represent the main themes that emerged from the questionnaires (for more discussion on the strategy of analysing questionnaires, see Chapter 6). Moreover, Corden and Sainsbury (2006) point out that quotation might be used to enable individual voices to be heard. Thus, in this chapter, citations aim to capture participants' personal standpoints. At the same time using quotations in the realm of individual perspectives allows to present agreement or disagreement among respondents in relation to gender issues.

10.2 Analysis of questionnaires/ part 1: Respondents' background information

Part 1 of the questionnaire aimed at obtaining information about respondents' background such as age, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, marital status or profession. These are indicators that might underpin understanding of gender issues (Connell, 2005, Whitehead, 2002, Harris, 1995). However, in the context of Facebook, participants were not willing to provide this type of information (for more discussion see Chapter 9). They did not have a need to depict their Social Self through the lens that might produce unfavourable assumptions and stereotypical thinking about their persona. However, in the case of questionnaires, all 31 respondents decided to indicate their nationality where 11 of respondents (35.49%) reported being British and 10 (32.25%) identified themselves as Scottish. The remaining 10 (32.25%) participants were American (n=1), Australian (n=1), Chinese (n=1), French (n=1), German (n=1), Indian (n=1), Pakistani (n=1), Scottish-Italian (n=1), Serbian-Jordanian (n=1) and Turkish (n=1).

Moreover, twenty-one participants who filled out the questionnaire defined themselves as students (mostly from the University of Glasgow). The rest of the sample indicated to be student/bar supervisor (n=1), student/officer cadet Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (n=1), oral surgeon (n=1), project engineer (n=1), teacher (n=1), teacher/freelance writer (n=1), teacher/holiday club worker (n=1) and banker (n=1). Only two respondents opted out from providing their profession. The sample was diversified in terms of age, where the range was between 19 to 47. Similarly, within the sample 4 participants described their sexual preferences as homosexual and 27 as heterosexuals. Moreover, 22 respondents indicated being single, 4 unmarried, 3 in a relationship, 1 married and 1 divorced.

Finally, the findings suggest that all participants who returned open-ended questionnaires included information about their religion views. Respondents portrayed themselves as

Atheist (n=14), Agnostic (n=2), Catholic (n=4), Catholic/Agnostic (n=2), Islam (n=2), Protestant (n=2), Anti-theist (n=1), Hindu (n=1), Pantheist (n=1), Taoist (n=1) and undecided (n=1). It indicates that participants demonstrate greater openness in providing sensitive background information in a private interaction when they are assured of full anonymity. For detailed indication of questionnaire respondents, presented in a form of table, please see Appendix G.

An interpretation as well as awareness of own masculinity might be linked with participants' socio-economic circumstances, ethnicity or country of birth (Connell, 2005, Whitehead, 2002, Harris, 1995). Similarly, in this part of the study, respondents disclosed different background knowledge about gender issues. 6.45% of all participants claim to have an understanding of gender issues. One respondent (3.22%) openly indicated that for him the concept of masculine identity was a new, worth exploring theme. The quotes below reflect these distinct attitudes:

a) *'I have done a few research projects on masculinity in literature and I definitely think this has shaped my perception of it. […]' [Scottish, 26-year-old, heterosexual]*

b) *'I'm a philosophically-minded feminist.' [German, 24-year-old, heterosexual]*

c) *'I never really thought about masculinity, nor read anything specifically about it […].' [French, 24-year-old, heterosexual]*

Despite participants' claims, one could observe that knowledge and openness in relating to masculinity was diversified within the questionnaire sample, depending upon country of birth and age. However, 9.68% of all participants could be classified as unable to reflect on own gender identities. They have no perspectives on masculinity and lack expressions to capture issues of gender. Within the sample, participants who lack a gender perspective are from Asian countries, namely India, Pakistan and China; they are all heterosexual, in the age range between 22 to 34. Historically these are male dominated cultures that are slow to engage with gender issues. However, this is not to say that respondents from western countries are fully informed about dimensions of masculinity. Among the respondents there was one Scottish participant (22-year-old, heterosexual) who was not able/not willing to reflect on masculinity in relation to social norms and another Scottish participant (26-year-old, heterosexual) who did not relate to own experiences of being a man. It has to be kept in mind that Scottish society is also historically rooted in hegemonic masculinity. Thus, one might argue that participants' nationality can influence their knowledge and openness in relation to gender. Some social and cultural environments might not encourage

people to explore and reflect on the concepts of masculinity and femininity. Consequently, using Freudian phraseology some men from the sample might be seen through the realm of symbolic castration. They are disconnected (to some degree) with experiences of being a man, thus, unable to critically assess own gender identities and social inequalities.

10.3 Analysis of questionnaires/ part 2: Masculinity and social norms

Part 2 of the questionnaire aimed at exploring respondents' individual perspectives on manhood in relation to social norms. The aim was to define symbolic consumption choices that underpin respondents' gender identities. Participants were encouraged to express their views about masculinity honestly rather than to provide socially desired explanations. The questions were designed in a manner that invited respondents to think analytically and to reflect on own perspectives on manhood.

10.3.1 Traditional masculinity in the eyes of respondents

It appears that respondents define social standards of 'appropriate' masculine behaviour in a traditional manner. Among participants, there was a general agreement that some attitudes and actions appear to be predominant indicators of hegemonic manhood. The table 10.3.1 summarises respondents' views on traditional social norms that define masculinity. The categories below were derived from the questionnaires themselves. Each indicator of a 'real' manhood listed by respondents was noted down as it occurred in question 1 part 2 in the questionnaire. Any recurring statements were noted down just once. Then, masculine traits were organised into three different categories, namely a) physical appearance, b) personality and behaviour as well as c) leisure activities and interests. Sharing the findings with two competent judges (familiar with the research topic) validated the researcher's interpretation.

Table 10.3.1 Indicators of a 'real' manhood according to respondents

Physical appearance	strong, careless in appearance, well built physique, deep voice, large hands, facial hair, athletic, noticeable body frame, muscular, medium to large body build
Personality and behaviour	womaniser, brave, kind, bread-winner, good at DIY, poor communicator, not good at expressing feelings, have leadership qualities, extrovert, have good sense of humour, solid in spirit, unwilling to submit, have sporting and sexual prowess, boorish and uncultured behaviour, able to consume copious amounts of alcohol, independent, competitive, have much higher rationality then emotionality, good at solving problems, stoic, intelligent, ambitious with drive to do things and explore, self-reliant, economically independent, use vulgar language, objectify women, hide emotions, aggressive, positive father figure, do not complain, quick to forgive, doing violent or physical jobs, dominant, noble, able to outperform others, good at pursuing particular goals, confident, assertive, reckless driver, not ticklish
Leisure activities and interests	playing sport, watching football, interested in cars and mechanics, high number of sexual encounters, hanging around in all-male circles, listening 'appropriate' type of music (e.g. rock), drinking hard liquor (rather than cocktails)

The table above indicates that participants are well aware of hegemonic gender codes. The first category of *'physical appearance'* incorporates exclusively stereotypical perceptions of attractive man. The qualities of a 'real' manhood classified under *'Personality and behaviour'* are hegemonic and represent dominant cultural preferences of male identity. These norms are also visible in *'leisure activities and interests'* which have been identified through the stereotypical line of active and adventures male. Thus, respondents being familiarised with hegemonic norms might choose consciously which aspects of masculinity are worth consuming (or otherwise) in order to sustain their gender identity in a social context. This is not to say that it is an uncomplicated decision and straightforward process to construct own and unique gender identity. There are tensions and clashing views about 'appropriate' codes of manhood not only among individuals but also within an individual. However, having the knowledge of gender stereotypes contributes to greater freedom of choice and social equality (Connell, 2002).

Some researchers (Connell, 1995; Seidler, 1997; Whitehead, 2002) argue that rigid social expectations that relate to the notion of hegemonic masculinity might determine many aspects of human life. This research indicates that there is a strong relationship between gender and social norms which reinforce hegemonic models of masculinity. Participants are well aware of dominant gender codes and consciously choose which aspects of

hegemonic masculinity are worth consuming (or otherwise) in order to sustain their gender identity in a social context. In this part of the study, respondents listed the indicators of 'real' masculinity through the stereotypical line of active and adventurous male. Moreover, 9.67% of all participants highlighted that contemporary society is strongly rooted in conventional beliefs about gender; the quote below is an example of such attitude:

> '[…] I think that the present representation of masculinity is very close to the traditional stereotype. I think the only difference is that men are not necessarily seen as the sole 'bread winner' since there are more economic opportunities for females […]' [Scottish, 24-year-old, heterosexual]

Here, masculinity is seen as the concept operating in the context of hegemony where men are still expected to consume stereotypical social roles. According to the participant, a decline of hegemonic norms is only visible in women's wider access to the public labour market. Thus, for the respondent, the most obvious ideology of bread-winning became to some degree an outdated patriarchal attitude. However, 29.03% of all participants hold more positive and optimistic perspectives on social reality:

> a) '[…] I feel culture is moving away from the more traditional image of masculinity, especially away from the more physical, aggressive elements […]' [British, 20-year-old, homosexual]

> b) 'I think there is less pressure now than 10 or 20 years ago for men to conform to these traditional masculine ideals. This is sometimes caricatured as men 'showing their feminine side' but I think this is pejorative – they are simply rejecting the societal norms imposed upon them and preferring a more temperate and compassionate personality.' [British, 31-year-old, homosexual]

> c) '[…] Society is slowly changing and in doing so there is more room to move away from the norm, because the norm doesn't really exist.' [Scottish, 32-year-old, heterosexual]

These participants recognised a shift in social reasoning that has occurred as a result of feminism and development of Gender Studies within the last twenty years (for more discussion, see Chapter 1). They understand gender identity as a continuous process of self-development where individuals take deliberate decisions about consuming hegemonic or non-hegemonic traits. Participants emphasise that within contemporary western society there is a tendency towards more egalitarian trends through which men can freely express themselves. They argue that a plurality of masculinities is accepted and understood to some degree by wider community. These differences in participants' perspectives might be explained through the notion of multiple realities. Being more specific, as discussed in the previous chapters, human subjectivity and individual experiences construct human

understanding of the world. Similarly, in the context of this study, participants' consume personal life narratives what influence their attitudes towards constructions of masculinity. At the same time, 12.90% of all respondents observed that stereotypical traits might be diverse in different cultures where particular factors (e.g. religious behaviours or sexual behaviours) might be more or less important indicators of masculinity. Similarly, they understand that gender differences exist across borders as well as within particular countries. These respondents are to some degree aware that masculinity is not a hegemonic concept and might take a form of many facets.

Moreover, in question 3, part 2 in the questionnaire, participants were invited to provide examples of men's behaviours that do not fit into the masculine image and discuss their answers in relation to a film or literature character, actor, singer or sports person. Respondents listed the following names as examples of typical non-masculine personas: David Beckham, Justin Bieber, all the characters on '*Big Bang Theory*', Russell Brand, Billy Elliot, Johnny Depp, Steven Fry, Perez Hilton, Eddie Izzard, JLS, Elton John, Ricky Martin, Freddie Mercury, Brian Molko, Mark Owen, Robert Pattinson, Alexander Skarsgard, Justin Timberlake, Gok Wan or Nicky Wire. Respondents made various comments in order to justify their choices. 61.29% of all participants indicated that effeminate behaviours are synonymous with an unmanly image. They observed that masculinity is often defined in terms of antithesis to femininity. Consequently, according to these respondents, men who are overly concerned with their physical appearance, who show excessive emotions and discuss them in public, who wear feminine clothing, have a high voice, male ballet dancers or artistic men such as writers are incompatible with masculine images. However, some of the examples provided by participants do not fully comply with this line of reasoning. Considering the case of David Beckham, one might argue that he is a celebrity who in many aspects fits with the hegemonic notion of masculinity. He is a successful football player who earns million of dollars. At the same time, there is a caring side of him that is linked with being a husband and a father; he fulfils his social duty by donating money for charities. Nevertheless, Beckham's concern with physical appearance and modelling for Calvin Klein underwear campaign for some respondents might appear non-masculine. It indicates that the concept of masculinity is complex and multiple, where singular personalities can combine stereotypical images of maleness and traditionally non-masculine traits. Similarly, participants consume contradictory messages of masculinity that invite them to test different identity models.

In addition, homosexual men are also seen through the prism of effeminate behaviours that according to 22.58% of respondents do not conform to the notion of 'real' masculinity (for more discussion see point 9.6.5). Similarly, one participant (19-year-old, Scottish, heterosexual) highlighted another issue of power relations aggregated within masculine group. Being more specific, he classified disabled men as those who represent non-masculine traits, as they are not in a position to be self-sufficient. Thus, for these participants conceptions of masculinity are set in traditional hegemonic norms that establish differences between femininity and masculinity in the realm of binary oppositions. Consumption of such values maintains unequal relations between men and women and within the masculine group. Nevertheless, another participant philosophically observed:

> *'Since masculinity is a prototypical concept, the majority of men do not fit fully into it.'* [German, 24-year-old, heterosexual]

The quote above suggests that men cannot achieve all social expectations that define borders of 'appropriate' masculine identity. Of course, within particular society, there might be dominant codes of desired masculine and feminine behaviours. However, at the same time every human being develops his or her distinctive self-understanding that is not necessarily in line with wider social perspectives (Seidler, 1997). It was previously discussed that in Western culture one can observe some sort of transition in human beliefs that shifted from the unquestionable notion of 'truth' to acceptance of multiple realities and individual choices. These social conditions seem to form new aspects of reality such as relativity of knowledge and some form of nihilism (Lyon, 1994). The cited participant displays a reflective agenda of consuming and accepting multiple realities of everyday life.

