

# Men and Sexual Violence Against Women

*Examining the relation between masculinities and  
sexually aggressive behavior*

Thesis MSc International Development Studies  
(Research Variant)

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## **Abstract**

Sexual violence and –harassment (SV and SH) against women form a widespread and pervasive problem in the Netherlands and beyond. Whereas the perpetrators are most predominantly male, public and academic attention is usually focused on women. This study will focus on SV and SH as a social and cultural issue of gender. Focusing on the role of men, this study will examine the relation between masculinities and the perpetration of SV and SH against women. This study uses Connell's gender order theory for conceptualizing masculinities, and apply this framework to the subject of SV and SH. Youth workers, sexuality educators and gender activists are interviewed about the young men they work with, and their own sexual life histories. The results demonstrate that men's mutual power struggles work in favor of upholding a gender hierarchy in which men dominate over women. In these struggles, masculinity traits of control, invulnerability and sexual conquests over women are encouraged, whereas soft non-normative traits are discouraged. SV and SH have been shown to be a way for men to conform to masculinity norms, as well as to stem from men's perceived entitlement to sex as a result of cultural dominance over women. They are also shown to be a result of lacking knowledge and communication about sex, as well as a lack of empathy. This study offered a theoretical contribution to Connell's theory by presenting the resisting male, which is a masculinity type that introduces a perspective of change in masculinities and sexual practices.

# TABLE OF CONTENT

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>                            | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK .....</b>   | <b>7</b>  |
| 2.1 GENERAL CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS .....             | 7         |
| 2.2 DUTCH PREVENTATIVE ACTIVISM.....                   | 7         |
| 2.3 LITERATURE .....                                   | 8         |
| 2.3.1 A men's issue .....                              | 8         |
| 2.3.2 Gender and Masculinities .....                   | 7         |
| 2.3.3 Masculinities: a gender order within .....       | 9         |
| 2.3.4 Sexual Violence and Masculinities .....          | 10        |
| 2.4 CONCLUSIONS ON THEORY .....                        | 12        |
| <b>3. METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN.....</b>                   | <b>14</b> |
| 3.1 GENERAL METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH .....              | 14        |
| 3.1.1 Use of theoretical framework .....               | 14        |
| 3.1.2 Research design.....                             | 14        |
| 3.2 RESEARCH POPULATION AND SAMPLING .....             | 15        |
| 3.3 DATA COLLECTION AND ELICITATION TECHNIQUES .....   | 16        |
| 3.4 DATA ANALYSIS .....                                | 16        |
| <b>4. FINDINGS .....</b>                               | <b>20</b> |
| 4.1 MASCULINITY TRAITS.....                            | 20        |
| 4.1.1 Not feminine, heterosexual.....                  | 20        |
| 4.1.2 Conforming to normative traits .....             | 21        |
| 4.1.3 Non-normative traits .....                       | 24        |
| 4.1.4 Conclusion.....                                  | 25        |
| 4.2 DYNAMICS BETWEEN MEN .....                         | 27        |
| 4.2.1 General practices and dynamics between men ..... | 27        |
| 4.2.2 Male types .....                                 | 29        |
| 4.2.3 Conclusion.....                                  | 38        |
| 4.3 NOTIONS OF THE SEXUAL SELF .....                   | 40        |
| 4.3.1 Norms of quantity.....                           | 40        |
| 4.3.2 How to have sex and with whom .....              | 42        |
| 4.3.3 Conclusion .....                                 | 45        |
| 4.4 NOTIONS AND BEHAVIOR TOWARDS WOMEN AND SEX .....   | 46        |
| 4.4.1 Unequal to men.....                              | 47        |
| 4.4.2 Victim blaming .....                             | 49        |
| 4.4.3 Women's chastity: femininities .....             | 51        |
| 4.4.4 Conclusion .....                                 | 54        |

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 4.5 IN SEARCH OF EMPATHY AND COMMUNICATION .....  | 55        |
| 4.5.1 <i>Knowledge</i> .....  | 55        |
| 4.5.2 <i>Empathy</i> .....  | 56        |
| 4.5.3 <i>Communication</i> .....  | 57        |
| 4.5.4 <i>Conclusion</i> .....   | 60        |
| <br>5. <b>DISCUSSION</b> .....  | <b>61</b> |
| 5.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CONNELL'S GENDER ORDER THEORY .....  | 61        |
| 5.1.1 <i>Understanding masculinities</i> .....  | 61        |
| 5.1.2 <i>A perspective on social transformation</i> .....   | 64        |
| 5.1.3 <i>Connell and understanding masculinities, sex and sexual violence</i> .....                                       | 65        |
| 5.2 LITERATURE: KATZ, FAHLBERG & PEPPER .....   | 66        |
| 5.2.1 <i>Katz's paradigm shift</i> .....  | 66        |
| 5.2.2 <i>Fahlberg &amp; Pepper's masculinity threat</i> .....   | 67        |
| <br>6. <b>CONCLUSION</b> .....  | <b>69</b> |
| 6.1 HOW IS MASCULINITY DEFINED? .....   | 69        |
| 6.2 HOW IS MASCULINITY CONSTRUCTED IN THE DYNAMICS BETWEEN MEN? .....   | 70        |
| 6.3 HOW DO MEN SEE THEMSELVES SEXUALLY? .....   | 70        |
| 6.4 HOW IS MASCULINITY EXPRESSED IN HOW MEN THINK ABOUT AND TREAT WOMEN, AND HOW THEY THINK ABOUT AND PRACTICE SEX? ..... | 71        |
| 6.5 IN SEARCH OF EMPATHY AND COMMUNICATION .....  | 71        |
| 6.6 WHAT IS THE RELATION BETWEEN MASCULINITIES AND SEXUALLY AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR? .....                                    | 72        |
| 6.7 THEORETICAL RELEVANCE .....   | 73        |
| 6.8 SOCIAL RELEVANCE .....  | 74        |
| 6.9 LIMITATIONS .....   | 74        |
| <br>7. <b>LITERATURE</b> .....  | <b>76</b> |

## 1. Introduction

In the Netherlands and beyond, sexual violence (SV) and sexual harassment (SH) form a widespread and pervasive problem. In the Netherlands, according to the FRA report (2014)<sup>1</sup>, 18% of women in the Netherlands have been sexually assaulted and according to the Whitepaper<sup>2</sup> report (2015) 40.3% of women have been victimized by sexually aggressive behavior, in contrast with 12.7% of men. This paper also revealed that 14% of Dutch women have been raped, while 1.7% of men have been raped in their lifetimes. Unsurprisingly, SV and SH have until recently mainly been framed as women's problems. However, perpetrators are most often male, whether the victim is male or female. Men perpetrate 97-99.4% of sexual violence against women and they perpetrate 58-60.4% of sexual violence against men (De Haas 2012). Nevertheless, reporters have typically found a wide variety of ways to divert attention away from men and gender, by raising questions about the victim, or by discussing perpetrators' individual characteristics, such as their ethnicity, or their psychological and personal background.<sup>3 4</sup> Furthermore, a slightly growing but limited amount of academic research has studied the link between masculinity and SV and SH.

The subject of SV and SH gained massive public attention, when on October 5, 2017 *The New York Times*<sup>5</sup> published an article with a multitude of sexual violence and –harassment allegations against Harvey Weinstein. A global social media campaign against SV and SH erupted within less than two weeks, marked by #metoo. This sparked a global momentum for mostly women and a few men to publicly speak out about their experiences with sexual assault, opening up the issue for discussion where it had been rather silent before. More than ever before in history, men were massively called out for their sexually aggressive behavior, followed by forced resignations and discharges of accused men in a wide range of industries<sup>6</sup>. The public debate around #metoo today is characterized by a struggle to come to terms with the renewed focus on perpetrators of SV and SH, as well as on how individuals, communities and institutions need to deal with the problem<sup>7 8</sup>. Considering the limited available academic resources to inform these discussions, we may well state that there is a gap of scientific studies dedicated to SV and SH from a perspective of men, who make up the largest share of perpetrators.

For that reason, this study argues that SV and SH are men's problems. Therefore, the focus will be on men and masculinities, and what their relation is to sexual violence and –harassment against women. This study investigates hereby the relation between masculinities and sexual violence and sexual

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.atria.nl/epublications/IAV\\_B00109721.pdf](https://www.atria.nl/epublications/IAV_B00109721.pdf) [Accessed: 08/01/2017]

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.movisie.nl/publicaties/whitepaper-seksuele-grensoverschrijding-seksueel-geweld> [Accessed 09/01/2017]

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2016/12/19/zestien-jaar-cel-geest-tegen-utrechtse-serieverkrachter-a1537368> [Accessed: 08/01/2017]

<sup>4</sup> <http://nieuws.tpo.nl/2016/12/07/weer-gruwelijke-verkrachtingen-duitsland-weer-wijst-dna-asielzoeker-als-dader-aan/> [Accessed: 08/01/2017]

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/05/us/harvey-weinstein-harassment-allegations.html> [Accessed: 31 January 2018]

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/11/10/us/men-accused-sexual-misconduct-weinstein.html> [Accessed: 31 January 2018]

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/05/us/the-metoo-moment-whats-next.html> [Accessed: 31 January 2018]

<sup>8</sup> <https://dewerelddraaitdoor.bnnvara.nl/media/378441> [Accessed: 31 January 2018]

harassment against women. Furthermore, as taken from Katz<sup>9</sup> and Connell (2005), SV and SH form an issue of power and privilege, and they are part of a culture that upholds male dominance over women, underpinned by mutual male power struggles. Adopting Connell's relational approach to gender, this study will investigate gender relations from a perspective of the dominant groups, and examine their relation to perpetrating SV and SH in intimate detail. In-depth interviews were conducted with social workers, sex educators and activists about the young men they work with on the one hand, and their own sexual life histories on the other. This way, this study aims to work out what propels young men to cross women's sexual boundaries and what cultural influences and beliefs about gender support the existence of this pervasive problem.