10.3.2 Problematic representations of masculinity

When asked in question 4, part 2 in the questionnaire if there are representations of masculinity that raise concerns, participants provided a wide range of answers:

> a) *'Nothing in particular'* [Scottish, 21-year-old, heterosexual]

> b) *'[…] masculinity overlaps rather frighteningly with homophobia and sexism.'* [Scottish, 24-year-old, heterosexual]

> c) *'I am concerned that men are not "allowed" to display their emotions freely and so must often bottle up their emotions.'* [Scottish, 19-year-old, heterosexual]

d) '[…] there is a worrying emphasis on sexual promiscuity and alcoholic excess as being measures of a man.' [British, 20-year-old, homosexual]

e) '[…] looking threatening and acting aggressively are viewed as part of being a 'real man'. I think this is a terrible message to send out to young people […].' [Scottish, 27-year-old, homosexual]

f) 'I think some of the 'size 0' concerns that afflict females are also being presented to young men. Magazines, music videos and Hollywood depict images of male beauty that almost certainly make young men anxious and feel inadequate.' [British, 31-year-old, homosexual]

In responses to question 4, part 2 in the questionnaire, 77.42% (n=24) of all respondents highlighted their concerns related with a negative representations of masculinity. At the same time, 12.90% of men did not observe any troubling issues and 3 participants (9.68%) left the question unanswered. Participants, who expressed their concerns, captured multi-dimensional factors, which according to them might have a negative effect on the formation of gender identities. It has to be pointed out that each participant in his answers could have related to more than one concern.

Among those who provided information about concerning representations of masculinity (24 participants), 25% indicated that violent male behaviours correlate with a negative manifestation of men's power. Lyon (1994) observed that there are certain anti-social behaviours that for the majority of people are regarded as morally wrong. Similarly, participants who related to the issues of violence indicated that masculine demonstration of own dominance can take forms of physical, psychological or sexual offenses. These participants also observed that male aggressive instincts are associated with football hooliganism; they are rooted in unjustified hatred and the need to prove own strength and bravery. Moreover, participants claim that aggressive images of masculinity are promoted through specific music genres such as hip-hop or rap. As one of the respondents observed these music types centre around the concepts such as terror of the streets, violent language, gang wars and drug addiction. It has to be pointed out that some men (especially from a lower class, who have difficulties in finding employment and who struggle financially) can attempt to regain their dignity and self-respect through aggressive social behaviours (Seidler, 1997). It is a dangerous idea to consciously consume violent behaviours, aggression and physical strength in order to maintain a dominant form of masculinity. These practices of gaining physical power and domination are seen by participants in the realm of social problems that have negative effects on others.

Interestingly, 58.33% of participants (n=14) who reflected on their concerns highlighted the concept of negative media messages that are linked with violent images of men as well as with male physical appearance. In feminist thought, the concept of attractiveness is mostly associated with femininity (see Chapter 8). Nevertheless, respondents' accounts indicate that men might also be pressured to comply with media regimes of physical attractiveness that are often idealised and unattainable. Appearance became an integrated element of self-esteem and as this study indicates, some men can feel inadequate about own looks. Consequently, men from this sample consume idealised masculine images promoted by media that are often not in line with their inner self but comply with social expectations.

Among those who reflected their concerns about the contemporary notion of masculinity, four participants (16.67%) mentioned the issue of homophobia and sexism. Both phenomena are rooted in the concept of oppression where the former one is linked with sexual and the latter one with gender oppression (Edwards, 1994). Heterosexuality is promoted within a society as a natural sexual orientation. This concept of sexual sameness is cultivated for example in school environments where masculinity and heterosexuality are presented as intertwined elements (Robinson, 2008). As a result, any homosexual practices might be seen in opposition and in contrast to the notion of manhood. Similarly, sexism is an expression of radical discrimination (especially) against women, that sustains patriarchal or in other words male-dominated social and political order. As discussed in Chapter 1, there are pro-feminist men who realised that their social position has been constructed on gender inequalities. Consequently, they aim to establish more equal gender relations by questioning historical and present accounts that define women as a subordinated group. Of course, there are also men who constantly promote the paradigm of traditional gender roles and they might become overly anti-feminist and sexist. For example, one participant (Australian, 33-year-old, heterosexual) among those who provided information about concerning representations of masculinity in media, made a controversial statement and indicated that overly feminised images of men in media have a negative impact on masculine identities and divert gender ideology from 'desirable' traditional norms. This conservative perspective sustains the notion of hegemonic masculinity and unequal gender relations. Consuming homophobic and sexist messages constructs the realm of dominant and subordinated masculinities.

Finally, 58.33% (n=14) out of those who revealed their concerns, related to issue of stereotypical and appropriate masculine traits. Being more specific, these men call for

revision of traditional manhood especially in relation to expressing emotions and feelings. In contemporary society, there is still a belief that men have to be in control of their own emotions and feelings (see Chapter 6). People should try to accept individual differences, personalities and realities because for some men denying own emotions and keeping them in secret might carry personal consequences. Men can fall into extremes. When they are not able to express feelings in private life, they might start valuing professional success and fulfilment (Seidler, 1997). Consequently, they have difficulties with establishing gender identities in the private contexts and decide to reject them. Moreover, respondents also listed other stereotypical indicators of 'real' manhood such as excessive drinking or sexual promiscuity as patterns that should not be normalised among men. These participants reject consuming stereotypical assumptions about gender norms that underpin social practice. For them deconstruction of hegemonic norms could contribute to creation of more egalitarian relations. It is a social and political dilemma to deal with problems such as violence, homophobia, sexism or distorted images of femininity and masculinity that are circulated in contemporary culture. It appears that respondents are aware that some groups of men and their aggressive and abusive behaviours create problematic images of masculinity. However, it is also important to recognise that men can encounter difficulties when their grounds for expressing gender identity do not confirm the established masculine stereotypes.

Nevertheless, respondents had contradictory opinions when asked in question 5, part 2 in the questionnaire if there is any need to reconstruct of what society has come to know as traditional masculinity:

a) 'If, by "traditional masculinity" you mean conservative, alpha, patriarchal, strong father figures, then there is no need to reconstruct this image. A resounding NO!' [Australian, 33-year-old, heterosexual]

b) 'I don't feel that artificial change can be imposed on characteristics that are seen to define masculinity as these form part of a man's wider personality and I feel (perhaps optimistically) that outdated narrow views of what defines a man as masculine are a thing of the past.'[British, 47-year-old, heterosexual]

c) 'The traditional gender role applied to men is as irrelevant as the image of women which feminists reject. There are many more productive ways of building cultural capital and I would prefer that traits such as compassion, empathy, altruism were valued over and above being able to demonstrate dominance via aggression.' [British, 31-year-old, homosexual]

d) '[…] I'm not 100% sure about what exactly men SHOULD construct their gender identity on. I mean, men have a position of privilege over women simply by basis of

their sex and that's not exactly something which should be celebrated. Masculinity has never been a part of how I have identified so I cannot really say what I think should or shouldn't be present in a new masculine identity.' [Scottish, 24-year-old, heterosexual]

In responses to question 5a, part 2 in the questionnaire, 13 (41.93 %) participants out of all 31 respondents, did not see a need to rebuild the concept of traditional masculinity. At the same time, 16 (51.61 %) respondents pointed out that the conventional image of masculinity should be more diversified and 2 (6.45%) of participants indicated that it is difficult to provide a straightforward answer. These differences within individual accounts highlight that people carry diverse expectations from themselves and their surrounding environment, depending upon individual life narratives, experiences, traditions and culture.

The quotes above indicate that participants consume contradictory views on 'appropriate' gender norms. In relation to question 5, part 2 in the questionnaire, 32.26% (n=10) of all respondents presented conservative perspectives which are in conflict with feminism and one might argue with the changing expectations of Western society. Conservative perspectives imply that feminist thought de-constructed social order and created confusion of evolutionary patterns (Whitehead, 2002). The notion of traditional masculinity is rooted in a patriarchal understanding of reality that for these respondents appears to be an ideal model for living. Nevertheless, among participants who do not see the need to redefine the concept of traditional masculinity (n=13) there is 23.07% of men for whom 'traditional masculinity' no longer reflects the life situation and expectations of men in European or American culture. Being more specific, they believe greater than ever before that a sense of gender equality based on traditional masculine and feminine traits disappeared. However, it might be too optimistic (if not simplistic) perspective on gender issues (for more discussion see point 9.7).

Moreover, 35.49% (n=11) of all respondents took a pro-feminist stance. For them the achievements of feminism call for revision of manhood. Consequently, pro-feminist men regard questioning of conventional facets of masculinity as a contribution to their own growth and development. At the same time, 4 out of the pro-feminist respondents were confused on which principles they ought to define their gender identity. It is not surprising, bearing in mind that people are exposed to multi-layered concepts and realities. As indicated in the previous chapters, in the context of the Social Self participants did not uphold a continuity or coherence of self-representations. They developed multiple gender identities and gender messages. Similarly, in this part of the study, while answering

questions some respondents expressed their sense of fragmented identities and as in the instance cited above (d) uncertainty about masculine roles. Among those who indicated that conventional images of masculinity should be more diversified (n=16), 5 participants (31.25%) did not provide justification for their reasoning. Finally, in responses to question 5, part 2 in the questionnaire, 6.45% of all respondents indicated that some traditional standards serve as a useful indicator for constructing own gender identity. However, at the same time, these participants argued that representations of masculinity should also include non-traditional qualities such as sensitivity, compassion or tenderness. Participants conceptualise and maintain their gender identities through the symbolic consumption of both social and individual understanding of reality that overlap each other creating a complex network of relationships.

10.4 Analysis of questionnaires/ part 3: Connecting personal experience with gender identity

Part 3 in the questionnaire links the concept of gender identity with individual experiences of respondents. Put differently, respondents were encouraged to present their subjective perspectives and to reflect on own life stories that could have structured their gender identities. It allowed identifying their personal experiences of 'being a man' in the context of symbolic consumption.

10.4.1 Influence of personal environment on formation of gender identity

Identities develop according to the context of environment in which a particular person finds himself or herself. As Harris (1995) observed, people learn about gender roles in surroundings such as work, peer groups or family house. Similarly, research by Egan and Perry (2001) indicated that gender identity is a multidimensional construct. Egan and Perry proposed that gender identity is built up on the premises of four components, namely, a) individual feelings of psychological connectedness with one's biological sex and gender b) individual feelings of psychological connectedness with one's gender group c) external pressure to conform to gender stereotypes d) personal perception on gender groups (e.g. feelings of superiority or inferiority of own gender group) (2001, p.451). The research measured relations among these four components of gender identity and their influence into psychological adjustment in a group of 182 pre-adolescent children (aged 9 to 14).

Methodological procedures included administration of two self-report style questionnaires. The findings indicate that components of gender identity are not strongly correlated with each other, however they all relate to psychological adjustment. Egan and Perry (2001) concluded that felt pressure for gender conformity has a harmful effect on psychological well-being while self-perceived gender typicality does not essentially influence a healthy sense of self. Moreover, the research indicated that girls feel greater pressure to conform to socially valued characteristics of gender than boys (2001, p.460).

In the context of this study, respondents when asked in question 6, part 3 in the questionnaire, if their environment had an effect on formation of their gender identities provided diverse answers. Among 31 questionnaires, only one (3.23%) participant opted out from providing any information. It has to be pointed out that each participant in his answers could have related to more than one environment. Nevertheless, in total, 22 respondents (73.33 %) mentioned their relationships with parents, where 17 (77.27%) highlighted a positive impact of family on their gender identities. Moreover, 6 (27.27%) participants indicated that their parents did not impose any particular gender roles. These participants described the family home as a hassle-free environment where they were able to take their own decisions:

> a) '[…] My parents don't particularly enforce any gender role on me that I am consciously aware of.' [British, 19-year-old, heterosexual]
>
> b) 'I think my environment, raised by relatively progressive parents and subsequently surrounded by those of a progressive political leaning (more or less), has certainly helped the formation of a healthy gender identity where I've never felt the need to overemphasis my gender but am also comfortable with it. […]' [Scottish, 24-year-old, heterosexual]

Among those who related to the family issues in their answers to question 6, part3, 2 (6.67%) participants highlighted that traditional arrangements within their parent's household, where a father was a bread-winner and mother took care of the family, did not necessarily enforce in their lives greater approval of stereotypical gender roles. For these participants such a situation appears to be one of the possible models of life (that might work out only for some people).

Among those who provided information about their family environment, 5 (16.66%) participants indicated that families hindered their gender identities. These participants claim that they were pushed to follow a particular type of career or hid their homosexuality

that would not be accepted by family members. Among those who provided information about their environments, 12 respondents (40.00%) indicated that their friends and colleagues had a crucial role in developing their gender identities. Moreover, within 2 participants (16.66%) stated that their friends did not have any impact on their identities. These men from an early age might have had a very clear sense of self.

It has to be pointed out that 3 respondents (10.00%) from all those who provided information (n=30), indicated that their work environment reproduces stereotypical gender roles where men and women are accordingly given more masculine or feminine tasks (for example girls help with cooking or cleaning while boys help with fixing cars and ought to watch football with fathers). Similarly, in this study, participants indicated how different sources (e.g. parents, peers and colleagues) had an impact upon their behaviours and understanding of masculine and feminine roles. The findings indicate that pressure of one's social environment can have negative effects not only on women but also on men's gender identities. Nevertheless, masculinity is not a stable concept (Connell, 1995), similarly the need to consume particular masculine traits changes during the lifetime. Throughout the course of life, men redefine their identities, reject certain ideologies received while growing up and choose new perspectives that are in line with their changing inner self.

10.4.2 Masculinity as a self-performance

Gender identity might be expressed through the performance of particular activities. Goffman (1959) pointed out that one might adjust and shape his or her behaviour to give appreciation of 'ideal' social models. For him people 'perform' particular actions in order to highlight their conformity with generally accepted norms (for more discussion see Chapter 1). In the context of this study, participants were asked in question 8, part 3 in the questionnaire if they ever tried to act out a traditional masculine persona. Only 1 (3.23%) participant opted out from providing the answer. Another 61.29% of respondents provided answers that are in line with Goffman's ideology:

> a) '[…] in my opinion, being masculine is more about what you say and the image you put out than what you actually feel or believe. If you don't feel a certain way or have a particular interest, for example a love of football, you can simply state that you do.' [Scottish, 27-year-old, homosexual]

b) '[…] when with a group such as my school or university friends I think my macho behaviour is probably to show dominance and gain attention.' [Scottish, 20-year-old, heterosexual]

The majority of respondents claim to re-conceptualise their own identities in order to fit with their experiences in a particular social context. They consume identities that are socially desirable and likely to satisfy external expectations. However, by adapting behaviours that are not necessarily in line with their inner self, participants might reinforce the notion of hegemonic masculinity. This type of behaviour also indicates that the social environment has a great impact upon formation of gender identities. Nevertheless, 35.48% out of 30 respondents highlighted more individualistic approaches to life:

a) 'I don't really make the effort to look masculine to people, I don't think. I don't see how it would matter whether I did or did not actually appear masculine.' [Scottish, 21-year-old, heterosexual]

b) '[…] Generally I do things because they benefit me in some way, by making me feel good etc, rather than as part of some false persona.' [British, 22-year-old, heterosexual]

It appears that quoted men are willing to define themselves through the realm of individualistic perspectives. They do not have a need for conventional approval. To some degree, they look at themselves through the prism of personality rather than gender. Paradoxically, consumption of nihilistic attitudes might challenge traditional gender roles and lead to greater democratisation of social expectations (see also point 10.5.1).

Through the questionnaires participants were also encouraged to describe their masculine and non-masculine traits by referring to the specific personal experiences from the past. Consequently, the focus was upon participants' subjective sense of self. Table 10.4.3 summarises experiences that participants defined as masculine and non-masculine. The categories below were derived from the questionnaires themselves. Each masculine and non-masculine side of participants' identity was noted down as it occurred in the questionnaires in questions 10 and 11, part 3 in the questionnaire. Any recurring statements were noted down just once unless the same category was classified by participants on the opposite bases. Sharing the findings with two fellow students (who were familiar with the research topic) validated the researcher's interpretation.

Table 10.4.2 Summary of masculine and non-masculine side of participants' identities

Masculine side of own identity	**Non-masculine side of own identity**
doing well at sport, being outdoors, pushing the body to a new limit, completing physical challenge, doing DIY (e.g. putting up a cupboard from IKEA), being given a role of Romeo in the school drama production, beating father at darts, wearing a uniform, being a role model for a child, acting aggressively, lifting heavy things, starting a verbal conflict with a police officer, dealing with physical pain, losing 20 pounds and be back in physical shape, successfully asking a girl out, beating others in arm wrestling, being able to dance in almost every style, growing a beard at the age of 15, fighting and beating another boy from a class, competing and winning at go-karting, having a son and being a father	non-masculine taste in music, film, television programmes, doing housework, using moisturiser, lack of interest in sport (either playing or talking about it), being a geek on topics of maths or videogames, not willing to bring up sex as a topic of conversations, being homosexual, being emotional and non-competitive, being interested in literature, reading poems, being caring and compassionate about own girlfriend, enjoying art, paintings, drawing, being a worrier, writing poetry, talking about worries, being worried about exams, being interested in fashion and own physical appearance, dancing, drinking cocktails, straightening hair, using lip balm, being interested in environmental issues

The table above indicates that respondents classify their own masculine and non-masculine behaviours according to discourses of gender. Participants conform to unambiguous gender distinctions. In responses to question 10, part 3 in the questionnaire, 77.42 % of participants described distinctly masculine episodes from their lives. At the same time, 22.58% of respondents opted out from providing the information. In comparison, in responses to question 11, part 3 in the questionnaire, 80.65% of participants reflected on their non-masculine side of own personality and 19.35% left the question unanswered. One can observe that participants classified their behaviours in line with traditional gender roles (Franklyn II, 1984). Their images of masculinity are related with courage, physical strength, competition or a different kind of success. Non-masculine traits are defined in terms of emotionality and stereotypically feminine interests such as reading or art. It indicates that consumption of social norms has a considerable impact upon participants' self-perception. It has to be pointed out that many women adopt behaviours that are socially described as masculine as well as many men expose attitudes that are socially regarded as feminine (Bradley, 2007). In the context of this study, 16 respondents (51.61%) claimed to openly discuss their non-masculine side with friends. Six respondents (19.36%) stated that they do not talk about their non-masculine side even with the closest

friends or significant other and another 9 participants (29.03%) did not relate to this issue. This finding suggests that the majority of respondents consciously consume traits that are stereotypically regarded as non-masculine, however, one fifth of the respondents repress their 'feminine' identity in a social context.

10.4.3 Changing perceptions on masculinity

In responses to question 13, part 3 in the questionnaire participants provided a wide range of answers. Nineteen (61.29%) respondents out of 31 indicated that their perceptions on masculinity have changed over time. Among them 3 (15.79%) participants related to physical changes (e.g. body shape, growing a beard) and 16 (84.21%) observed that they gained better understanding of own identities as they matured:

a) 'I feel that my perception of masculinity has broadened over time to include the softer aspects of protectiveness and emotional sensitivity as well as the 'harder' traditional values of strength and resilience.' [British, 47-year-old, heterosexual]

b) '[…] I'm definitely more conservative, patriarchal and alpha now than I was earlier on, through experiencing problems in family and in personal relationships, as well as through working for other people in offices, call centres and retail. I don't function well if I'm not allowed to lead and in that case I'd rather go and make my own way.' [Australian, 33-year-old, heterosexual]

One can observe that older men who participated in this study had a great understanding of own identities. They were able to critically reflect and capture changing perspectives on masculinity in the context of individual lives. 29.03% of all respondents did not observe any significant changes in their perspectives on own masculinity:

a) 'I wouldn't say my perception of masculinity has changed over time. I have not previously considered my perceptions of masculinity but I don't imagine they have changed over the years.' [Scottish, 21-year-old, heterosexual]

b) '[…] The underlying concept [of masculinity] remains the same, however, even though the interpretation has become increasingly broad as time goes on.' [American, 24-year-old, heterosexual]

These respondents indicated that their perceptions on manhood did not undergo any transformations. It appears that individual life narratives and age influence the concept of self-awareness. Greater self-awareness comes with greater life experiences and age when individuals become more aware of own behaviours and standpoints. Thus, also the ability to consciously consume particular behaviours and beliefs might be dependent upon these

two factors. It has to be pointed out that 3 (9.68%) among all respondents left the question unanswered.

10.5 Similarities between Social Self and Individual Self

The analysis of questionnaires indicated that there are certain similarities between portrayals of participants' Social Self and Individual Self. In this section it is discussed how the dominant elements that emerged from the analysis of questionnaires overlap with a vision of masculinity presented in the social framework of Facebook. Put differently, this part of the chapter captures practices of symbolic consumption that parallel social and individual areas of life.

10.5.1 Individuality and sense of happiness

In the context of both social and individual accounts, participants attempt to consume behaviours that sustain their individualistic sense of self. Participants claim their control over own lives and choices. Throughout the questionnaires, one could observe that 11 participants (35.48%) declared that their gender identities do not have to be approved by others:

> *a) '[…] Frankly, I don't really care what others think of me. […]' [Australian, 33-year-old, heterosexual]*

> *b) '[…] I just do what makes me happy.' [Scottish, 24-year-old, heterosexual]*

> *c)'[…] I don't really fit in with my straight friends or fit in at all with other gay men – though I think this may be that I'm more true to myself and less likely to act in a way that society dictates.' [Scottish, 27-year-old. homosexual]*

Paradoxically, this unapologetic focus on the self brings loosening of social expectations because other people have to learn how to accept and understand others in their own right (Giddens, 1991). Moreover, in the West, students within the University environment interact with a multiplicity of masculinities that are influenced by different social backgrounds, nationalities, sexual orientations or age. Consequently, they gain a rich panorama of gender performances and develop greater tolerance for diversity (Harris III & Struve, 2009). Similar evidence that participants attempt to pursue personal happiness that neglect to some degree social expectations was also provided in Social Self. In Chapter 7 it was indicated that through the appropriate selection of Facebook photographs participants emphasise the message of being happy. Moreover, Western participants consumed images that combined individuality with rebellious behaviours against social norms.

Nevertheless, there are participants for whom construction of gender identity is not a straightforward process because, as respondents indicate, they build identities through the evaluation of surrounding messages. The findings of questionnaires indicate that 25.80% of respondents claim that media messages influence the concept of identity within contemporary culture. In other words, men from this sampling indicate that media might become a source of gender role messages:

a) '[I compare myself] with men in adverts, usually showing admirable physiques. I would then compare my own physique and usually fall into a mixed mood of depression and wanting to self-improve (something I believe that is a part of the advertisement's goal). Typically if I'm in a slump-like mood I may compare myself more to such pictures or people and feel unsatisfied with my personal appearance.' [Scottish/Italian, 20-year-old, homosexual]

b) '[…] I think it is as damaging for young boys to think they have to grow up to look and act like a footballer or cage fighter as it is for young girls to think they need to grow up to look and act like a super model or a bunny girl.' [Scottish, 27-year-old, homosexual]

The quotes above imply that some participants might try to reconcile their appearance and identities with the desired images of masculinity presented by media. Men and women being exposed to global representations of gender have possibilities to compare and test different concepts of identity. Nevertheless, an inability to reflect critically on presented codes might lead to experiences of dissatisfaction with own appearance and/or identity. It did so in the instance cited above and may well have done in others. Consequently, people have to be aware how to uncover deeper and more complex motives of media such as distorted portrayals of femininity and masculinity. Otherwise, young people might believe that they must consume scripts encapsulated within mass media in order to avoid social failure. In Chapter 7 in the context of Social Self it was also demonstrated that participants are under the influence of media messages. They were constructing images of own physical attractiveness according to stereotypical media messages. Nevertheless, another theme that remain consistent in both Social and Individual accounts is the importance of social connectivity.

10.5.2 Social and family life

In the context of Social Self, participants presented their gender identities through the prism of social connectedness and friendly relationships with others. It was particularly visible throughout the Chapters 7, 8 and 9 where participants attempted to maintain friendly relationships with others through the consumption of socially positive practices such as a sense of humour. A similar message was highlighted in respondents' private accounts in responses to questionnaires. Being more specific, participants indicated that friends provide social and emotional support, especially in the contexts of University or work environments. 25.80% (n=8) of all respondents claim to strategically use a sense of humour to perform their gender identities in a positive light of friendliness and solidarity:

a) '[…] To this day I think that there is an expectation that men should be funnier than girls. This is also linked with a culture of piss-taking and banter among boys which, for me, is an important part of my male identity I guess.' [British, 30-year-old, heterosexual]

b) '[…] being generally loud for example attracts attention, and if used wisely, e.g. with humour, one can achieve a dominant role in a group […]' [Scottish/Italian, 20-year-old, homosexual]

Respondents suggest that they consume humour that sustains solidarity and popularity within a group of friends. Nevertheless, analysis of questionnaires also indicates that 19.35% (n=6) of all participants have a need to be a part of the mainstream student or work society where drinking alcohol is perceived as an important element of socialising:

a) '[…] I never realised how much alcohol and social drinking factored into masculinity as I didn't drink that much when most of my friends were, and didn't start drinking and realise this properly until I was nearly 17.' [British, 19-year-old, heterosexual]

b) 'I was raised in an area which produces and consumes large quantities of whisky. Drinking, occasionally competitively with friends was a part of my masculine lifestyle at school […].' [British, 22-year-old, heterosexual]

Drinking is often associated with masculine identity (Capraro, 2000). Carparo (2000) suggested that men being under the masculine gender-role stress might get involved in drinking in order to meet social standards. It is visible in the case of quoted participants who indicate that they consume alcohol in order to be regarded as sociable and outgoing person. Nevertheless, this need to prove own manhood might lead to alcohol problems. This issue was previously explored in Chapter 7 in the context of University lifestyle.