This study formulates the following general research question: What is the relation between masculinities and sexually aggressive behavior in life histories and stories about young men's sexual development by gender-transformational activists and social workers?

The following sub-research questions will build the bridge between masculinities on the one hand and SV and SH on the other, by digging into masculinities and their mutual relations, and how these are expressed in (sexual) beliefs and practices towards women:

1. How is masculinity defined?
2. How is masculinity constructed in the dynamics between men?
3. How do men see themselves sexually?
4. How is masculinity expressed in how men think about and treat women, and how they think about and practice sex?

In order to develop a theoretical and conceptual perspective, the following chapter will present a theoretical and conceptual framework, which takes Raewyn Connell's gender order theory as key to understanding gender, masculinities and the system of power and privilege in which they are embedded. Furthermore, this section will discuss Jackson Katz's plea for approaching violence against women as a men's issue and his explanation of how currently popular media shape masculinity, which is appropriated in peer culture, and how this encourages men to take on a 'tough guise'. Finally, it will use Fahlberg & Pepper's (2016) insights on the 'masculinity threat'. Its following chapter will discuss this study's methodological design, which also includes the sub-questions on which the data gathering and analysis is built. Subsequently, this study's empirical results and analysis are presented. In the discussion chapter, a critical assessment of the literature and theoretical framework according to these study's findings is presented, followed by the conclusion, which will answer the research questions and reflect upon this study's relevance and limitations.

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9

[http://www.ted.com/talks/jackson\\_katz\\_violence\\_against\\_women\\_it\\_s\\_a\\_men\\_s\\_issue/transcript?language=en#t-14353](http://www.ted.com/talks/jackson_katz_violence_against_women_it_s_a_men_s_issue/transcript?language=en#t-14353) [Accessed: 19/12/2016]

## 2. Theoretical and conceptual framework

This chapter will present the conceptual and theoretical framework, in order to offer acquaintance with the subject and the theoretical findings that lead the academic debate on masculinity and sexual violence and –harassment today. This study presents viewpoints from Katz, Connell, and Fahlberg & Pepper, as they specifically discuss the issue of sexual violence from a culture and gender perspective, while principally focusing on men and masculinities, rather than on women alone. Before introducing these theories, a brief introduction of sexual violence-related concepts and definitions will be presented, in order to clarify what this study refers to when it uses the terms. These include the Dutch legal and generally applied working definitions for rape, sexual assault and –harassment. This is followed by a brief introduction of Dutch organizations at work to eliminate sexual violence and –harassment from a gender perspective, and for which the respondents of this study work or volunteer.

### 2.1 General Concepts and Definitions

Sexual violence, according to Dutch law, consists of sexual assault and rape. This refers to penetration (rape) or other sexual practices (assault) whereby either violence, or the threat of violence has been used, or where a situation or condition has been taken advantage of, in which the victim was not able to refuse (for instance an unexpected attack or the use of substances).<sup>10</sup> Sexual harassment refers to verbal, non-verbal or physical behavior with a sexual nature or meaning and an intention or effect that harms the dignity of a person. This is especially the case when a threatening, hostile, insulting or humiliating situation is created. The term sexual harassment is typically used for employment situations, however it can be used in any situation that includes more than one person. An important criterion for considering an event to be assault or harassment is the relationship between the victim and perpetrator(s), as some milder forms of harassment or assault are only considered as such in an inequitable relationship, such as a relationship of dependence or a significant power- or age difference. In order to include all forms of sexual practices that cross a person's sexual boundary, various Dutch institutions and scholars prefer to use the term *seksuele grensoverschrijding*, which translates into: sexual boundary violations.

### 2.2 Dutch Preventative Activism

In the Netherlands, various organizations work on preventative projects to eliminate sexual boundary violations, by educating young men about gender stereotypes, positive and negative sexual behavior, sexual boundaries and consent. Organizations such as Rutgers<sup>11</sup>, Soa Aids Nederland<sup>12</sup>, Movisie<sup>13</sup>, Qpido<sup>14</sup>, Emancipator<sup>15</sup> and Sex Matters<sup>16</sup> develop and implement projects and programs for young men on schools and other institutions. These organizations offer sex- and gender awareness education with a holistic focus on the social and cultural factors that play a role in sexuality. In these educational programs, sexuality informers challenge traditional ideas and practices through exercises, videos and conversations.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.movisie.nl/publicaties/whitepaper-seksuele-grensoverschrijding-seksueel-geweld> [Accessed: 19/12/2016]

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.rutgers.nl/wat-wij-doen/programmas-en-projecten> [Accessed: 31 January 2018]

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.soaids.nl/nl> [Accessed: 31 January 2018]

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.movisie.nl/databank-effectieve-sociale-interventies?f\[0\]=im\\_taxonomy\\_vid\\_23%3A1894](https://www.movisie.nl/databank-effectieve-sociale-interventies?f[0]=im_taxonomy_vid_23%3A1894) [Accessed: 31 January 2018]

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.qpido.nl> [Accessed: 31 January 2018]

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.emancipator.nl> [Accessed: 31 January 2018]

<sup>16</sup> <http://sexmatters.nl> [Accessed: 31 January 2018]

## 2.3 Literature

### 2.3.1 Literature review: the field of masculinity and sexual violence

The majority of studies on sexual violence focus their research on women's victimhood, and have paid less attention to men's perpetration (reference). In addition, Men's victimhood with regard to sexual violence is an issue that has received even less attention. Indeed, sexual violence against men is a serious problem, that comes with specific masculinity-related issues surrounding their victimhood (reference). Yet, with regard to the relatively high rates of women's victimhood and men's perpetration, this study focuses on men's perpetration of sexual violence and –harassment against women, and what the scientific field has to offer on this issue.

Men's perpetration of sexual violence against women has evolved into a field of study in its own right, due to the contributing scholars from a diverse range of disciplines, who have studied the issue in a wide range of geographic contexts (Fahlberg & Pepper 2016: 674). Fahlberg & Pepper offer in their study 'Masculinity and Sexual Violence: Assessing the State of the Field' a comprehensive overview on how influential scholars and their findings contribute to the field of masculinity and sexual violence. This study will discuss several of these scholars, who importantly explored the link between constructions of masculinity and the perpetration of sexual violence. One of the first groundbreaking works on the issue of sexual violence was Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will*, which was one of the

Jackson Katz importantly and convincingly puts into words in *The Macho Paradox* (2006) and his famous Ted Talk why we need to look at men, and the mechanisms in society that pull our attention away from men. This will be discussed under 2.3.2.

Connell's relevance in the field with regard to masculinity:

Connell laid the groundwork for masculinity studies. She offers hereby a coherent and widely acknowledged framework for understanding masculinity, and her theory will therefore lay the ground of this study as well. Elaborated upon under 2.3.3 and 2.3.4.

Introduction of important scholars who linked masculinity to sexual violence. These will be elaborated upon under 2.3.5.

Finally a perspective will be offered on changing masculinities (DeKesedery et al 2000)

### 2.3.2 A men's issue

Sexual violence and sexual harassment are mostly perpetrated against women. Therefore, it is commonly taken to be a women's issue. However, since perpetrators of this type of violence are almost exclusively male, I would rather argue that it is a men's issue. Jackson Katz explains in his book *The Macho Paradox* (2006) the mechanism in society that works behind framing gender violence as a women's issue, and how this is part of the problem. His findings became particularly known to wider



audiences with his famous Ted talk “Violence against Women – It’s a Men’s Issue,”<sup>17</sup> in which he put his argument most concisely: When people hear the word “gender”, they tend to think it is synonymous with “women”. This also applies to race being synonymized with being black, or sexual orientation with being gay:

In each case, the dominant group doesn’t get paid attention to. ... As if white people don’t have some sort of racial identity ... as if heterosexual people don’t have a sexual orientation, as if men don’t have a gender. This is one of the ways that dominant systems maintain and reproduce themselves, which is to say the dominant group is rarely challenged to even think about its dominance. ... And this is amazing how this works in domestic and sexual violence, how men have been largely erased from so much of the conversation about a subject that is centrally about men.<sup>17</sup>

A tenacious consequence of this gendered mechanism of privilege is victim blaming, which refers to the blaming of a person whom something was done to, rather than the person who did it. This becomes evident in questions such as “What was she wearing?” or “Why is she still attracted to that guy?” Rather, Katz turns the questioning towards men and he asks a paradigm-shifting question: “What is going on with men?” Furthermore, it is important to note that perpetrators of sexual violence are often normal and everyday men (reference). Yet, media rather keep focusing on perpetrators’ individual pathology or deviance from normalcy, which, by ‘Maintaining this mirage of individual pathology, the media denies the social roots of violence against women and absolves the larger society of any obligation to end it’ (Carll 2003: 1603). If we stop looking at perpetrators as deviant others and see that they are a normal part of society, we can start looking at the ways in which society and its institutions are producing sexually abusive men. Fundamental to this way of thinking about sexual violence against women is that it is a gender issue and should therefore be examined with an emphasis on gender (Katz 2006).

This study will take two important findings from Katz. First, this study will discuss violence against women as a political issue of power and privilege and therefore focus its attention towards this system of power and the people this system privileges – men. Secondly, it will look beyond sexual violence and harassment perpetration on an individual level, and rather address it as a social and cultural problem. Therefore, specific attention is paid towards the culture that is producing abusive men, and this study includes peer cultures, the masculinities they produce and how these relate to violence and sexuality.