Another theme that is linked with participants' construction of gender identity is family life.

Family members are also believed to have a significant impact upon formation of gender identities (Harris, 1995). In both the social and the private setting, a role of father was mentioned in a two-fold manner. Throughout the questionnaires, 16.12% (n=5) of respondents highlighted admiration for their fathers' standards of upbringing, while 6.45% (n=2) of participants presented the figure of father in an indifferent or negative perspective:

> a) 'I don't think particularly much of my father, so I tend to find male role models elsewhere – books, films, television, occasionally teachers, etc.' [British, 22-year-old, heterosexual]
>
> b) 'My father I think had a large effect [on formation of my gender identity]. I was brought up in a socialist household so he read a lot and talked about politics and history. There were books and newspapers everywhere. He'd tell me that things should be equal between men and women, classes, races, etc. […] Also dad was never hugely interested in cars and never spoke disrespectfully about women, or was out womanising. He is still 'manly' with a big, deep voice and he commands respect. [Scottish, 30-year-old, heterosexual]

Of course, consumption of particular attitudes depends upon individual life circumstances because for some men in this sample, relationships with parents might have been a problematic and challenging experience. Thus, some individuals, as the first quoted participant, might avoid being like their fathers. Bearing in mind that previously fatherhood was defined in the realm of authority and rationality, father-son relationships could have been underpinned by distance and lack of emotionality (Seidler, 1997). Recently, the concept of fatherhood gained a softer facet based on emotions of love and tenderness (Biddulph, 1998). Nevertheless, as the quotes above indicate, parents' commitment and decisions about child upbringing influenced participant' sense of identity and their symbolic consumption choices.

10.6 Differences between Social Self and Individual Self

The analysis of questionnaires indicated that there are crucial differences between portrayals of participants' Social Self and Individual Self. In this section it is discussed how the dominant elements that emerged from the analysis of questionnaires create a new vision of masculinity that is not compatible with public Facebook representations. Thus, this part of the chapter captured aspects of symbolic consumption that are often silenced in the context of Social Self.

10.6.1 Comparing with others

In responses to question 9, part 3 in the questionnaire, when asked to explain to what extent participants compare themselves with other men, participants' responses were rather consistent. 70.96% (n=22) of respondents indicated that they compare with others while 22.58% (n=7) claimed to be confident about themselves and in general, do not make any comparisons. Moreover, 6.46% (n=2) left this question unanswered. The main message emphasised by respondents was that other men are not regarded in terms of potential rivals. As this study indicates, participants avoid building a destructive and competitive relationship. In the case of Social Self, participants highlighted that they attempt to create a community of friends in order to deal with the difficulties of everyday (university) life. However, as respondents indicated through their Individual Self, there might be some rivalry between men, which does not exclude the possibility of being friends at the same time:

a) I compare myself with both men and women – I try to look for creativity and dynamic personalities, hoping they don't have more than me and if they do, figuring out how I could compare more favourably [...].' [Scottish, 21-year-old, heterosexual]

b) 'I worry about some comparisons a lot. Physical appearance, intelligence and leadership. I always compare myself to find out where I lie, regarding whether I am above, below or just average.' [British, 19-year-old, heterosexual]

As the quotes above indicate, the arena of comparison involves various aspects of participants' lives and is not necessarily limited to other men. Surprisingly, in the context of one-to-one research interaction, 68.18% (n=15) of respondents, out of those who compare with others, revealed that they make comparisons on the grounds of physical appearance. It has to be pointed out that in the light of traditional gender roles 'real' men are careless about own looks (Harris, 1995). Participants in the context of Social Self upheld this message and avoided conversations about physical attractiveness. However, in a private context of research interaction respondents claimed that the body might become an indicator of positive or negative self-characteristic:

a) 'I wouldn't say I do [compare with other men] to a great extent, sometimes in a self-deprecating way in terms of appearance, as I'm relatively self-conscious in that way, but other than that I wouldn't say I spend time comparing myself with other men.' [Scottish, 24-year-old, heterosexual]

b) '[I compare with other men] Physical image and sporting ability. To a lesser extent earning potential. This is because these are qualities which seem to be

attractive to members of the opposite gender (possibly only subconsciously). [British, 22-year-old, heterosexual]

The quoted participants portrayed their Individual Self within the realm of uncertainties about own physical appearance, indicating that they want to look appealing and attractive to women. Consequently, the female's perspectives might shape the canon of appearance as well as the sense of male identity. Participants' fear of being unattractive is linked with the fear of being rejected by females. Participants symbolically consume the messages of physical attractiveness mostly on more private and individual grounds. For them physical attractiveness is an aspect that might determine life success and individual sense of happiness. However, from stereotypical perspective it is socially acceptable for women to feel insecure about their own looks rather than men (Harris, 1995). This might be the reason of concealing any non-masculine messages from participants' social self-representations. Moreover, it appears that in private contexts, 50.00% (n=11) of respondents (out of those who compare with others) often compare their intellectual abilities and creativity with others, indicating that they consume the message of being clever and above-average. The aspect of being intelligent was also consumed in participants' Social Self, nevertheless, not on the basis of comparisons with others.

10.6.2 Expressing emotions and feelings

In the context of Social Self, participants were not willing to display intimate emotions or feelings. Throughout the questionnaires, 22.58% (n=7) of respondents indicated that public expression of emotions should be regarded in the realm of natural human behaviour while for 9.67% (n=3) it is unacceptable sign of weakness. Thus, questionnaires revealed that participants consume some contradictory standpoints in relation to masculine emotionality:

a) 'I am quite comfortable talking openly about my emotions but most of my male mates don't seem to feel comfortable talking about their feeling unless they are really drunk.' [British, 27-year-old, homosexual]

b) '[…] Men are not always emotionally strong, or balanced. This expectation [of men being emotionally strong] to my opinion set apart men from their own feelings and existence.' [Turkish, 34-year-old, heterosexual]

c) '[…] Emotions I always hold back till later – for when I am alone or when I am with my significant other. I also don't like to share my emotions with anyone aside from my significant other.' [Australian, 33-year-old heterosexual]

d) ' […] I don't think guys should have to be emotionally in control all the time but at the same time a man crying in public seems wrong. […]' [British, 20-year-old, heterosexual]

The quotes above indicate that for some participants public depiction of emotions is a sign of weakness that challenges male identity. On the other hand, other respondents have a need to reflect on their own feelings, but they are limited to some degree by stereotypical norms. Seidler (1997) observed that masculine identity is associated with the public world of work where men are expected to act confidently, hide negative and positive emotions and take rational decisions. Consequently, as Seidler stated, men transfer similar aspects of manhood into their private lives and lose contact with a deeper sense of self. It appears that some participants accept their emotional vulnerability and expect from others to be more tolerant about male emotional openness.

Another indicator of masculinity linked with emotional side of masculinity, is a desire of having a girlfriend:

a) 'I feel pressured to find a girlfriend, but only by myself. I have a genuine reason as I want to look after and care and love for someone but I also find I pressure myself because generally having a girlfriend is a "masculine" thing to have. Not having one can be seen as being non-masculine.' [British, 19-year-old, heterosexual]

b) '[…] I often feel the need to up my masculinity in night-clubs as being single, especially still at 20 years old, does build up a strong pressure to try to find a partner.[…]' [Scottish/Italian, 20-year-old, homosexual]

While constructing their Social Self participants avoided expressions of intimate feelings. They adopted a hegemonic pose of emotional indifference that is not necessarily in line with their inner needs. Being more specific, in the case of Individual Self, for 12.90% (n=4) of participants, the concept of having a girlfriend appears to be an indicator of positive or negative self-characteristics. These respondents indicated that without female attention they might feel unpopular and unattractive. Consequently, to some degree having a partner/significant other becomes the confirmation of their masculinity. However, in a social context they avoid consuming this type of message as they might be seen through the prism of unmanly behaviours.

In the contemporary world, the uncertainties of future life directions and insecurities related with employment carry implications for intimate relationships (Giddens, 1998). Men might feel a need to have a significant other not only to protect the loved-one, but also to receive support in order to cope with the difficulties of everyday life. However, at the

same time they cannot be sure that one day they will adopt the roles of a husband or a father (Seidler, 2007). According to Giddens (1998), relationships underwent a *transformation of intimacy*. In other words, for Giddens the concept of 'marriage for life' is no longer adequate to social conditions. Nowadays, there are no external reasons that would bond a relationship. Partners aim to derive a personal satisfaction from being together. Nevertheless, when the relationship fails to bring a sense of fulfilment (for one or both partners) the effort and mutual plans are simply disbanded. As Giddens suggests, it might be a result of 'sexual revolution' and women's liberation.

However, inability to find a significant other might trigger in some men the need of sexual conquest that is not informed by emotional involvement. This type of behaviour might be a form of regaining a sense of own manhood and self-respect. Interestingly, a theme of 'womanising' and sexual promiscuity did not appear in the public context of Facebook. However, in a private, one-to-one research interaction, participants revealed:

> *a) 'Men seem to gain respect for perceived masculinity from peers if they show a great feat of strength, show that they are good at fighting, good at womanising or good at consuming lots of alcohol.' [British, 20-year-old, homosexual]*

> *b) '[Men feel masculine] Whenever [they] attract the attention of women and successfully asking them out, which is a social minefield of despair.' [British, 19-year-old, heterosexual]*

Throughout the questionnaires 19.35% (n=6) of respondents related to the theme of womanising, indicating that according to social expectations men are expected to demonstrate sexual promiscuity. It appears that men in this sample in a mixed-group environment attempt to sustain their social self in line with the demands of feminism. Many pro-feminists (both men and women) support the idea that men ought to transform their attitudes towards women (Whitehead, 2002). It appears that some participants are ready to incorporate into everyday life practices respect for women's rights and feelings. Nevertheless, at the same time they might feel peer pressure that associate masculinity with 'womanising' and sexual promiscuity. Such dissonance indicates that some men might be in a state of inner battle in order to accommodate cultural attitudes and personal feelings. These feelings of inadequacy might also relate to homosexual men who are stereotypically seen through the prism of effeminate behaviours and feminine emotionality.

10.6.3 Homosexuality

On Facebook profiles users have an option to select and publicly express their sexual preferences ('interested in'). In the context of this study, on Facebook pages 35 (39.32%) participants out of 89 claimed to be heterosexual. Another four (4.49%) users from the sample specified to be interested in men. One participant (1.12%) indicated to be male bisexual and 49 (55.05%) opted out from providing the information. At the same time, all respondents who decided to fill out the questionnaire (31 people) indicated their sexual orientation. Four (12.91%) respondents described themselves as homosexual and 27 (87.09%) as heterosexual. This data suggests that in a public context of Facebook many participants avoided indicating their sexual preferences, whereas one-to-one communication contributed to a more private and confidential interaction. One of the respondents who specified his sexual orientation only in the case of the questionnaire, stated:

'Gay (although not out at work, hence not out on facebook)' [British, 31-year-old]

The same participant explained in the later part of the questionnaire:

'I hid my homosexuality until I was in my late 20's as I erroneously felt it would hold back my career. I have at times felt pressure to demonstrate masculinity in order to 'cover up' my natural inclination towards rejection of traditional masculinity.'

The above confession indicates that social pressure might influence men's public expression of gender. It may be the case that the participant for many years has been building his identity in contrast with own feelings in order to satisfy the surrounding environment. Knowing that his sexual preferences might not be accepted by larger society, he experienced some kind of duality where he had to betray his inner identity. Consequently, being insecure about his individual self, that for some does not comply with the dominant heterosexual norms, the participant is still in the process of 'coming out'.

Gay men might face prejudice and experience the feelings of alienation. For many years, homosexuality has been associated with psychological disorder, abnormality, HIV and AIDS (Seidler, 1997). Nevertheless, this study indicates that a younger generation of homosexual men is more likely to publicly display their sexual orientation. For instance, as mentioned above, in the case of Facebook accounts four participants indicated that they are interested in men and one to be bisexual. At the same time, 29.03% (n=9) indicated that

they are tolerant and ready to support different representations of masculinity. It has to be pointed out that university students might be more open-minded and tolerant for diversity:

a)'[…] after high school and my undergraduate studies I feel that my perceptions of masculinity are certainly more nuanced and allow for a great deal more understanding of those who do, and do not, feel the need to identify in some way.' [Scottish, 24-year-old, heterosexual]

b) 'As I come from a small, traditional town with an onus on gender stereotypes I felt as though my sexuality was oppressed before I went to University. [British, 20-year-old, homosexual]

It appears that in the University context, expressions of masculinity are not limited to traditional male behaviours. Students establish friendships with men from different backgrounds, with diverse life narratives and sexual orientations. Consequently, they gain greater understanding of gender and masculinity. Nevertheless, 22.58% (n=7) of respondents consume stereotypical social norms and associate homosexuality with effeminate behaviours. In other words, gay men and their attitudes are seen in contrast to heterosexual gender roles:

a) 'I think that people tend to draw a lot of attention to me being masculine – as though it not socially normal or acceptable for gay people to act like men.' [Scottish, 27-year-old, homosexual]

b) 'I identify as much with females as I do with males, however I am a completely heterosexual man – this is something which is often not understood, I think, because some people see "identifying with females" as synonymous as "homosexual" and vice versa.' [Scottish, 19-year-old, heterosexual]

Many women adopt behaviours that are socially described as masculine. As well, as many men expose attitudes that are socially regarded as feminine (Bradley, 2007). However, some heterosexual men do not want to acknowledge their feminine side, as they do not want to be mistakenly taken for a gay. Paradoxically, homosexual men might be pressurised that their behaviours are too masculine. It appears that cultural pressure might push men towards consumption of an 'appropriate' gender identity. Moreover, some researchers indicate (Harris, 1995; Connell; 2002, Messner, 1998) that straight men, because of hegemonic social norms might, become frightened by gay men:

a) 'On the whole heterosexual men are Ok with homosexual man. However, when homosexual men exhibit openly, very extrovertly homosexual behaviour (big example, two homosexual men kissing in front of them.) It can make them feel incredibly awkward.' [British, 19-year-old, heterosexual]

b) '[…] I don't think same sex couples should adopt simply because the child will have such a confusing upbringing. Im not homophobic but children learn

relationships from their parents it must have effects, single parent children are proven to be less adjusted and have higher incidents of criminal and metal health problems.' [British, 20-year-old, heterosexual]

Gay men by public expression of intimate feelings to other men question the notion of traditional gender roles and expose the limitations of hegemonic masculinity (Nardi, 2010). As the quotes above reveal, heterosexuality is still unchallenged and omnipresent sexual practice describes it in terms of 'natural' and 'normal'. However, same-sex relationships become to some degree stigmatised and seen by 6.46% (n=2) of respondents, through the prism of abnormality. These participants employed the consumption of stereotypical views on sexual orientation; therefore, they are not able to move beyond a hegemonic matrix. Nevertheless, the final theme in the area of differences between Social and Individual Self is the concept of sport.

10.6.4 Sport

Many researchers (Connell, 1995; Messner, 1992; Anderson, 2002) described sport as an arena for reproduction of hegemonic masculinity. Being more specific, through sport, young boys are trained how to be masculine, strong or competitive and persuaded to stay away from qualities such as physical weakness or delicacy that are traditionally associated with femininity or homosexuality. However, in the context of Social Self participants did not present own gender identities through the notion of sport. The findings suggested that participants preferred discussing sports events rather than being involved in sport activities. However, questionnaires illuminated that for 32.25% (n=10) of respondents sport serves as an indicator of own manhood:

a) 'I love camping, being outdoors, pushing myself to a new limit. I find that a masculine experience. I'm into rock-climbing and when I get to the top of a mountain I feel pretty masculine then. […]' [British, 30-year-old, heterosexual]

b) 'Completing a race (running) always feels like a traditionally masculine feat. I enjoy feeling the thrill of completing a physical challenge.' [British, 22-year-old, heterosexual]

c) '[…] recently, […] I've got interested in losing weight and so am getting into different sports—yoga and swimming (before I had played football but injuries stopped that)—because I had put on weight over my twenties but I feel healthier now being leaner. I'm not interested in massive biceps or that though […]' [Scottish, 30-year-old, heterosexual]

The quotes above indicate that for these respondents sport is not a form of competitiveness or an attempt to establish their own dominance over others. Participants, by pushing the

limits of physical abilities reflect their desire to live on the cutting age. Sport is also seen through the prism of staying healthy and in shape. It appears that participants attempt to eliminate competitive tensions and challenge dominant concepts of hegemonic masculinity associated with sport. Possibly, those who are more reflective about gendered relationships might uphold a masculine identity by consuming more individualistic and co-operative sports.

10.7 Respondents' perspectives on the concept of masculinity

Participants' trajectories exposed that men from this sampling understand their gender identity through different perspectives that might overlap with a wide variety of concepts. The discussion in previous chapters indicates that men build their manhood on concepts provided by social norms, a subjective sense of self, media messages, peers, parents and the university environment. These diverse sources offer different conceptions of the self that might contradict or overlap each other to different degrees. Nevertheless, 35.48% of respondents indicated that they do not construct their self-understanding through the prism of masculinity:

a) *'I do not think of myself as masculine to a large extent, and I see no need to do so!'* [German, 24-year-old, heterosexual]

b) *'[…] more recently I've been thinking that masculinity is a linguistic sign which is related most commonly (in my life) not to gender or sex, but to being happy and fulfilled. […] This realisation has changed my perspective a lot as I see masculinity (in my own experience of it) as a positive state which often has nothing to do with masculinity.'* [British, 30-year-old, heterosexual]

c) *'I don't attempt to be masculine, just myself.'* [British, 28-year-old, heterosexual]

d) *'The most "masculine" thing to do is to be yourself, and like things (or not) on your own terms.'* [British, 22-year-old, heterosexual]

The above accounts can indicate that Western society might be moving towards a deconstruction of ideology of gender. On the other hand, sometimes it might be difficult and confusing to draw boundaries between masculinity and person-hood. These quotes above highlight that for some participants masculinity is a matter of self-conception and self-estimation that does not necessarily fit into aspects such as 'appropriate' physical appearance, behaviours or interests. Respondents define masculinity in the context of inner harmony and contentment with themselves.

One of the participants, when asked if he wish to make any additional comments about the nature of contemporary masculinity stated:

> *'I don't believe that in the 21st century there is any need for such a concept. Gender differences (other than in physical terms of course) are not as significant as have been made out, and in this day and age we should be moving past such primitive notions towards a more equalitarian society.'* [British, 22-year-old, heterosexual]

Nowadays, people live in a world of greater gender equality than ever before. However, it has to be kept in mind that in different parts of the world, this gender awareness is at different developmental stages. For example, in many Third World countries, women are vulnerable to different forms of physical violence, trafficking, rape and murder; they are forced to engage in under-age marriages and have less access to education than men (Hudson, 2012). Even in the context of Western countries, one might argue that gender equality is to some degree illusionary. Despite women's increased presence in employment, education or politics, men continue to dominate the world's political parties, media, companies and corporations (see Chapter 2). People might be also under the impression of existing solidarity and equality among men. However, it is clear that race, class, economic and intellectual capital, create relations of power and subordination within masculine groups. Wealthy upper or middle-class white men are seen through the prism of hegemonic and dominant masculinity, while working-class men of colour are more often marginalised and socially excluded (Connell, 1995; Whitehead, 2002; Seidler, 2007). Consequently, one could argue that some respondents through their individual narratives reproduce to some extent 'false consciousness' and the illusion of an egalitarian world. Nevertheless, in order to recognise social hierarchies, gender inequalities and stereotyping there is a need to think in both individual and global terms. The concept of gender (masculinity and femininity) is crucial for understanding social differences in the context of European and American culture as well as Third World countries where gender awareness is still very low. Individual self-reflection, academic engagement in theories of gender equality and social activism might transform the facets of unequal *status quo*.

10.8 Conclusions

This part of the study presents the contradictory nature of male standards and attitudes towards the notion of masculinity. Findings suggest that masculinity is a complex and multi-layered concept; therefore, it is difficult to define clear messages related to manhood as participants consume a wide range of attitudes and behaviours depending upon their life narratives.

Initially, the chapter discussed gender identity in relation to social standards. Respondents' perspectives on social norms indicate that they are well aware of stereotypical social frameworks that define masculine and non-masculine behaviours. 61.29% of participants highlighted that in order to maintain their manhood they consciously consume behaviours and attitudes that are stereotypically regarded as masculine. In doing so they sustain a hegemonic notion of masculinity whether it is part of their identity or not. Moreover, a majority of respondents (77.42%) recognised problematic representations of masculinity that circulate within contemporary culture. Among behaviours and attitudes that concern participants, one could observe violent male behaviours (25% out of 24 participants), sexism and homophobia (16.66% out of 24), unattainable media messages of physical attractiveness (58.33% out of 24) or need to uphold traditional attributes of manhood such as lack of emotionality (58.33% out of 24). Thus, respondents recognise destructive social messages that might have a negative impact on the formation of gender identities; therefore they are also able to make informed consumption choices and take responsibility for the development and negotiation of manhood.

However, participants when asked if there is a need for reconstruction of current images of masculinity, they provided clashing perspectives. 32.26% of all respondents have traditional and conservative attitudes towards life and believe that traditional gender roles should not have been shifted. Among those who do not see the need to reconstruct a contemporary notion of masculinity, there are also respondents (23.07% out of 13) for whom the concept of patriarchy seems to be outdated, as they believe that gender equality has been already achieved. There are also pro-feminist participants (35.49% out of 16) who call for the revision of traditional traits of manhood. This consumption of diverse theoretical standpoints indicates that respondents take individual and reflective decisions about gender norms. They symbolically consume beliefs that are in line with their self-creation project.

Another part of the chapter captured the concept of masculinity in relation to respondents' personal experiences. The findings suggest that participants gender identities and certain perspectives on private and public life are influenced by their closest environment such as family (73.33% out of 31 participants) and friends (40.00% out of 31). Moreover, 25.80% of respondents claim that mass media might construct gender identities especially in relation to physical appearance and choice of lifestyles. These various sources of information about masculinity may reinforce traditional gender roles or they might

challenge hegemonic norms and offer alternatives. Findings suggest that formation and understanding of gender identities is also a result of self-reflection process. 35.48% of all respondents indicated that they do not have a need for social approval and whether it is a public or private sphere of life, they follow their own reasoning. Put differently, participants claim to actively narrate and modify their own biographies and react intelligently to external influences. They deliberately reject consumption of hegemonic behaviours and attitudes that are in opposition to their inner self and their sense of happiness.

Goffman (1959) suggested that people in a public context might shape and perform their behaviours in order to be seen through the prism of harmony with social expectations. On the other hand, in a private area of life people are free to express themselves. Following this line of reasoning, the analysis of questionnaires captured similarities and differences between participants' Social Self and Individual Self. Findings of this study indicate that in both contexts participants highlighted their individuality and need to find personal happiness (35.48% of all respondents in the context of Individual Self). Participants have a positive attitude towards life; they are open to new friendships, experiences and opportunities. Moreover, they attempt to construct their Social Self and Individual Self on warm relations with others where good sense of humour (25.80% of 31 respondents in the context of Individual Self) and drinking alcohol (19.35% of 31 respondents in the context of Individual Self) seem to be crucial elements of socialising. Similarly, in both public and private domains, fathers were not always seen in a positive manner (6.45% of all respondents in the context of the Individual Self). Some respondents pointed out that they build their own manhood in contrast to their fathers' personality. Finally, as data indicates, both contexts highlighted that media have an influence upon participants' formation of gender identities (25.80% of all respondents in the context of Individual Self). Thus, in their Social and Individual Selves, participants consume messages that are socially innocent and could not be defined through the prism of immorality.

Nevertheless, there are also certain differences between respondents' Social Self and Individual Self. Being more specific, there are aspects of life that are silenced in the social context of Facebook. First, the theme of comparing with others was revealed only through participants' Individual Self where 70.96% of all respondents declared to make comparisons on grounds of physical appearance and intelligence. At the same time, in the context of Social Self, participants highlighted only the need for establishing meaningful relationships with others. Similarly, a desire of having a significant other is another

invisible message in participants' public narratives. However, through the questionnaires it became clear that for 12.90% of all respondents having a significant other is to some degree a confirmation of their own manhood. Moreover, in a public context of Facebook, participants avoided expressing feelings and emotions as it could be seen as non-masculine behaviour. Through their individual narratives, 22.58% of all respondents indicated that inability to reflect on own feelings disconnects people from own emotionality. For these respondents, expression of emotions should be regarded in the realm of natural human behaviour. Similarly, the theme of homosexuality was visible and discussed in more detail, only in a private one-to-one research interaction. The analysis of questionnaires revealed that homosexual men might experience social pressure that makes them hide own sexual orientation. In the context of this study, 22.58% of participants associated homosexuality with effeminate behaviours. Nevertheless, at the same time they claimed to be tolerant and ready to support different representations of masculinity. The final silenced area of life relates to a typical masculine domain, namely sport. On Facebook accounts participants discussed sports events rather than relating to own involvement in sport activities. However, questionnaires illuminated that for 32.25% of all respondents participation in sport is a form of physical challenge and adventure. It appears that in the public context of Facebook, men from the sample did not want to depict their own images through the prism of competitiveness. Thus, consumption of particular behaviours and attitudes is context-specific where the consumption of sensitive/problematic social themes becomes invisible in the public domain. Nevertheless, in their Individual Self, respondents are more likely to consume narratives that might be unenthusiastically perceived by circles of Facebook friends. This study indicates that participants' gender identities are multiple and fluid. The complexity of modern life requires from them to make individual decisions about own life narratives. There are certain stereotypical frameworks of behaviour that they consume or reject to consume as a model for constructing personal biographies. Consequently, in order to achieve greater social equality, individuals should become tolerant of diversity and believe in multiple 'truths', producing greater integration and mutual understanding. However, consuming stereotypical masculine behaviours and attitudes that are not in line with inner self, upholds the hegemonic notion of masculinity.