### 2.3.3 *Gender and Masculinities*

Since sexual violence against women is a gender issue, this section will conceptualize on gender, using Raewyn Connell’s gender order theory (Connell 2016). Secondly, the focus will be directed towards men and elaborate on the cultural production of masculinities. This will include a political account on gender and culture, as masculinity is explained as part of a system of dominance and control.

When we speak about gender, we tend to think of Judith Butler and her performativity theory (Butler 1988; 1993; 1999), as this theory has been widely influential in the field of gender studies, and made the distinction between biological sex and socially ascribed gender famous. However, in this study, Raewyn Connell’s relational theory (Connell 2005) is preferred, as Butler’s post-structuralist fixation on discursive forms of power ‘does not have much to say about economic processes,

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17

[http://www.ted.com/talks/jackson\\_katz\\_violence\\_against\\_women\\_it\\_s\\_a\\_men\\_s\\_issue/transcript?language=en#t-14353](http://www.ted.com/talks/jackson_katz_violence_against_women_it_s_a_men_s_issue/transcript?language=en#t-14353) [Accessed: 19/12/2016] [Ted talk video: transcript below video]

organizational life, material interests, or non-discursive forms of power' (Connell 2012: 1676-1677), nor is it able to offer a convincing account of the physical relationship that masculinity and femininity have with the body. According to Connell, if we wish to expand our understanding of gender and power to other realms of social life, it is more useful to shift towards a relational approach to theorizing gender. This relational gender order theory endorses Butler's performativity theory, to the extent that gender is not a biological evolutionary result from bodily differences. In fact, Connell argues that the accounts that sociobiologists offer of natural masculinity are entirely fictional, as the broad presupposed differences in character traits between men and women have been proved to be small compared to the differences within either sex, and smaller compared to the difference between men and women's social status (Connell 1995: 47).

Rather, relational theory states that gender *is* a relation. Gender is constituted as a social structure in patterned relations between women and men, as well as amongst women and amongst men. Relational theory hereby explores how the social practices in these relations are shaped by, address, and modify this structure (Connell 2012: 1677). In order to recognize gender as a social pattern, it should be seen as a product, as well as a producer of history. Indeed, while people tend to think of the biological as more real than the social, it is the social which defines us as human and 'no other species produces and lives in history, replacing organic evolution with radical new determinants of change' (ibid.: 81). Furthermore, while acknowledging the importance of Butler's use of the distinction between biological sex and socially constructed gender, Connell rather stresses that bodies and social processes are not opposed realms, but rather deeply enmeshed. Connell depicts this with the term 'body reflexive practice', which refers to the idea that bodies are both objects and agents of practice and that these practices form the structures within which bodies are appropriated and defined (Connell 1995: 61). Crucial to this process is that people and groups, who practice in relation to their shared and personal histories, do not act in isolation, but configure their actions in larger units. Considering that practice is socially structured in terms of gender, masculinity and femininity are configurations of this gender practice (ibid.: 72). This structuring of gender practice in the contemporary European/American gender order is hierarchical and characterized by the overall subordination of women and dominance of men (ibid.: 74).

#### 2.3.4 *Masculinities: a gender order within*

Beside this general male dominance and the masculinity that is constructed in relation to femininity, there is also a gender order within masculinity. Therefore, Connell argues for a focus upon relationships between men, which is not to suggest the existence of masculinities as fixed types of personalities, or perhaps even lifestyle choices within an individualist consumer society. Rather, gender order theory urges seeing masculinities as positions within a pattern of gender relations, which are always contestable. Gender configurations are furthermore made under compulsion, which is in line with Butler's 'punitive consequences', and can be experienced as bitter, as well as pleasurable by the gendered actor (ibid.: 76). Connell distinguishes between four masculinities within the current Western gender order.

The first is *hegemonic masculinity*, which is a term derived from Antonio Gramsci's hegemony – the social dynamic in which a group sustains a leading position in social life (ibid.: 77). Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as: 'the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.' Bearers of hegemonic masculinity may however not hold the greatest position of power, or vice versa: on the one hand, they may be exemplars such as a movie character or a film actor, on the other hand they may be a corporal business owner who is far from hegemonic in his

personal life. For instance, one of Connell's examples is a key figure in Sidney's gay scene. A bearer of hegemonic masculinity nevertheless needs to correspond in some way to a cultural ideal and hold some form of institutional power. This is marked by a successful claim to power, rather than active use of violence (although violence often supports or underpins authority). Connell furthermore notes: 'When conditions for the defense of patriarchy change, the bases for the dominance of a particular masculinity are eroded' (ibid.). Change hereby happens when a new group challenges the old practices and constructs a new hegemony.

The second form of masculinity exists in a relationship of subordination with the dominant form of masculinity in society as a whole, and is defined as *subordinate masculinity* (ibid.: 78). In European/American culture, this is most evident in the oppression of homosexual masculinities and the domination of heterosexual masculinities. This is expressed symbolically in the expulsion of gayness from heterosexual masculinity, such as for instance a man's fastidious passion for fashion or receptive anal pleasure – a range of things that are often easily assimilated to femininity (ibid.). Subordination is also materialized in homosexual men's daily lives, including street violence, as well as political, legal and corporal discrimination and exclusion. Other types of masculinities also fall prey to subordination, and are expelled from the circle of legitimacy with terms that also blur with femininity (ibid.: 79).

The third type of masculinity is *complicit masculinity*, which applies to the majority of men, who cannot live up to the standards of hegemonic masculinity, but who have a relationship of complicity with the hegemonic project (ibid.). These men enjoy the dividend paid from hegemonic masculinity, the benefits gained from the overall subordination of women. However tempting it may be to see these men as light versions of hegemonic masculinity, complicit masculinity is more carefully crafted than that: 'marriage, fatherhood and community life often involve extensive compromises with women rather than naked domination or an uncontested display of authority' (ibid.). They 'also respect their wives and mothers, are never violent towards women, do their accustomed share of the housework, bring home the family wage, and can easily convince themselves that feminists are bra-burning extremists' (ibid.: 80).

The fourth and final type of masculinity is *marginalized masculinity*. Unique to this type of masculinity is that, whereas the other masculinities exist within the gender order, marginalized masculinity comes into existence in the interplay with other social structures, such as race and class. In the context of white supremacy, hegemonic masculinity has been constructed among whites, and in relation to black masculinities. Examples of black masculinity are toughness, which is symbolized in black sportsmen, or ruthlessness in the fantasy of the black criminal and rapist. Right-wing politicians in the United States have exploited these masculinities, while hegemonic masculinity sustains the institutional oppression and physical terror against black men, resulting into mass incarceration, 'massive unemployment and urban poverty now powerfully [interacting] in the shaping of black masculinity' (ibid.). 'Marginalization is always relative to the authorization of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group' (ibid.: 80-81). Therefore, individual men from subordinate social groups may attain a status of hegemonic masculinity at the authorization of the dominant group, as for instance black athletes may be exemplars for hegemonic masculinity. This has no trickle-down effect however, as this individual man's fame and wealth does not increase the social authority of black men in general.

As mentioned above, the four masculinities described here are not fixed character types, but rather exist within a changing structure of relationships as configurations of practice, generated in particular situations. Knowledge of these masculinities is fundamental to understanding the relationship between masculinities and sexual violence, since the relationships between masculinities generate different manifestations and motivations of violence.

### 2.3.5 *Sexual Violence and Masculinities*

Discuss most important scholars and studies on the theme. Lay out their findings on the link between masculinity and sexual violence. Finish with a perspective on change (DeKesedery et al 2000).

In order to study the relation between masculinities and violence, a theorization of this link is in order, drawing further on Connell's work, followed by Jackson Katz (1999; 2013) and Fahlberg & Pepper (2016).

#### *Connell and sexual violence*

Connell states that violence supports the massive dispossession of social resources of women (1995: 83). Overwhelmingly, the dominant gender holds and uses the means of violence, while women are materially and culturally disarmed, as they are far less often the possessors of weapons, practitioners of combat techniques, and more often bearers of the patriarchal definition of femininity as fearful and weak. Connell distinguishes two patterns of violence that follow from this situation.

The first is that the privileged members of the group use violence to maintain their dominant position. 'Intimidation of women ranges across the spectrum of wolf-whistling in the street to office harassment, to rape and domestic assault, to murder by a woman's patriarchal 'owner', such as a separated husband' (ibid.). While most men do not attack or harass women; those who do, feel entirely justified by an ideology of supremacy.

Secondly, violence can become important in gender politics among men, such as the violent oppression of gay men, or marginalized masculinities' assertion of violence against other men in group struggles, the latter of which is 'continuous with the assertion of masculinity in sexual violence against women' (ibid.). Sexual violence in the context of marginalized masculinities carries an extra dimension of racial and ethnic masculinity tensions. As Philippe Bourgois (1995) explains in his work on crack-dealing Latinos in East Harlem, New York, the loss of normative masculine resources (political power, employment, wealth) results in their reassertion of masculinity through sexual violence against women.

More generally, sexual violence is part of a culture of difference, to which the defenders of gender injustice continuously appeal, and which involves the structuring of a masculine/feminine opposition (ibid.: 231). This is not the logical result of nature, but rather becomes social reality through body-reflexive practices, in which men and women experience social differences in their bodies (such as arousal, turn-ons or turn-offs and bodily tensions). Difference hereby implies intimate supremacy, on a cultural as well as an interpersonal level, and can be realized violently in body practices such as sexual violence or harassment (ibid.: 232).

#### *Jackson Katz and sexual violence*

Jackson Katz further theorizes the link between masculinity and sexual violence in his documentaries *Tough Guise* (1999) and *Tough Guise 2* (2013) and argues that American popular media reflect as well as create a cultural image of violent masculinity. This culture of violent masculinity teaches boys what it means to be a man. Katz stresses hereby that we need to shift our focus to violence as a *taught* behavior, rather than merely a *learned* behavior, as this allows us to find out who is responsible for teaching boys and men to be violent. Boys are taught to take on what Katz calls a "tough guise", which allows them to fit into a "man box", in which men are disallowed of any vulnerability or emotion except for anger. What also fits into this box is the readiness to use violence, disallowance to back down when one is disrespected and to be sexually aggressive with women. This tough guise is not merely taught by popular media; it is directly passed on to boys and men through peer groups, fathers, coaches and other men.

Sexual aggression is an important part of this culture of violent masculinity. In popular media, there is a narrative that says that being a man is about sexual conquest. This narrative tells boys and men that caring about girls and women is for “pussies” and “fags”. Women are hereby often turned into trophies; instruments to assert to gain the approval of other men. There is also a disturbing development going on in the porn industry, which has shifted from soft-core sexism towards “hard-core misogyny, anger, aggression, and sexualized brutality” (ibid.). In real life, this culture of misogyny has normalized rape to a level that in various male peer groups, rape has become just another way of bonding among the members of the group. Katz concludes:

The key here with all of this is that this isn’t just about deviant individuals. It’s about the much more disturbing possibility that our social norms about manhood are implicated as well. And it’s about how men too often turn to violence out of fear that they don’t measure up to our rigid cultural codes of manhood (ibid.).

#### *Fahlberg & Pepper and sexual violence*

The studies discussed so far tend to argue that sexual violence and harassment are both a way of gaining direct control over women, as well as a means of men to reassert power over other men. A question that remains, concerns the public/private nature of sexual assault. If it is used to reaffirm power over other men, how then do we explain sexual assault that happens in private, when no other men are around to witness the act? Fahlberg & Pepper (2016) explored the link between masculinity and sexual assault in various contexts and explain the phenomenon as the “masculinity threat” (ibid.: 676). This refers to the feelings of inadequacy and emasculation that men often experience in relation to body shame, social exclusion and masculine insecurity caused by rigid social norms of masculinity. Sexual aggression and –violence are often tactics for these men to reaffirm their sense of power, security and identity. This theory has more explanatory power in the private sphere, as it explains sexual violence as a bodily practice that a perpetrator uses in relation to his own masculinity.

Fahlberg & Pepper furthermore state that sexual violence and harassment are a result of compulsory heterosexuality, which requires the sexual conquest of women in order to reaffirm one’s own personal heterosexuality, as well as to avoid harassment and emasculation from other men (ibid.). This is accompanied by the patriarchal idea of entitlement that men hold over women’s bodies. Finally, power and control are key aspects of masculinity, a sense of which can be reclaimed through emasculation, humiliation and feminization of another subject. For a variety of reasons, and in a variety of settings, sexual violence and harassment may therefore reassert a sense of empowerment and masculinity, where there was a sense of powerlessness and emasculation experienced before. This may also apply in settings where sexual violence is often committed against men, for example in prisons or military settings. ‘In this framework, also women can appropriate dominant masculine attributes by committing acts of sexual violence, which contributes to the feminization of the victim’s ... identity’ (ibid.: 678).

#### *2.4 Conclusions on Theory*

Using Connell’s gender order theory, this study will focus on the dynamic social practices and power relations that are enacted and experienced between men in relation to sexuality and sexual violence and harassment. The four masculinities described above are hereby a useful tool in order to help understand the motivations and power dynamics that help create, maintain and contest normative structures of masculinity in personal interactions among men and between men and women. The research will draw upon the theoretical perspective that sexual violence and harassment exist in relation to masculinities, which are continuously contested in order to assure a position in the gender order. It is hereby essential

to study how a culture of violent masculinity is created, and which mechanisms in society are responsible for teaching boys and (young) men what it means to be a man.

### 3. Methodological Design

This chapter explains which research methods have been used for this study and how these are useful for answering the research questions. First, the general methodological approach is explained, after which the study's sample and recruitment methods are elaborated upon. This is followed by the data collection methodology. Finally, the data analysis methods are presented.

#### 3.1 General Methodological Approach

##### 3.1.1 Use of theoretical framework

Using Connell's relational gender order theory as its theoretical framework, this study will approach gender as something that is constituted in relations. Within these relations, practice is socially structured in terms of gender. One can think hereby of behaviors that are repeatedly assigned to a certain gender, which makes a behavior a behavioral trait of that gender. This makes the construction of masculinity, consisting of behavioral traits, a configuration of gendered practices. This study will therefore examine masculinity, by looking at social relations. Data will also be gathered to examine the role of practices in these social relations. This way, by putting social relations at the center of our scope, we can see how sexual practices, such as SV, are shaped by, and modify, relations. This way, this study will find out how masculinities are constructed. Considering that masculinities are constituted in relations between people and mostly concern men, this study will approach men in order to learn about their constructions of masculinity, as well as the relations they observe, in which these constructions come about.

##### 3.1.2 Research design

This study will employ a qualitative research design, as qualitative methods have the characteristics that will best fit the exploratory research objectives. First, qualitative research presents us with 'an inductive view of the relationship between theory and research, whereby the former is generated out of the latter' (Bryman 2012: 380). This feature partly holds true for this study's objectives, as it aims to gain new understandings from empirical data, rather than test existing theories and concepts. Yet, as a research approach requires some sort of theoretical basis that precedes the formulation of the research questions, this study employs an iterative design, which means that the data collection and generation of theory proceed alongside one another (ibid.: 387).

Secondly, qualitative methods follow an interpretative epistemological position, which means that the researcher will aim to understand the social world by studying the interpretations of this world by its participants (ibid.: 380). This is in line with this study's aim to learn about masculinity through interpreted experiences that are constituted in social interactions, rather than developing structured measurement tools to look for 'social facts' external to the respondent. This brings us to another feature of qualitative research, which is the ontological position it tends to uphold. Qualitative methods tend to work with a constructionist view, which implies that they do not see social phenomena as social facts that hold absolute truth external to the observer, as realists do. Rather, constructionists contend that social phenomena are 'outcomes of social interactions between individuals' (ibid.). The researcher's position in this study will work in line with this, and take men's constructions as a basis of knowledge about gender, rather than present absolute truths that would somehow explain more about gender than the gendered subjects themselves. This is a methodological outcome of this study's theoretical stance, namely that gender is socially constructed, rather than a product of nature – the latter of which is often presented as holding absolute truth.

In order to find men's experienced constructions of gender, as well as the practices to which

they link these experiences, this study conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews. This interview style gives access to rich data, and its semi-structured design offers respondents the chance to bring in what they find important with regard to the topic, while presenting each of them with similar interview guides to assure that they offer information that answers the research questions.

### *3.2 Research Population and Sampling*

This study's research population consists of all men, although the focus is mainly directed towards young heterosexual men, until approximately 25-30 years of age. This focus on young men is aimed at finding out how men embody constructions of masculinity throughout their formative years. By studying men's early life experiences, we can track down how they developed their notions and practices with regard to masculinity and sexuality. The focus on heterosexual men serves this study's questions with regard to finding the relation between masculinity and SV and SH against women.

The sample consists of thirteen male youth workers, sex educators and gender activists, which is based on three main considerations. First, as the main share of this sample works with young men, and as they aim to transform these young men's gendered and/or sexual behavior, one could suspect that they have considerable knowledge about the masculinity constructions, which these young men deal with. Namely, being at the forefront of gender transformational work, these respondents experience how young men respond to the transformational ideas they present, and which ideas about gender the young men bring to the table. Secondly, as these men were expected to be familiarized with the subjects of masculinity and sexuality, a practical issue was hoped to be overcome. Namely, discomfort with intimate questions about sex and masculinity may lead to socially desirable answers and awkward, stunted interview progressions. Another practical consideration of this sample concerned recruitment, which was enabled through the activist network this study was aligned with. Furthermore, especially sex educators and activists were expected to already have reflected upon their own issues and experiences with regard to masculinity and sex, which facilitates the interview process and amount of relevant data collected. Although these men form a somewhat niche group, which weakens the overall representativeness of these study's findings, they have grown up in the same world, and together with the men who did not follow similar life paths later in their lives. Finally, as this study's analysis chapters will bring to the fore, the transformational positions, which the respondents of this study tend to take, offer us a unique insight into the changes that these men represent. Exactly because these men stand out as being at the forefront of social change, we can now examine what this change is comprised of, where it originates, and what it means for the future.

These three strata of respondents – youth workers, sex educators and activists – each had their own particular properties. Youth workers work with young men, mostly in order to help them with social-economic issues, rather than sexual issues. Even though the organizations they work for are aligned with gender transformational networks, their own focus with regard to young men neither comprises of gender, nor of masculinity. The answers they offered to the questions about the men they worked with, as well as about their own life histories, therefore, were far less concerned with gender and sexuality. Still, due to the semi-structured nature of the interview guide, their answers did touch upon relevant subject matter. Furthermore, because they were less aware of feminist and activist perspectives, a relatively large share of their answers offered insight into rather conservative, less feminist views about sex- and gender-related questions. Sex educators and activists were better able to offer intimate information about their own sexual life histories, as well as about the young men they worked with. Some activists however did not have much experience in front of a class yet, which this study anticipated on by focusing entirely upon their life histories.