Part Four

Summary of the Research

The final part of this study brings all the research strings together. Chapter 11 summarises the core findings in relation to the research ideological framework and methodological assumptions. It is also a critical consideration of limitations and implications of the study. It has to be pointed out that presented findings acknowledge the researcher's interpretation and understanding of the research. Nevertheless, this research is also open to interpretations of others. Finally, Chapter 12 ('Afterthoughts') is a subjective reflection on the research process as well as expression of personal trajectories that go beyond the research boundaries.

Chapter 11

Conclusions and Recommendations

11.1 Introduction

This research explored the notion of contemporary masculinity in the context of metaphorical consumption of gender ideologies. At the same time, another aim was to offer new grounds for researching gender identities that would capture subjective experiences of masculinity. Consequently, this academic investigation contributed to the research on gender in multi-layered manner.

First, it has to be pointed out that currently research on gender relies heavily on studying *representations* of masculinity and femininity in the context of literature, printed media, broadcast media or other visual forms such as paintings, photography or advertisement (Beynon, 2002). This investigation did not look at representations *per se* but sought to examine which aspects of hegemonic masculinity were consumed to be reproduced (or otherwise) in the wider social context. It is important to understand that through this symbolic consumption of particular gender meanings, people maintain a continuous process of self-recreation. Moreover, this process of understanding individual masculinities contributed to challenging hegemonic facets of gender and to obtaining greater perspectives on masculinity.

Second, this study identified new and innovative directions in researching subjective experiences of masculinity. The fieldwork of this project was entirely located on the Facebook social-networking platform. In the context of this research, Facebook provided an opportunity for obtaining personal accounts in the light of contemporary life. Facebook e-mail communication developed an atmosphere of trust and facilitated openness of research relations. Similarly, the analysis of Facebook Walls, profile pictures and cultural information contributed to generating meaningful data that fulfilled the demands of academic research and contributed to the development of techniques and skills that explore gender issues. Finally, this research might be a stimulus for teachers, academics and individuals to unlearn stereotypical thinking and to grasp an alternative understanding of masculinities in order to eliminate gender-based inequalities. Consequently, another outcome of this research indicated in the final part of this chapter, relates to social strategies that can be developed in order to reduce problematic issues of gender.

11.2 Findings in relation to the research ideological framework

The intention of this part is to present research ideological findings in a form of summary. Findings that emerged from the analysis of Facebook profiles and questionnaires provide a basis for subsequent discussion which are organised around themes crucial for the study of gender, masculine identity and consumption.

1. In a social context, gender identity is not hegemonic but multiple.

This study indicates that masculinity cannot be defined through the concept of hegemony because the richness of human life cannot be reduced to specific traits. Consequently, Connell's (2002) perspectives about the multiplicity of masculinities are relevant to the context of the current study where participants' life narratives revealed a kaleidoscopic mixture of behaviours and attitudes. In other words, this research created an interesting picture of multiple masculinities. Gender identities were found to be complex and multiple throughout the every chapter of analysis (Chapters 7-10). The evidence in Chapter 7 highlighted that participants consume behaviours that provide a sense of meaningfulness in particular moment of their life. Thus, the array of behaviours and roles adopted by participants in the context of Facebook Walls was diversified. In Chapter 7, participants had various attitudes towards emotionality, where some of them freely revealed a 'feminine side' of own gender identity by making emotional comments (3.87% of postings). Similarly, some men in this study challenged a hegemonic form of masculinity by asking for help (0.46% of postings), revealing their own fears (1.70% of postings) or discussing housework duties (1.03% of postings). Their manhood was highlighted by distinctiveness from dominant social norms. The number of postings that highlights participants' distinctiveness from dominant social norms is very low. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that there are men who openly consume non-traditional facets of manhood.

Individualistic approaches to reality were also found in Chapter 8 where participants through their Visual Self characterised themselves through various, often contradictory messages about masculinity (e.g. violent versus tender, indifferent versus carrying, immature versus sensible). This juxtaposition of images occurred within and across different Facebook profiles. Findings in Chapter 9 suggest that participants attempted to sustain a sense of individuality also in their consumption choices. For example, in their Cultural Self, 73 participants made in total 1,201 music entries where 719 artists/bands were mentioned only once. Similarly, in the case of favourite movies, 66 participants made

in total 649 entries where 344 (53%) titles were mentioned only once. It indicates that men in this study are not shaped by the sameness of cultural preferences. Moreover, in questionnaires (Chapter 10) participants themselves indicated that in different cultures there might be diverse stereotypical traits that are not consistent with Western patterns. However, diversity is not limited only to multicultural societies. As this study indicates, there is also a differentiation within a given setting, university or workplace where construction of masculinity is not universal and might depend upon upbringing, age, sexual orientation or religious beliefs (Connell, 2000). This was particularly apparent in Chapter 10 where older men who participated in this study expressed greater understanding of their own identities. They were able to critically reflect and capture changing perspectives on masculinity in the context of individual lives. Similarly, Chapter 8 highlighted the interplay between gender and ethnicity. Through visual representations Southern Asian participants attempted to uphold a serious self-image which is in line with Asian social norms and expectations. At the same time participants from Western countries conveyed unsophisticated and cheerful images. These different methods of self-presentation seem to be underpinned by consumption of distinctive social norms and hegemonic messages. In short, this study implicates that there is no one specific gender identity, but multiple identities that cannot be clearly defined.

Nevertheless, it is not to say that there are no common patterns of behaviour. There are some tendencies and standard practices through which participants attempt to reflect their gender identities. In this study, participants throughout all chapters of analysis claim their student identities and display themselves as being well-read and intelligent. They want to be seen as citizens of the world rather than narrow-minded individuals. In Chapters 7, 8 and 9 participants valued social connectedness and sense of humour. At the same time, throughout these chapters, there were certain activities through which participants collectively did not want to depict their gender identities such as materialistic purchases or gendered (sexist) humour that reinforces xenophobic perspectives. Participants avoided consuming interests that bear negative social connotations. They consciously associated themselves with the collective identity that is full of respect for diversity and rejects perspectives that might be harmful for others.

2. On individual levels, gender identity is not coherent but fragmented.

This research shows that Giddens' (1991) concept of 'self creation project' is applicable to participants' lives. In this study, men appear to be reflective individuals who make informed choices about their beliefs, education, relationships or appearance. They are aware of their own complex identities as well as freedom of choice. Consequently, they construct their lifestyles in a self-imposed manner. As this research indicates, within a single person, there are often ideological contradictions where hegemonic perspectives in a particular area of life might overlap with behaviours that are more androgynous. Similarly, individual preferences such as taste in music or film are fragmented and often exclude each other. These multi-faced identities could be explained through the context of the complexity of everyday life and a multiplicity of choices that invite people to test different possibilities in order to underpin individualistic sense of self.

In this study, the fluidity of identities pursued by participants is detected in Chapter 8. Participants through visual images attempted to consume multiple gender identities and gender messages. They do not strive to uphold continuity or coherence of self-representation but test different identity models and canons of physical appearance. Similarly, this sense of fragmented, but reflective self is displayed through particular patterns of consumption. Media, through the production of multiple messages, invites people to experiment with their freedom of choice. Consequently, as Chapter 9 indicates, the same person might listen to classical music, metal and pop music where those different music genres, that seem to mutually exclude each other, construct an individual experience. In their consumption choices, participants attempt to sustain an individualistic sense of self. It is clearly visible in any cultural preferences they make.

Paradoxically, as this study indicates, challenging the hegemonic norms of masculinity (or behaviours) might contribute to greater democratisation of social norms. Nihilistic approaches to social reality normalise to some extent concepts and behaviours that once used to be socially unacceptable (e.g. same-sex marriages). At the same time, Giddens (1991) highlighted that some individuals might attempt to maintain coherence (routine) of everyday life and their own identities in order to cope with dichotomous meanings and conflicting concepts. Similarly, in this study, it is visible in Chapter 10 that some participants adopted in questionnaires unambiguous conservative or pro-feminist attitudes. Nevertheless, participants in the same chapter also reflected their multi-faceted identities in relation to other aspects of masculinity. For example, a British 31-year-old, homosexual participant for many years has been building his identity in contrast with own feelings in order to satisfy the surrounding environment. Thus, being engaged with satisfying

superficial codes of social practice he developed the sense of shifting and fragmented identities.

3. There is a complex network of relationships between individual understanding of gender identity and social practices.

The findings of this research show that Goffman's (1959) theories on 'social performance' were not compatible with identities of some participants. Being more specific, Goffman (1959) suggested that in a social context, people shape their behaviours to give appreciation of well-established social models. This dissonance could be explained through the fact that in questionnaires, 35.48% out of 30 respondents highlighted their individualistic approaches to life. These participants indicated that they do not have a need for conventional approval but an individualistic desire for being happy. Moreover, in Chapter 10, participants also revealed that they are under the influence of social environments such as family (73.33 % out of 30 respondents) or peer groups (40.00% out of 30 respondents) that have a diverse impact on formation of their gender identities. Certain differences observed in Chapter 10, between Social Self and Individual Self might indicate that participants either silence or expose certain aspects of behaviour in order to maintain shared framework of practice (what is akin to Goffman's theory or 'social performance'). For example, in a private context of research interaction participants revealed that they compare physical appearance or intelligence with other men (68.18% out of 22 respondents). Similarly, for 12.90% out of 31 participants, the concept of having a girlfriend appeared to be an indicator of a positive or negative self-characteristic. A desire to have a significant other was expressed in participants' private accounts but it was not visible in their Facebook profiles. Such dissonance indicates that participants attempt to accommodate cultural norms and avoid behaviours that are socially regarded as 'non-masculine'. However, social expectations and participants perspectives were sometimes in tension. This was particularly apparent in Chapter 7 where participants publicly made non-conventional choices and freely expressed things they are afraid of (1.70% of postings out of 646) or publicly stated that they are broke (1.08% postings out of 646). Thus, this study indicates that participants' sense of self is tied up with social environment but at the same time participants themselves are actively involved in negotiation of own gender identities.

4. Mass media influence (to some degree) the construction of gender identities.

This research demonstrates that apart from family, peer groups or school environment, mass media also influence the process of learning particular gender roles. As Baudrillard (1983) indicated, human perceptions are exposed to extreme and unreal experiences created by mass media that guide human behaviour, reasoning and set the lines of normality. Similarly, in the context of this study participants appeared to construct their individual biographies in relation to media messages (for example in the case of visual self representation). Consequently, for some men, differences between authenticity and appearance collapsed (Baudrillard, 1983). Moreover, Chapter 7, being up-to-date with current media information (both political and cultural) was an important indicator of participants' identity. In Chapter 8, it was revealed that participants' self merged to some degree with media stories. For those participants who posted as their profile picture an image of a famous person, lives of celebrities provided a frame for constructing an individual biography. Similarly, Chapter 9 highlighted that gender identities are constructed through the consumption of media patterns because, for example, participants' interests were closely linked with commercially successful music or films. Finally, in Chapter 10, among those participants who provided information about concerning representations of masculinity, 58.33% reflected on negative media messages that are linked with violent images of men as well as with male physical appearance. Inability to reflect critically on presented media codes might lead to experiences of dissatisfaction with their own masculine identity.

5. Both, consumption as well as the resistance to consume particular hegemonic messages symbolically communicate vital meanings of the self.

The results of this research are relevant to another of Baudrillard's (1981) theory of symbolic consumption. For Baudrillard the term 'consumption' relates to cultural values and beliefs that usually express something socially. Consequently, buying particular commodities or choosing to support particular political party might signify specific meanings to the consumer himself and to others who share a similar understanding of these symbols. In this study, participants also constructed and maintained the sense of their own gender identities through the consumption of symbolic meanings. They articulated a sense of own identity through their Wall narratives, selection of particular profile pictures and the choice of cultural information they decided to reveal on Facebook profiles.

This research examined what parts of hegemonic masculinity are consumed and reproduced (or otherwise) in the wider social context. Through the symbolic consumption

of particular gender meanings, participants maintained their self-creation project (Giddens, 1991) that fulfils (to some degree) a sense of personal understanding and at the same time complies with the collective expectations. Participants consumed meanings that become representations of their manhood and gender identities. Within this study, consumption was not understood in the economic context of satisfying material needs. Rather, it defined a symbolic process of assimilating specific concepts through which individuals express their gender identity. Consumption of gender had different dimensions and related to activities that participants chose, roles they adopted or beliefs they followed. At the same time, there were some undesirable concepts that bore negative connotations, either on personal or social grounds, which participants did not want to reproduce and attempted to avoid in the social context of Facebook. This is to say that also a rejection of particular meanings contributed to the construction of their gender identities. As discussed above in the context of multiple and fragmented identities, this study provided evidence that both the consumption and resistance to consume traits of hegemonic masculinity were valuable methods of constructing gender identities.

11.3 Findings in relation to the research process

The fieldwork of this project was entirely located within the online environment, contributing to the development of innovative research procedures. This section considers research findings in relation to methodological issues which shaped the process of data collection and data analysis.

1. Computer-mediated communication/research contributed to reducing organisational difficulties and obtaining valuable sets of data.