### *3.3 Data Collection and Elicitation Techniques*

As briefly mentioned above, this study conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews, in order to enable respondents to bring in their own interpretations and constructions, while loosely following an interview guide to assure relevance for the research objectives. The interview guide was developed and adapted twice. This flexibility was required, as the first design failed to measure men's personal experiences into depth, since it merely addressed the respondent's work experience, and did not yet include the personal life history questions. The second research guide purposefully started with questions about the respondent's work with young men, gradually building up the intimacy of the questions from masculinity traits towards sexual behavior. This progression was aimed at (re)familiarizing the respondent with the subject, as well as making them comfortable with talking about masculinity and sexuality. In the second part, they were asked to reflect on their own development of how they embodied masculinities, about their relations with other men, followed with a gradual build up towards their relations with women and their sexual experiences. The activist stratum, which consisted of men less experienced in front of a class, was presented with questions from an interview guide that only focused on their personal lives. The same gradual build up from less intimate to more intimate questions was employed, in order to make them comfortable enough to share intimate information. Follow up questions throughout all of the interviews chiefly consisted of requests to be more particular and explicit about general statements or vague narratives, in order to make sure where their narratives originated and to what specific experiences they were attached.

### *3.4 Data Analysis*

This study analyzed the transcribed text from the interviews, according to the sub-research questions formulated in the problem statement above. Each sub-research question was analyzed through a thematic content analysis, which was used to identify patterns in the interview data and discover and describe the focus of the respondents (Stemler 2001: 1). This is a qualitative inductive analysis method, which searches for thematic content that arises from the text. This enables the researcher to generate new insights and theories from the data, rather than searching for validation of existing insights and theories in a text from a top-down coding method. For each sub-research question, a separate coding scheme was created bottom-up from the text, which means that codes were added to the scheme during the analysis of the subsequent interviews. If new codes posed novelties for the coding scheme, the coding scheme was adapted and applied to all the previously coded data as well.

The first round of coding explored the question 'How is masculinity defined?' These codes represent behavioral traits that the men discussed were exuded to witness. The second round of coding was concerned with the question 'How is masculinity constructed in the dynamics between men?' The codes from this round consist of behaviors that happened between men, as well as positions they described within the male hierarchy. The final round of coding explored the question 'How is masculinity expressed in how men think about and treat women, and how they think about and practice sex?' These codes represent notions and feelings towards women, as well as (sexual) behaviors towards women. These rounds of coding are presented in figure 3.4.1 below, which shows a small selection of codes, and in which the codes from the former two rounds of coding are presented in blue, and codes from the third round of coding is split in orange for notions and ideas, and pink for practice. Figure 3.4.2 presents a coded text, excerpted from an interview with Giovanni, from which the codes from figure 3.4.1 were generated.

Throughout these three rounds, the codes of this study have been generated along another two lines. The first consists of norms against which men are measured, as described during the interviews. The second line consists of behaviors, which were deduced from what respondents describe to exude or witness. These normative and non-normative traits together are informative about masculinity roles

and expectations (this is also demonstrated in figure 3.4.1). This comes to the fore as punitive consequences when non-normative behavior is punished, or when normative behavior is rewarded. The analysis chapters will therefore focus upon the friction between normative and non-normative traits and show how male subjects suppress non-normative behaviors and enhance normative behaviors.

Both norms and behavior have been coded as close as possible to overt statements of respondents. However, some masculinity traits were rather latently present in the text, yet they were important to include in the analysis. One example of a latent code is the following quote from Mauro, who looked back on the first time he had sex:

She was my girlfriend and our relationship lasted for another five years after, but I remember that moment very well and yeah, she was way too tense. Too tense in her body. Yes, I think it actually hurt. And when you're that young, I mean, I was fourteen and she was thirteen years old, then there are moments when you may not dare to say that.

*Mauro (35), sexuality informer*

Although this passage contains no literal reference to empathy, the code empathetic has been used for this quote. Empathy refers to “the ability to understand and share the feelings of another” (Oxford Dictionary of English). In retrospect Mauro deciphered what his former girlfriend must have felt like, due her physical reaction during their first time of intercourse. Therefore, we can deduce that he now demonstrates the quality of empathy. This trait is concealed in the data, yet important to include, since his act of telling the story from her perspective clearly manifests the trait.

It is important to acknowledge that all of that these traits are human traits that women, and non-binary genders practice as well as men. However, a significant part of these traits has come to be associated with men and masculinity, whereas another part of these traits has come to be perceived as feminine, or at least, unmasculine. The following chapters will illuminate how these compositions come about and how they are related to social processes.

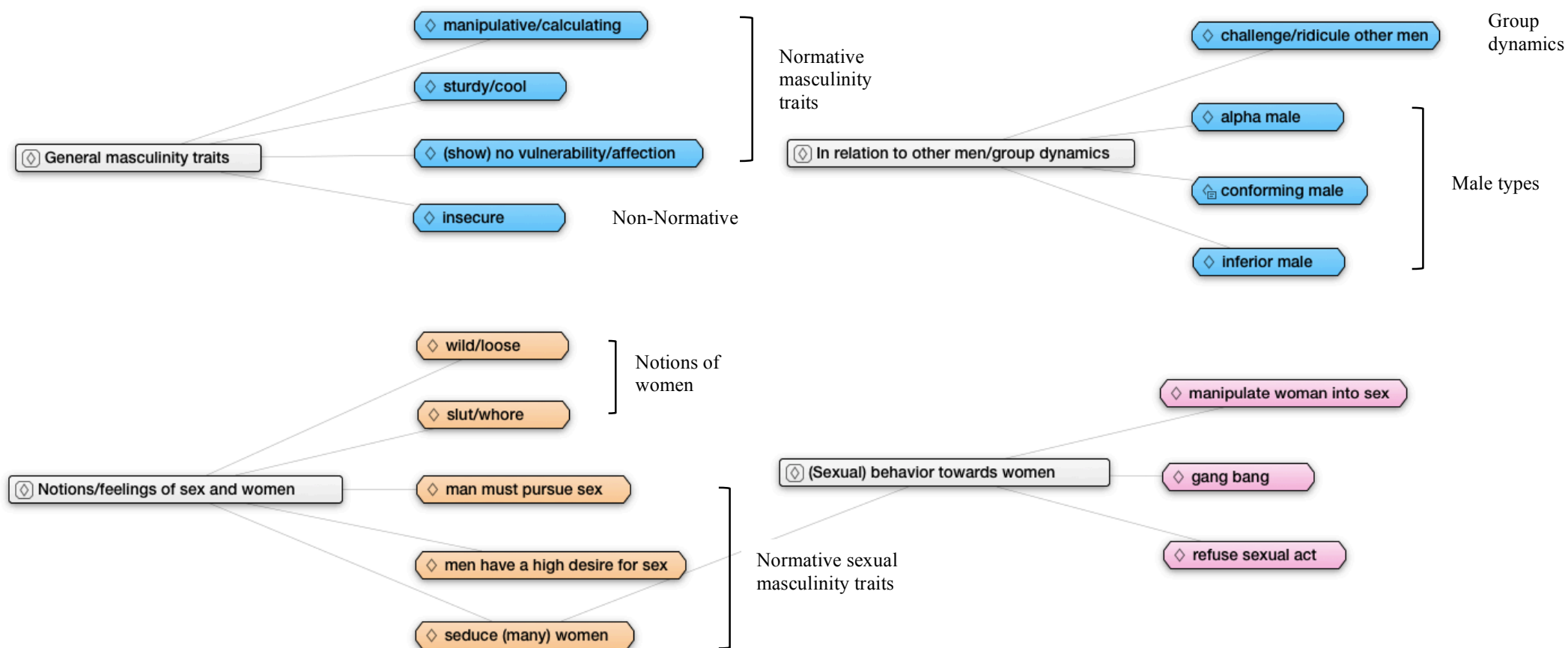


Figure 3.4.1: A selection of codes and their code groups

**Simone** Why? Why were they cool?

**Giovanni** Yeah, I keep asking myself why. Why were they cool? I think they were cool because they'd been able to surprise-attack her with so many guys at the same time, and eventually persuade her into sex.

**Simone** So what was cool about that?

**Giovanni** Yeah, that was just cool. That was just the man. Because, for instance, the fact that she was easy, which is actually a bad term to use, that was clear to everybody. That if you would say to her "Come, we'll do something", she wouldn't say "no". But she never had sex with four, five guys at the same time. And this was the first group to pull that off. So they were really cool. And I noticed that, not only within our friend group, but also guys from outside, they also gave them a lot of respect. And they would also question me, because I did not join in. There was also this other guy who did not participate. And we were just chillin' there. And people would question us, like "Why didn't you join? Were you scared?" You know, so we had a lot of explaining to do. But with me it was only explaining. The other guy was every now and then bullied for not joining.

**Simone** Yeah, in fact you were insecure, right?

**Giovanni** Yeah, in fact I was. So if I would have said "Yeah I didn't dare with all of you there" or something, I would have been laughed at. I think the other guy had said "I didn't dare with so many people around" or something. And I just had a really vague story, like, "No man, I didn't feel like it" or whatever, I had some lame excuse and people said like "No, I understand" at some point. And then they let me off the hook. But the other guy, he was really made to suffer for it.

Ja, dat vraag ik...

- man must pursue sex
- manipulate woman into sex
- manipulative/calculating
- sturdy/cool

Ja dat was gewoon cool. Dat was gewoon de man. Want bijvoorbeeld...

- alpha male
- challenge/ridicule other men
- gang bang
- inferior male
- man must pursue sex
- manipulate woman into sex
- manipulative/calculating
- men have a high desire for sex
- refuse sexual act
- seduce (many) women
- slut/whore
- sturdy/cool
- wild/loose

Dus als ik zou zeggen van "Ja ik d..."

- (show) no vulnerability/affecti...
- conforming male
- inferior male
- insecure
- man must pursue sex
- refuse sexual act

Figure 3.4.2: Translated coded interview excerpt

## 4. Findings

The findings of this study are presented in the following chapters. The former four chapters each discuss a sub-research question, after which chapter five presents several findings that are also crucial for understanding sexual violence and –harassment, as well as the eradication thereof. Underneath each chapter heading, the codes are presented from the thematic content analysis, which are most relevant to the chapter. This offers extra insight into how the text was analyzed, before presenting this study's findings.

### 4.1 Masculinity Traits

• (show) no vulnerability/affection • aggressive • be(have) heterosexual • body posture • breadwinner/provider • cocky • dangerous/frightening • dare to be yourself/confident • defy rules/the law • empathetic • hang out/group together • heroic/be important • homosexual/bi • humorous/playful • ignorance about own boundaries • insecure • intelligent/rational/sensible • into sports • involved in household/family • kind/respectful • lazy • manipulative/calculating • not feminine • not too vain • peaceful/quiet • physical characteristics • protect/take care of others • rich/material luxury • risky behavior • self-reliant • show no compassion/empathy • show no vulnerability • smoke/drink/use drugs • strong • sturdy/cool • support gender inequality • transgender/non-conforming • uncomplicated/does • vulnerable/affectionate • well styled • withdraw from household/family

#### 4.1 “General Masculinity” codes

This chapter will delve into the general composition of masculinity, in order to find an answer to the sub-research question ‘How is masculinity defined?’ This way, we can get a clear idea of what respondents, and the men they refer to, mean when they talk about masculinity. The first section explains the place of the general composition of masculinity in the gender order, before exploring the composition itself in the sections thereafter. These subsequently describe masculinity by normative and non-normative gendered practices, as traits of masculinity. After this chapter, we will move on to the place of this general composition in the dynamics between men and, later, its sexual implications.

#### 4.1.1 *Not feminine, heterosexual*

The following two traits are important to introduce first, as they help define masculinity within a normative gender binary, and as they inform sexual orientation as well. Clarifying how masculinity is set off against femininity, and the role of normative heterosexuality in this order, is fundamental to understanding how masculinity itself is constructed.

First and foremost, an important normative trait is to not be feminine. This trait arises from the data as normative, as failure to conform has been reported to lead to consequences such as ridicule, criticism and social exclusion. Respondents were perceived to be specifically feminine mostly as a result of style choices that were associated with femininity. This happened when they wore make-up, an earring on the wrong side, women's boots, a pony tail or a tight acrobat suit. Importantly, a word that has been reported to be used for men who look or act feminine is *pussy*. Interestingly, while used as a term of abuse for men, pussy is also slang for women's genitals. Pussy therefore directly links femininity to the devaluation of men. More often, however, terms used for name-calling in reaction to effeminate behavior refer to homosexuality: *mietje* (translates to queer, pansy), *homo* and *gay*. In fact, most respondents explained that homosexuality is closely associated with femininity.

This brings us to our next normative trait, which is to be and/or behave heterosexual(ly). Respondents reported that appearances of homosexuality are continuously met with punitive

consequences, such as ridicule, disrespect, social exclusion and occasionally physical violence. Therefore, from an early age on, respondents reported themselves and other men to avoid any association with homosexuals and homosexuality. Men avoid homosexuals themselves, as associating with a homosexual man can lead to rumors that one is homosexual himself. A man – whether he is sexually oriented towards men or not – is also deemed a homosexual through a myriad of other behaviors, which can generally be condensed into acting unmasculine or feminine. The following respondent illustrated the complex link between homosexuality and femininity and the stigmatization of homosexuality, as he explained why he did not want to associate with homosexual men during his childhood:

Yeah dunno, I didn't feel the need. I always found them – just how kids think about them today for example. Yeah, like they always say, there are two sorts of gays. There are the super effeminate gay guys, and there are just the manly gay men. And I [knew] a lot of effeminate gay guys and then I always thought – they talked about putting on heels and skirts: *yeah, that is pretty weird*. Where would you do that then? And yeah, they would also say that a lot of homosexuals had AIDS and stuff like that. So then you don't want to have anything to do with that. ... And because you're young, you think that they all fall for you.

*Sander (24), sexuality informer*

As Sander explains, homosexual men are put on a scale of effeminateness. Robin (27, sexuality informer) explained how effeminate homosexual men are less tolerated than homosexual men who behave more masculine. This means that homosexual men are still expected to conform to norms of masculinity, even when they are outed as homosexual. Furthermore, Sander touched upon an important process of stigmatization of homosexual men, which firstly consists of AIDS, and secondly of the idea that gay men are automatically attracted to all male individuals, which includes the threat that “they immediately want to do things with you” (Sander) and that you may contract a deadly disease. This stigmatization caused Sander to avoid homosexual men – a motivation which reappeared in other narratives on men and boys.

The close association expressed in the interviews between homosexuality and femininity, combined with the stigmas, devaluation and punitive consequences surrounding them, informs us on a hierarchical ordering of gender. Within gender binary thinking (one is either male or female), devaluing femininity implies a higher valuation of masculinity. Male homosexuality within this order refers to men who are acting effeminate, and who therefore lower their position in the gender hierarchy in relation to femininity, being that homosexuality is closely associated with femininity. To not be feminine in combination with being heterosexual are therefore normative traits, in relation to which respondents find themselves and their fellow men to be measured. In this sense, male subjects discussed in this section below, perform an important deal of behavior in order to not be associated with femininity and homosexuality, and to rather be associated with masculinity. The content of these masculinity traits will be discussed in the following section. What this devaluation of femininity implies for men's notions of women is studied further below in the chapter “Notions and behavior in relation to women and sex”.

#### *4.1.2 Conforming to normative traits*

One of the most prevalent masculinity traits, which has been reported in every single interview, is to show no vulnerability. To be vulnerable is an umbrella term for what has been described as to show emotions such as sadness, fear or insecurity. Respondents describe the trait as a norm, as they report

that boys are expected to behave in a way that does not show their vulnerability or affection. The following passage illustrates the normativity of this trait:

I see that boys are struggling with how to be a man and that is mostly because of what they hear in their surroundings. The norm that is imposed on them. Expectations. The clichés are pretty strong. ... Like being tough, cool. Not showing your weaker side, to not cry. Because, yes, if you cry, if you are sad, or if you talk about your vulnerabilities, then you'll fall down the pecking order really quickly. Being macho, that is what predominates quite strongly in a lot of the men's groups I visit.

*Mauro (35), sexuality informer*

Mauro touches upon an important aspect of this social norm, which is the consequentiality for showing one's vulnerable side. It is not merely an expectation that men have of each other, it is also reason to fall down the social ladder. Kevin (29), a social worker, describes these moments in which boys and men experience the threat of these consequences as a situation, in which a guy needs to respond correctly within "a split second". If he fails, he'll suffer a "loss of face". These consequences are further illustrated in Giovanni's story about how he was forced to toughen up early in his childhood:

I think [I had to act like a man] since I was eight years old or so. Maybe even younger. If, for example, I went to school and I came into a fight and it got physical, and I came home crying, I remember that very well. My mom never said it, but if my uncles and aunts were there, or my dad, then they would say "As a guy, you're not allowed to come home crying. Otherwise I'll beat you on top of that." You weren't allowed to come home crying like, somebody hit you and you don't want to go back to school for a while. No, you'll make sure you win, and the next time you come home crying, you'll get beatings. And that is what I still hear, by the way.

*Giovanni (25), activist and sexuality informer*

These three examples all touch upon the punitive consequences of showing one's vulnerability. Beside reputation loss, as Mauro and Kevin speak of, Giovanni illustrated how showing one's vulnerability poses physical dangers as well. Furthermore, interviewees added social exclusion and bullying to the list of consequences. It is important to understand from these statements that the male subjects discussed have in fact a vulnerable side, which repeatedly leads to social and physical threats when they express this side in front of other men. These punitive consequences demonstrate the normative nature of showing no vulnerability.

Respondents reported other traits of masculinity in relation to showing no vulnerability as well. The most frequently named characteristic of masculinity discussed in the interviews is to be sturdy/cool – an approximate translation of the Dutch word *stoer*. According to Prisma woordenboek Nederlands, *stoer* refers to fearlessness, strength and robustness. Respondents link various characteristics to the word, including leadership, defying rules and laws, aggressive behavior, being disrespectful of women and overall toughness (see Appendix 1 for co-occurring codes). In some cases, a *stoer* guy is used to refer to an alpha male, in other cases *stoer* is defined in opposition to gayness and femininity. *Stoer* is therefore a crucial umbrella characteristic when it comes to understanding how this study's respondents, and the men they refer to, see masculinity. A set of traits that is associated with *stoer* is to show off manliness in front of peers and women. The following statement sums it up quite comprehensively:

You'd have to act kinda different. Yeah, you'd be a hunk and wear nice shoes. ... In a way you'd feel *stoer* so to say. Yeah, you would stand somewhere on a good spot and yeah, you'd mostly feel *stoer*. Quite like the man. You'd stand there with your pals watching girls and they'd look back. Kind of just that little macho man. ... Many of my friends smoked, so that was also really part of it. So you really had to, when you would be chillin' outside, you'd sometimes have to smoke a cigarette. ... Drinking was also part of that. At fourteen. Yeah, that was normal.