In the context of this research, CMC enabled to recruit and reach participants during time convenient for the researcher (the period of summer holidays). Similarly, CMC minimised time commitment required from participants. Volunteers could have logged and checked research Facebook account at any time suitable for them. It eliminated the problem of appointments and organising face-to-face meetings at mutually convenient times (Mann & Stewart, 2000). Moreover, the ability to overcome time and space barriers and the possibility to communicate asynchronously triggered reflexivity and the depth of the research process. In the case of questionnaires, participants themselves observed that, e-mail communication provided them with time for reflection. This is not to say that in any

research context, computer mediated communication could replace more traditional, face-to-face forms of data collection. The decision whether to exclude offline methods of data collection depends upon research focus, approach and the Internet environment that is being investigated (Orgad, 2005). In the context of this study, the theme of hegemonic masculinity was explored through the lens of symbolic consumption where computer-mediated research contributed to obtaining valuable sets of data. Analysis of Facebook Walls, profile photographs and cultural information that participants choose to provide about themselves allowed capturing ideas and topics that participants consume on a daily basis to sustain their gender identities. At the same time, the Facebook platform provided an opportunity for identifying areas in participants' self-presentation that remain silent, being only noticeable by their absence (Chandler, 1998). This resistance to consume certain social beliefs also communicated vital aspects of gender identity. Overall, the Facebook environment enhanced the possibility of investigating the notion of gender through an innovative perspective of consumption.

2. The researcher has to adopt a number of roles while navigating a computer-mediated study in order to facilitate meaningful online communication.

This study provided evidence that the Facebook setting encourages a friendly flow of communication and enhances mutual understanding between the researcher and participants. In the context of this study, the researcher adopted a role of a friend, a person who is willing to listen and learn from others. The researcher decided to fill out her research Facebook profile with personal information to give participants an idea about the researcher's personality and to reduce personal distance. Moreover, participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research and the associated procedures. They could also withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Despite all these attempts to create a trustworthy research setting, volunteers had to be continuously reassured about the sincerity of the research relationships and research ethical standards. As discussed in Chapter 6, in the initial stage of the research, volunteers had doubts about the character of the research and felt unsure about the possible risks to which they might be exposed.

As Chapter 6 indicates the researcher had to also ensure a continuous flow of communication with participants in order to avoid the problem of withdrawals. During the process of data collection that took place for over a month, the researcher had to attract participants' attention and increase their curiosity about the study. Participants were continuously informed about the number of people who joined or withdrew from the

project as well as any undertaken research decisions. Moreover, another role adopted by the researcher was that of an expert in her own field of study (Mann and Stewart, 2000). In the case of one-to-one e-mail communication some participants had to be explained theoretical assumptions of the project.

3. Participants require time for reflexivity and encouragement to provide meaningful responses.

In the case of this study, open-ended questionnaires invited the free flow of reflexivity by producing only a general framework for discussion. Volunteers themselves had to choose concepts through which they wished to express their experiences and understanding of own masculinity. Questionnaires were sent via Facebook e-mail and volunteers could have completed forms from home or any self-selected setting. They could have worked on their answers over time rather than filling it out hurriedly all at once. As participants indicated themselves, providing some space for reflection contributed to greater depth of provided responses. The quality of data depended upon richness of participants' comments where writing responses in own words might have been time-consuming and demanding task. Therefore, exploring complex issues of own gender identity required time for consideration.

Moreover, the Facebook environment, as a research setting ensured continuous co-operation. Participants were willing to support and maintain contact with the researcher, indicating that they provide any further explanation or clarification in terms of their questionnaire answers if necessary. Thus, in the context of this study, questionnaires did not impede an opportunity of communication between the researcher and participants (or *vice versa*). The ability to overcome time and space barriers triggered friendly relationships between the researcher and participants what could contribute to greater depth of responses.

4. Analysis of photographs/visual materials can be a significant component of research practice.

In this research, Facebook profile photographs were used to strengthen the analysis of participants' Narrative Self and Cultural Self. In the context of social networking websites photographs are important aspects of one's self-presentation. Therefore, one might argue

that by selecting photographs for sharing with a wider circle of friends, users symbolically choose messages they want to transmit to others. Consequently, in the context of this research Facebook profile pictures were treated as a research material *per se,* allowing thoughtful examination of men's gender codes. The analysis of pre-existing photographs captured activities and roles adopted by participants in their visual images and enriched the examination of their gender identities. However, the interpretation of images is not fixed or stable as diverse audiences can view a particular photography differently. It has to be borne in mind that the researcher is not able to capture the whole 'truth' about a particular photograph; rather one can present his/her own interpretation and point of view for others to be considered. Nevertheless, the analysis of photographs contributed to the objectives set by the research questions by enriching research findings presented in Narrative Self (Chapter 7) and Cultural Self (Chapter 9). Nowadays, technologies, text, images and people's experiences overlap each other creating a complex and multi-layered reality (Pink, 2005). Following this line of reasoning, in this research, participants' photographs became an important source of information about the notion of masculinity.

5. Computer-mediated research has to be compatible with well-established ethical standards.

Many netiquette suggestions can offer just an initial agenda of ethical standards because doing research through diverse Internet services and platforms requires setting up different ethical frameworks. Consequently, searching for rational solutions to ensure participant's rights remains the responsibility of the researcher (Mann and Stewart, 2000). In this study, ethical concerns centered around private and public content available on social-networking sites, anonymity and confidentiality of participant's personal information or signing electronic consent forms. All these issues were considered in line with well-established ethical standards. As indicated in Chapter 5, the research discussed was an open one where participants were fully informed about the purpose of the investigation and methodological procedures. They were assured that the researcher did not intend to be actively involved in their Facebook environment, for example, by leaving messages on their Walls or by writing comments under pictures. Moreover, participants were volunteers who knew about the research taking place and freely chose to participate in it. Within this study confidentiality and non-traceability of given information were ensured by changing participants names or Facebook pseudonyms in any research writings, reports or conference papers.

In the context of this research there was another ethical dilemma relating to researcher identity. Being more specific, participants had to interact with an online researcher, potentially causing a sense of insecurity and uncertainty. Therefore, the researcher decided to provide on her research Facebook profile personal information about favourite books, films or TV series as well as display the gallery of own pictures. This step was undertaken in order to ensure that participants had a sense of fair play because individuality of both the researcher and participants was mutually exposed. Nevertheless, as this study indicates, the ethical practices related to online research should be compatible with well-established academic standards as well as individualistic nature of undertaken online investigation.

11.4 Limitations

The limitations of this study were related to the sampling procedures. Being more specific, in this research participants were volunteers, males over 18 years of age and active users of Facebook Websites who communicate on their profiles mostly in English language. They were recruited via the University of Glasgow student WebMail. Consequently, this sampling was likely to select a particular type of individual; middle-class and well educated, excluding experiences of men from outside academia or men who opted out from having a Facebook profile. However, the inductive nature of this research demonstrated high validity where volunteer participation contributed to gaining greater honesty and sincerity of responses.

Moreover, findings of this research might apply only to some cultures and not to others. As Connell (2002) observed, men from different geographical locations and with different ethnic origins might construct separate understanding of gender. In this study, despite the participation of men from diverse cultural backgrounds, the overwhelming number of participants represented Western society. Consequently, this research is an interpretation of manhood in the context of Western culture. This is not to say that this study does not offer valuable insights into the studied phenomena of consuming hegemonic masculinity. There is depth of the research that is supported by the descriptive and detailed data analysis. Moreover, novelty and soundness of the research procedures applied to the framework of this study uncovered novel meanings of masculinity in the context of consumption.

11.5 Recommendations

Teaching processes have to create conditions for students to become autonomous thinkers. The educators' role is to help students to extend their critical awareness so they could recognise and challenge distorted ideologies of gender. Students should be exposed to the alternative materials such as literature or films that present new images of masculinity and femininity (Walkerdine, 1990). This practice is necessary to create a range of ideological conflicts and contradictions that often stay unrecognised. Materials provided during the classes ought to construct non-traditional versions of gender as well as explore individual sense of own gender identity. In this study, for some participants the concept of gender identity and masculinity was a new theme worthy of exploration. Men were encouraged to reflect on the notion of their own masculinity by providing answers to the open-ended questions included in the questionnaires. Similarly, students in the classroom can come to an understanding of gender relations through discussing and writing about their own experiences of masculinity and femininity.

As this study suggests people have to learn how to recognise and negotiate the hidden meanings of mass media, its history and marketing strategies (Taylor, 1993). Some participants were unable to reflect critically on presented media codes. This lack of media awareness lead them to experiences of dissatisfaction with their own appearance and identity. Consequently, the classroom environment has to provide a challenge to the existing *status quo* where conversations unmask any contradictions and allow the exploration of the ambiguities of everyday life (McKenna, 2003).

Moreover, an academic research might contribute to the process of social transformation and consciousness-raising (Hammersley, 2000). This research was an attempt to increase public awareness of gender issues by presenting men's different life narratives and the multiplicity of their realities. Gender stereotypes create frontiers between normal and atypical, acceptable and unacceptable as well as the production of a notion of appropriate and inappropriate social practices. However, this study mapped out the complexity and diversity of masculinities. Moreover, the concept of manhood is often socially unnoticed until men create problematic behaviours, commit crimes or act aggressively (Whitehead, 2002). However, this study aimed to circulate some positive models of masculinity that could contribute to the ideological shift in the public consciousnesses. Participants' perspectives and behaviours were depicted by tolerance, equality and respect. There is a possibility to continue the work on the current thesis and expand it through the linguistic

analysis of Facebook profiles or through obtaining female responses to the concept of masculinity. As, Beynon (2002) observed there is still a need to research masculinities in the context of individual experiences and perspectives in order to challenge hegemonic facets of gender.

It has to be pointed out that, in diverse parts of the world gender awareness is at different levels of progress. For example, in this research some participants revealed that for them the concept of gender identity was a new theme never explored before. Consequently, researchers ought to consider gender performances in different cultural settings because people have to understand masculinities and femininities both at the local and global levels. Such academic investigation could contribute to a greater understanding and transformation of unequal *status quo* in the context of gender and cultural relations.

This research raised reflections about what could be done on personal grounds to eliminate from social beliefs distorted portrayals of gender. In this study, most participants appeared to collectively avoid projecting their identities through the lens of oppression, exploitation or violence. Similarly, they avoided messages that objectify women. Through paying careful attention to cultural differences, they attempted to build cross-cultural dialogue and mutual understanding. For Giroux (1997), one needs to become 'homeless' in order to construct a new understanding of the world. This state of homelessness ought to be read in metaphorical terms where individuals, in order to respect the notion of difference, have to become intellectual border crossers. To overcome the situation of social injustice people have to be able to analyse independently the strengths and limitations of political, cultural, and social relations.

In this research, some participants indicated that for them the notion of masculinity is an outdated concept that is not relevant to the experiences of modern men. However, in order to recognise social hierarchies and stereotyping there is a need to think not only in individual but above all on global terms. Such an approach could help in understanding and negotiating heterogeneous facets of masculinity and femininity. Greater tolerance for diversity and an ability to detach own perspectives from traditional gender roles might transform human relations. Moreover, individualistic expression of own personality and acceptance of androgynous identities can challenge traditional gender roles and lead to greater democratisation of social expectations.

Chapter 12

Afterthoughts

12.1 Inspirations

This PhD study has grown out of my previous work on gender and femininity. Being more specific, my Masters dissertation focused upon an analysis of Jacqueline Wilson's novels in order to map out manners in which romance fiction constructs teenage gender identities. Portrayals of girls within sampled for the Masters research texts did not challenge the oppressive images of girlhood and promoted stereotypical views of femininity. However, a ceramic vase *'Growing Up As a Boy'*, by Grayson Perry that I came across in the Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow in 2009 (see picture 12.1) inspired me to explore gender issues in the context of masculinity. The following quotation is Grayson Perry's rationale that explains the concept of his pottery:

> *'I feel boys are often treated less sympathetically than girls and tend to be more perverse. The nursery scenes are also a comment on the policing of the boys' role. This pot replays some of the emotional traumas of childhood in a metaphorical way.'*
> *[Indication in the Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow]*

At first sight, the vase demonstrates a boys' childhood dreams, their earliest sexual desires and joyful memories. However, in the background one can observe less colourful experiences that reinforce stereotypical messages that are reflected by images such as a wire fence or an adult male figure, hanging lifelessly from the tree. Consequently, this ceramic vase to some extent contributed to the development of my perspectives on gender and made me think about men from my environment (a father, a brother, ex-boyfriends and male friends). I realised that aspects of masculinity are complex, dynamic and often contradictory.

Picture 12.1 *'Growing Up As a Boy'* by Grayson Perry; pictures taken in the Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow, 22nd March 2011

Initially, the topic of my thesis meant to relate to masculinity in the context of vocational education in Poland. Nowadays occupations provided by vocational institutions (for example, carpenter, plumber, bricklayer) are socially devalued. In Poland, the high school track tends to be higher valued and regarded as a social norm. Of course, young people are well aware of the quality of the school to which they are assigned and know what levels of achievement are expected of them (Van Houttee, 2005). Consequently, educational stratification and socially created educational prestige may establish and reinforce a distorted perception of self.

Nevertheless, these early interests evolved into a new project. The core idea of researching masculinity stayed the same. Only the context of the academic investigation was shifted towards the Facebook accounts. This idea of conducting research in the online environment came to my mind one day while walking through the University library. That day I realised that each student that I was passing by was logged on his or her Facebook profile.