*Sander (24), Sexuality informer*

The behaviors that made Sander feel *stoer* were to be well styled, to hang out and group together and to smoke and drink. Another set of behaviors associated with *stoer* is to be humorous, playful and to be an uncomplicated doer. Luuk (23), a gender activist, summed up the activities with his high school peer group as nights of die-hard drinking and competitions of making the best jokes about one another rather than having serious conversations. More respondents point out this set of behaviors, which represent men as being without depth, to top off one joke with another and to rather act than think.

Interestingly, as another respondent demonstrated, this *stoer* rather playful uncomplicated-doer set of traits can be bridged to another version of *stoer*, which consists of a set of traits that cast the male as an intelligent, rational and sensible, uncomplicated doer. In Jack's extended family, Jack was given the role of a leader and a caretaker for important family tasks, such as arranging funerals and weddings, or solving family conflicts.

I think when I was about twelve years old or so, that I became aware of it. When a cousin wasn't quite behaving himself, yeah, then it was like, my father is the eldest and the smartest. Everybody looked up to him. And I was his son, so then it was: "That cousin is not doing well. Go talk to him."

*Jack (38), social worker and sexuality informer*

Elaborating upon the traits he incorporated due to his role, Jack stated:

Yes, I think you have to be strong. At least, that is something I learned from my home. That, in principle, you shouldn't show your weaknesses. And just do things. Yes, don't think about it. It just needs to happen.

One of the situations in which Jack performed his role as a leader of the family, was when his niece died in her crib on a family birthday.

People were flipping out because that happened. Yeah, that was hectic. And then you're the oldest cousin and you will just take your role automatically. And then you'll hear that a colleague takes two weeks off because the cat just died. So at that point I think, *how?*

In the role that Jack played in his family, while taking on the notion that "it just needs to happen", there has been little room for him to mourn and "flip out". He was supposed to keep it together and arrange whatever needed to be arranged. Furthermore, as a result of this role, he had difficulty understanding why other people surrounding him stopped functioning as a result of an emotional loss. In this narrative, as well as in other interviews, the uncomplicated doer is cast as a leader, who is an intelligent, rational and sensible man who is emotionally stable, and in control of oneself and the situation. Related to this is another number of normative traits, which is to be a breadwinner, self-reliant and able to afford luxury. Together with the trait *to protect and take care of others*, these traits similarly contribute to



being able to maintain control over the situation by taking care of others, while relying on oneself, rather than to depend on anybody else. This stable man is therefore emotionally, socially, as well as materially stable.

Beside the emotionally and financially stable set of traits above, there is a final set of behaviors, which can be seen as quite another version of the same desire to be *stoer* or *invulnerable*. Rather than keeping it cool, men have also reported how toughness regularly leads to aggressive and manipulative behavior. As Giovanni's father drilled him to be tough and to win fights rather than to back down or show emotions, Giovanni became, as he himself put it, "hyper aggressive". Ever since, he's had the tendency in discussions to attack first:

If he would scream to me or something, then I still think I need to make sure to hit him first and to hit him hard, so that he passes out. Because if he hits me it will hurt and then it may be that I'll cry and then I'll get punished at home because I'm crying.

*Giovanni (25)*

Even though he stopped putting violence in practice when he grew up, Giovanni had been forced to put on a tough persona at such a young age, that the option of fighting still recurs to him during (non-physical) interactions of conflict. Similarly, in multiple other accounts, toughness occurred as a manner to gain or maintain control over a situation, or over people. A tough persona is dangerous and feared, he does not show compassion nor empathy for other people and is able to bend other people to his will. Although most men interviewed and described would not come close to match all of these requirements, toughness and ruthlessness have repeatedly been brought up in role models and alpha males, and have generally been described as traits that are crucial to achieving heroic status.

In conclusion, invulnerability is a strongly imposed masculinity norm, to which men and boys conform through various sets of behaviors, and which is frequently reinforced as they show their vulnerable side. Whereas some seemingly contradicting behaviors occur, such as playfulness versus rationality, or rationality versus aggression, all of these variants make sense as reactions to the social obligation of hiding one's weaker and emotional self. From this perspective, playfulness offers the impression of taking things lightly, and therefore implies maintaining control of the situation and one's emotions, just as rationality implies. In turn, aggression is also a manner of maintaining control over the situation, however violently, rather than to be defeated or give way to emotions such as fear and sadness.

#### *4.1.3 Non-normative traits*

As demonstrated above, normative traits such as showing no vulnerability and *stoer* are reinforced, as men are punished for showing their vulnerabilities. The presence of a non-normative trait, such as to show vulnerability, is accompanied by a number of other traits that can be seen as suppressed traits, as men regularly hide them in order to conform to masculine role expectations. However, respondents' narratives continually brought these non-normative traits to the surface. Therefore, in order to offer a more complete and fair image of masculinity, this chapter will represent these masculinity traits as well. They will furthermore introduce alternative expressions of masculinity, which is fundamental to gaining a perspective of change.

The most widely evident non-normative trait is to be vulnerable. Respondents' narratives represented men's vulnerabilities by pointing out their insecurities, sadness and fears. For instance, while Jack was busy taking care of his family and keeping his own vulnerabilities to himself, he did not recognize his

own boundaries and, therefore, never learned how to say “no”. He noticed that it made him prone to being taken advantage of by his loved ones for his willingness to arrange things for everyone:

I was a little insecure at that time. Also, each time with friends – okay they were my friends – but somehow I was also looking for a certain validation from them.

Jack realized that he in fact was vulnerable, even though he was keeping up a tougher image all along. He finally owned up to his own insecurities, he discovered his boundaries, and he learned to say “no”. Just as Jack came to realize his insecurities, the following respondent explained how he consciously let go of the culture that men should not cry, by crying and showing more of his vulnerabilities:

Yeah, I did not cry for a very long time. But at some point, I thought, *I need to cry over some things sometimes*. And then I started exposing more of my vulnerable side. ... I think I was about eighteen years old when I learned to let go a little. Sometimes I just don’t feel okay, you know? So, then I started letting in my emotions more.

*Quincy (36), sexuality informer*

Another frequently discussed trait that revealed respondents’ softer side is empathy. Even though empathy is something that the interviewed youth workers, activists and sexuality informers stated to miss when it comes to men and boys, their stories also testified of substantial understanding and commitment to the feelings of men and women surrounding them. Jack explained how getting in touch with his own vulnerable side allowed him to better understand other people’s weak moments: “I am more aware now that maybe for me that would not feel as painful, but for someone else it may hurt a lot. ... But because at home I was taught to be strong and to keep going, and to complain some other time...” Another respondent, Luuk, was early on in touch with his empathetic self. At the end of primary school, he deliberately chose to dance with the least popular girl in class because he felt sorry for her, despite his prediction that he was going to be mocked for it. The biggest challenge of his empathetic abilities however came later, when his first girlfriend told him that her uncle was continuously sexually abusing her. This period in his life consisted of a profound struggle, in which he dedicated himself to making everything less painful for her.

In this study, personal development narratives of empathy such as the ones from Jack and Luuk are in abundance. Empathy will moreover prove to be relevant in relation to girls and women, and therefore, it will be further discussed in the third chapter of these study’s findings. Other practiced traits associated with men and their softer side are: to be involved in the household, to be kind and respectful and to be peaceful and/or quiet.

#### *4.1.4 Conclusion*

As demonstrated in this section on masculinity traits, we have witnessed the practice of normative as well as non-normative traits. Normative traits can be generally condensed as invulnerability, which men aim to embody by being *stoer* through rationality, playfulness and/or aggressiveness. Not conforming to these normative traits frequently leads to punitive consequences. Non-normative traits can be mostly condensed as softness, which consists of most importantly vulnerability and empathy. Although these traits are generally cast in opposition to norms of masculinity, and thus frequently lead to punitive consequences, the practice of non-normative traits is widely present in respondents’ narratives on men’s behavior.

A legitimate question to pose at this point is: what does the wide practice of these latter traits imply for masculinity? How can we include these softer traits into our definition of masculinity, while

they did not seem to match our earlier description of normative masculinity? Are there different contexts or situations in which deviation is allowed? What are the driving forces that allow or disallow deviance?

In order to answer these questions, two things need to be established here. First, we need to widen our perspective to the possibility that there is not merely one masculinity, but that there are multiple forms of masculinity – and so from now on, we will rather speak of *masculinities*. In this understanding of masculinities, there is not merely a single archetypical male to which men can be measured; there are a few sets of characteristics, which are relational and dynamic, and out of which individual men perform a greater or smaller number of traits. Secondly, these masculinities we speak of here come to the fore in dynamics between men, which is a process characterized by power and hierarchy. As touched upon above, the processes in which men punish or reward each other for showing certain characteristics, are vital to understanding why and when men express certain traits, and why and when they suppress others. Furthermore, the inclusion of power into our definition of masculinities allows us to incorporate norms as well as (non-normative) behaviors, as norm-making is a deeply political process, which results in practice, as well as originates from practice, as drawn from Connell's gender order theory. In line with this notion, we will now discuss the dynamics between men.

## 4.2 Dynamics Between Men

• accept homosexuals • avoid homosexuals/homosexuality • disrespect/abuse homosexuals • tolerate homosexuals • brotherly • challenge/ridicule other men • competition • hierarchical • peer impact • show off • social exclusion • alpha male • conforming male • inferior male • resisting male

### *4.2 Codes on “Dynamics between men” and “masculinity types”*

Dynamics between men are important to comprehend, as they inform us on how certain traits of masculinity are reinforced, and how others are suppressed. They reveal power structures and how these structures are acted out between men. This chapter seeks an answer to the sub-research question ‘How is masculinity constructed in the dynamics between men?’