12.2 Reflections on the process of doing PhD

Issues of gender encompass a rich set of knowledge. Consequently, my work had to draw on interdisciplinary resources of sociology, anthropology, social sciences, theatre, economics, education, philosophy or psychology. Initially, I was focused upon analysing theories related to my research interests in order to find a central driving force for my study. I have considered some new insights and answers related to the notion of reality, virtuality, gender and technology. Writing a review of literature to provide background for my own research was a demanding task. Summarising and interpreting the existing theories from various academic fields appeared to be a research project in its own right. Then, I have gone from that point to a contemplation and philosophical reflection about my own researcher identity. I became clearer about my research intentions and for that reason; I was able to plan my research journey with greater confidence.

Another objective was to develop the methodology chapter, hence apply for ethical approval and find people who were willing to participate in my study. It required time, determination, patience and knowledge. To conduct an academic investigation that is innovative in the field of gender studies was a challenging task. Being more specific, many contemporary studies could offer just initial suggestions. Researchers use diverse Internet platforms and have different conceptual focuses. Consequently, this study required setting up a new research agenda. Moreover, in this study, I had to deal with multiple types of data and use variety of techniques to analyse participants' personal narratives, pictures, cultural information and open-ended questionnaires. Consequently, each chapter from the third part of this thesis (The Analysis of Data: Representations of Masculinity in the Context of Social-Self and Individual-Self) is different in its character.

In the whole process of doing a PhD, there were periods of academic satisfaction and joy. There were also periods when I was overwhelmed by helplessness. However, I believe that

every week, month, and year that I have devoted for this PhD thesis made me a more skilled and experienced academic person and above all creative individual.

12.3 Future directions

After graduating, I am planning to work, in cooperation with my supervisors, on papers based on this PhD thesis. Moreover, I would like to develop further my academic identity and apply for post-doctoral and research positions. Of course, academic work in the field of gender studies would be also a valuable experience. However, in the current economic climate, a postgraduate degree might not bring a desired academic job or any material benefits. However, for me the purpose of education is above all to create flexible and creative minds and I believe that within the last four years I have managed to achieve this goal.

Thank you for reading

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Appendix A

Consent Form

Title of Project: The Consumption of Hegemonic Masculinity: Understanding Gender Patterns Through Computer-Mediated Communication.

Name of Researcher: Katarzyna Borkowska

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I agree that my Facebook profile can be analysed as a part of this research project.

4. I understand that the researcher will not post any comments on my Facebook profile or attempt to communicate with any of my Facebook friends, unless my Facebook friend is another participant of this research.

5. I agree that the content of the questionnaire I return can be analysed and then data used for the academic purposes.

6. I understand that I will be referred to only by pseudonym in any publications arising from the research.

7. Students from the College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences are reminded that normal requirements of professionalism in relation to the use of social networking sites apply.

8. I agree to take part in the above study.

.

Signature (if you agree to participate in this research please reply by typing your name below and press the button 'Reply')

Appendix B

Invitation Email to Participate In the Project

Dear All,

My name is Katarzyna and I am a second year PhD student. I am conducting a PhD research into facets of contemporary masculinity. The project focuses upon exploring ways in which men represent themselves in a social context of Facebook profiles but at the same time recognises ideological aspects that underpin men's personal understandings of manhood.

I am looking for:

a) males over 18 years of age;

b) active users of Facebook (who communicate on their profiles mostly in English language)

to help me out with my project by participating in it.

To find out more about the study please read a Plain Language Statement that is attached to this email and **visit my research Facebook profile Katarzyna Borkowska-Research at** http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100002571163861&sk=wall

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kind regards,

Katarzyna Borkowska

Appendix C

Plain Language Statement

1. Study title and Researcher Details

Project title: The Consumption of Hegemonic Masculinity: Understanding Gender

Patterns Through Computer-Mediated Communication.

Researcher: Katarzyna Borkowska (k.borkowska.1@research.gla.ac.uk)

Supervisors: Dr George Head and Dr Georgina Wardle

This project is undertaken towards a PhD degree at the University of Glasgow.

2. Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

3. What is the purpose of the study?

I believe that there is a need to start the process of reconstructing and re-defining of what we come to know as traditional manhood. Power, authority and aggression appear to be taken-for-granted, unquestionable and natural elements of male identity. However, it is important to recognise that there might be other perspectives and facets of masculinity. Thus, the main objective of this research is to examine the nature of contemporary manhood.

A person's conception of himself/herself is located in-between **'social-self'** and **'individual-self'**. Social-self is established according to public norms and standards, whereas individual-self relates to the personal understanding of own identity. This project will focus upon exploring ways in which men represent themselves in a social context of Facebook profiles but at the same time will recognise ideological aspects that underpin men's personal understandings of manhood.

4. Why have I been chosen?

Within this project participants have to be:

  a) males over 18 years of age;

b) active users of Facebook who communicate on their profile mostly in English language

An email with an invitation to participate in this study was forwarded to undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University of Glasgow. The University of Glasgow environment brings together a cross-cultural population with diverse social characteristics that provides an opportunity for analysing different perspectives on manhood. This research relies on volunteers who will respond to the invitation email. The project may extend beyond the University of Glasgow if volunteers' friends from outside the University happen to be interested in participating.

5. Do I have to take part?

Involvement in this study is voluntary. If you decide to take part, you can still withdraw from the project at any time, without giving the reason and without any consequences.

6. What will happen to me if I take part?

For the purposes of this study, a Facebook account will be set up in order to create appropriate conditions for thoughtful communication between the researcher and participants. Potential participants will be invited to familiarise themselves with the research Facebook profile. Initially its content will be located in the public domain and visible to anyone on the Internet. However, only those interested in participating in the project will be asked to send the researcher a 'friend request'.

All 'friend requests' will be accepted at the time when the desired number of people (100) report willingness to participate in the research. The research process will commence when all invitations will be accepted. However, beforehand the profile's privacy settings will be changed from 'everyone' to 'friends only' so that all information will be shared only between researcher and participants excluding a wider audience. Additionally, participants' names will be visible only to the researcher.

Before the observation of your Facebook profile begins, you will be sent via Facebook email a consent form. You will be asked to read it, sign it and to send it back to me with an electronic signature.

In the first phase, the researcher will become a part of your social space in order to explore your daily activities, interests and self- presentation in the relatively public context of the Facebook platform. I can assure you that the researcher, under no circumstances, shall post

comments on your walls/pictures or attempt to communicate with your Facebook friends (unless it is another participant of this project). The researcher's observation of your profile will cover four main Facebook categories, namely: Wall, Info, Photos and number of Friends. The research Facebook account will exist until I graduate (hopefully in December 2012).

In the second stage of the project, you will be sent via Facebook email a questionnaire that will explore your individual perception of masculinity. The questionnaire will take up to 2 hours to complete. This part of the research marks a transition from public self-representation to individual experiences of being a man. You will be given one week to familiarise yourself with the questions, to provide answers and send them back. This period should be sufficient for you to explore and elaborate your ideas.

7. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All information collected from you during the course of this research will be kept confidential. Confidentiality and non-traceability of given information will be ensured by changing your name in any publications. In addition, I will take sensible steps to ensure that collected data and all records are kept in confidential manner. I will be the only person who has an access to the project's computer files and to the research Facebook profile. I will store all research data (e.g. printouts of questionnaires) in my locked desk at the University of Glasgow.

8. What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of this research will become a central part of my PhD thesis. Findings may also be presented as conference papers or published as journal articles. A written summary of results will be made available to all participants after submission of my thesis. I will keep data for up to 5 years after my graduation but you will still be anonymous and data will be treated confidentially.

9. Who has reviewed the study?

The Social Sciences Ethics Committee has reviewed this project.

10. Contact for Further Information

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Katarzyna Borkowska at

k.borkowska.1@research.gla.ac.uk

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project, you can contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Georgina Wardle at georgina.wardle@glasgow.ac.uk

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND CONSIDERATION

Appendix D

Questionnaire

INSTRUCTIONS

- This questionnaire will take up to two hours to complete. There are no right or wrong answers. Your honest and personal opinion is what counts.

- This questionnaire consists of open-ended questions and leaves space for a free response. Write answers in your own words and provide as many details as you wish.

- All questions are optional. This means that you can choose whether to answer a particular question or not.

- Your responses will be confidential.

- After completing the questionnaire, return it to me via Facebook email. If you cannot attach files through Facebook messages please return the questionnaire at k.borkowska.1@research.gla.ac.uk

If you have any other questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

PART 1- Background information

1. Age:

2. Nationality:

3. Religion:

4. Sexual orientation:

5. Marital status:

6. Profession:

PART 2- Masculinity and social norms

1. What are the social norms that define masculinity?

2. Please explain, to what extent men can achieve these expectations and constructions of masculinity?

3. Can you provide examples of men's behaviour that does not fit into this masculine image? You might discuss it in relation to a film or literature character, movie star, singer, sports person etc.

4. Are there any representations of masculinity, current in contemporary culture that worry you? Please specify and explain these concerns.

5. a) Do you feel that there is a need to reconstruct what we have come to know as traditional masculinity? Please, delete which is not applicable.

                    Yes   **No**

   b) **If yes**, what would be the characteristics of more diversified images of masculinity?

   c) **If no**, why the situation ought to stay the same?

PART 3- Connecting personal experience with gender identity

6. To what extent does your environment (e.g. parents, friends, colleagues or lecturers) reinforce traditional gender roles?

7. What effect has your environment had on formation of your own gender identity? Did it enhance or hinder your lifestyle?

8. To what extent do you try to act out a traditional masculine persona (e.g. pose as extremely brave, athletic, strong etc.)? When and why do you adapt such behaviour?

9. To what extent do you compare yourself with other men? Why? Which aspects do you compare?

10. Please write about a personal experience in which you felt masculine. What made this a distinctly masculine episode?

11. Would you classify some of your attitudes, behaviours or interests as traditionally 'non-masculine'? What are their characteristics? To what extent do you openly talk about this 'non-masculine side' with your friends?

12. Do you sometimes feel pressurised by not being masculine enough? Please, explain your answer.

13. Can you explore whether your perceptions of masculinity have changed over time? If so, why and how has this happened? What is different now? If not, what perspectives have stayed the same?

14. If you wish to make any other comments about the nature of contemporary masculinity and your own gender identity you may do so here.

Thank you for your time and help.

Appendix E

Request to Gain Access to Participants Within the Colleges of the University of Glasgow

Dear Prof [name]

I am conducting a PhD research into facets of contemporary masculinity and as an important part of this study, I hope to gather views and experiences of men who may or may not confront the hegemonic definition of manhood. The project focuses upon exploring ways in which men represent themselves in a social context of Facebook profiles but at the same time recognises ideological aspects that underpin men's personal understandings of manhood. Attached is a Plain Language Statement that explains the project to potential participants.

I would be very grateful if you would give your written permission to gain access to both undergraduate and postgraduate students in the College of [name].

Kind regards,
Katarzyna Borkowska

Appendix F

Permission to Use the Photographic Image

I .... (Full name)

.... (Full name)

and .... (Full name)

hereby give permission for the researcher Katarzyna Borkowska to use the image below for academic purposes.

I understand that it may be used in her PhD research and any presentations and publications arising from the research.

I understand that I **will not** be referred by my name or by pseudonym **in relation to this image** in her PhD research or any presentations or publications arising from the research.

Electronic Signature_____ Date_____

Electronic Signature_____ Date_____

Electronic Signature_____ Date_____

Appendix G

Questionnaire Respondents

QUESTIONNAIRE CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	Total number of questionnaire respondents (n=31)	
		Number of entries (n)	% of entries
AGE	19	5	16.13%
	20-29	18	58.06 %
	30-39	7	22.58%
	40-49	1	3.23%
	Left blank	0	0%
NATIONALITY	British	11	35.49%
	Scottish	10	32.25%
	American	1	3.23%
	Australian	1	3.23%
	Chinese	1	3.23%
	French	1	3.23%
	German	1	3.23%
	Indian	1	3.23%
	Pakistani	1	3.23%
	Scottish-Italian	1	3.23%
	Serbian-Jordanian	1	3.23%
	Turkish	1	3.23%
	Left blank	0	0%
RELIGION	Atheist	14	45.16%
	Catholic	4	12.90%
	Agnostic	2	6.45%
	Catholic/Agnostic	2	6.45%
	Islam	2	6.45%
	Protestant	2	6.45%
	Antitheist	1	3.23%
	Hindu	1	3.23%
	Pantheist	1	3.23%
	Taoist	1	3.23%
	Undecided	1	3.23%
	Left blank	0	0%
SEXUAL ORIENTATION	Heterosexual	27	87.10%
	Homosexual	4	12.90%
	Left blank	0	0%
MARITAL STATUS	Single	22	70.97%
	Unmarried	4	12.90%
	In a relationship	3	9.68%
	Married	1	3.23%
	Divorced	1	3.23%

	Left blank	0	0%
PROFESSION	Students	21	67.74%
	Student/bar supervisor	1	3.23%
	Student/officer cadet Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve	1	3.23%
	Oral surgeon	1	3.23%
	Project engineer	1	3.23%
	Teacher	1	3.23%
	Teacher/freelance writer	1	3.23%
	Teacher/ holiday club worker	1	3.23%
	Banker	1	3.23%
	Left blank	2	6.45%

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