This process of dynamics between men will overall be used to demonstrate what this study calls: norm-making, norm-conforming and norm-fighting behavior. These terms refer to the relations that men have to masculinity norms. Norm-making is hereby a position of power and privilege, in which a man’s behavior is taken as a norm for others. Norm-conforming behavior refers to the acceptance of a norm and the attempts to embody the normative behavioral traits that come with it. It is hereby a sign of alliance with the powerful. Norm-refusing behavior is about practices that demonstrate resistance to the norm, through willful attempts to deviate from the norm, rather than to conform.

The following sections will discuss the general practices and dynamics that were reported to play out between men, after which masculinity types are composed as locations within the male hierarchy. This will help gaining an understanding of the system of power and privilege, in which masculinity norms are imposed or resisted. This will have explanatory power for understanding how masculinities are expressed in sexual violence and –harassment against women, which is discussed in the subsequent chapters.

### *4.2.1 General practices and dynamics between men*

This section mainly focuses on male peers and how they interact, as respondents mostly identified these people whose approval especially young men wish to gain. Respondents regularly describe social interactions between male peers as hierarchical. While some literally speak of hierarchy, others name “status” to refer to hierarchy or “pecking order”. In any case, it is described as something that men and boys are strongly preoccupied with, and which influences an important deal of their behavior. Hierarchy is characterized by constant competition for a higher rank in the social order, which consists of challenging and ridiculing other men on the one hand, while showing off on the other.

#### *Challenge and ridicule*

Challenging and ridiculing other men is a pervasive and frequent way in which men dare each other or bring each other down in order to raise their own relative status within the male pecking order. Luuk aptly described how the process worked out in his school:

There kind of was mutual competition and it was like, if you got along well with the unpopular girl, then they would laugh at you. I think that has something to do with group pressure amongst boys.

Luuk explains here that laughing at other boys is part of mutual competition and that it relates to pressure, which boys experience in peer groups. Occasions for men to ridicule each other usually relate

to boys' and men's exhibitions of non-normative traits. Most often, failure to distinguish oneself from femininity or to avoid association with homosexuality give way to mockery and bullying. In turn, considering the humiliation that comes with bullying and mockery, the threat is pervasive enough to constantly avoid behaviors that may lead to it. With regard to homosexuality, statements explained how easily men are associated with being a homosexual, which often leads to a severe downfall within the male hierarchy. Quincy gave an account in which the stigma of homosexuality was so contagious that he chose to avoid hanging out in public with his friend who just came out as a gay man:

I noticed that I was compared to him. ... I think that at first I did hang out with him still, but at some point, I avoided him at school. ... Certain groups started acting a little annoying, I remember that well. ... Yeah, it is just unpleasant when people just start to shout stuff, you know? That is just unpleasant and you just don't want that. And that is why you'll start seeking less contact at school.

*Quincy (36), sexuality informer*

Although Quincy did not mind his friend being gay, because his schoolmates ridiculed him for hanging out with him, he was pressured into making the conclusion that he needed to avoid him at school. This is a clear example of norm-enforcing behavior, in which Quincy's schoolmates enforced heteronormativity on Quincy (and probably his gay friend as well), which he himself did not actually value. He however felt the need to abide by the norm in order to be free from bullying. This example also demonstrates how coming out as a gay man can directly lead to social exclusion. Hereby is the underlying assumption of the contagiousness of this stigma that if the friend of a homosexual man associates with him long enough, there must be something questionable about his own sexual orientation.

### *Inflated masculinity*

A way of avoiding or compensating for association with femininity and gayness is to inflate one's masculinity. This is also more generally a way to rise on the male social ladder. The main way to do this is by showing off one's masculine traits to other men. Mocking and challenging other men, for instance, are ways of showing off control over other people. Furthermore, in order to avoid gayness slurs and to receive social status, men have reported to brag about sexual conquests over women. The section on sexuality will further look into this. Besides bragging about sexual conquests, acting *stoer* and cocky, as described under masculinity traits above, are also clear examples of showing off one's masculinity.

Playing around, mocking and showing off are not necessarily experienced as harmful in and of itself. As Sander explained before, acting *stoer* was how they started acting when they reached puberty and they had fun doing it. Mauro explained how he experienced his friends showing off with sexual conquests as something that opened up opportunities to talk about sex and share feelings of insecurity. Robin disclosed that he himself tried on the alpha male role for a while during high school and it made him feel powerful, since he was able to intimidate and make other people do things for him. It is important to understand that men can experience these dynamics as fun, especially when they are in a position of control. Furthermore, mockery, playfulness and showing off are certainly not always harmful to others either. It is also a playful manner of interaction between men in a brotherly fashion.

On the other hand, we have demonstrated above that most respondents disclosed that they have felt victimized by fellow men who acted in this way at various points in their lives. Hence, when reflecting on the times when respondents themselves practiced this behavior, a part of them experienced feelings of regret or second thoughts about their own behavior afterwards, having realized the possible

consequences of this behavior for themselves or for other people around them. In the light of the wide practice of mockery and bullying – when in a context with other men, deviation from the norm carries the risk of becoming a target. It therefore limits and prescribes behavior in public and private settings. Private settings will be discussed further below under the chapter on sexual behavior. Yet, as demonstrated above, deviation is widely present. Furthermore, it is not automatically punished in most contexts, as it depends on a wide range of circumstances how men react to a deviator. In any context, a crucial factor of acceptance of deviation is social status. The following subsection will look deeper into social status and distinguish various positions within the male hierarchy. These positions, which we refer to as male types, will reveal a power structure in which some interactions lead to norm alteration and others to norm reinforcement.

#### 4.2.2 *Male types*

The hierarchy of masculinities, and its relation to the incorporation of normative and non-normative traits, is further captured in male types. The theoretical perspective behind distinguishing male types is for a significant part in line with Connell's four masculinities. However, the male types in this empirical section will be as much data-driven as possible, by inducing male types from the behavior between the male subjects discussed in interviews, rather than fitting the data into Connell's theoretical frame. Therefore, these male types are assigned different names, which furthermore facilitates comparison to Connell's masculinities later on. Similarly, in line with Connell's theory and important to settle on hereby, is that no man can be assigned to a single of these masculinities or male types; these male types are rather to be seen as ideal types, and as positions or locations within a gender hierarchy of masculinity, in which a man in various situations and aspects of his life can find himself. The descriptions of these male types are based on the narratives that respondents offer about their masculinity positions themselves, as well as about other men. For instance, if a certain cultural image of the deprived male is described, it is based on the stories that respondents told about men in this position, no matter if they found themselves in this position or not.

##### *Alpha male*

The first masculinity to be distinguished we refer to as the *alpha male*, which is comparable to Connell's *hegemonic masculinity*, as it concerns the most powerful position within the male hierarchy. While taking the basic principle of the top position within the male hierarchy from Connell, in this section we will describe the traits, positionality and unique factors that are associated with the alpha male as reported in the interview text. This may differ from Connell's description of *hegemonic masculinity*, as will become clear by comparison in the discussion chapter further below. The most important indicator of an alpha male in this research, is that he has a position of control within a given context, in which he is able to make or break norms, while diverting critical attention away from himself. Let us break down this position of control. The position of control of an alpha male consists of an extensive praise for his noticeable embodiment of normative masculinity traits. Which of these traits assign men to an alpha position, or which traits describe a man in an alpha position, differs per social context. In boys' and young men's peer groups, the alpha male is regularly characterized as *stoer*, humorous, well styled and sexually active. An important factor hereby is age, as boys up until fifteen to sixteen years old have been reported to receive more social status for cocky, extrovert and loud behavior, whereas their more mature alpha counterparts tended to come off as rather peaceful and laid back:

You'll just see that the one who screams the loudest, who has the biggest mouth and who is the wittiest, that is *the man*, and everybody follows him around. But I do notice that when they are in the third or fourth grade [fifteen to sixteen years old] it does change.

Then, it is the one who is relaxed and cool. Then they understand the game of school better. That you can walk in all *stoer* with a big mouth towards your teacher and be the man for a moment, but that it will not bring you any further. And then you'll notice that third, fourth grade, that certain guys get it, and the boys who also get it will follow that guy. So that guy will become leader and it strikes to me that he is a different type of leader than in middle school [Dutch: *onderbouw*], so to say.

*Jack (38), youth worker and sexuality informer*

Within the context of school, younger boys will award each other status for different traits than mature boys. Another striking aspect of this account is the relevance of circumstances and adaptation. Sticking for a prolonged period of time to defiance and cockiness may limit one's abilities to gain access to other normative traits necessary to be an alpha male in different circumstances. For instance, the position of the alpha male on Kevin's high school was taken by boys who failed to make a successful career afterwards:

I saw this a lot, that the guys in high school, who were *the man* so to say, and they were really *stoer* and at the center of attention. And then there were the guys who were quiet, who did listen carefully and made their homework etcetera. And they nowadays drive a fancy car. They've got it going on. They are living the family life. And the other guys, who used to be at the forefront, they, well... I still run into some of the guys I used to hang out with. They are 27 to 29 years old and it is much too late for them. When I talk to them, like, "What do you do these days?" Then it's like "Yeah, I'm still on welfare."

The traits necessary after high school for being an alpha male, as Kevin touched upon, rather consist of being self-reliant, breadwinner, rich and able to afford luxury ("fancy car"). In order to get there, the boys who practiced traits such as tranquility and sensibility during high school, were able to adapt to the circumstances after high school.

This introduces another crucial aspect of the alpha male's position of control, which is privilege. Although some men in an alpha male position have experienced social privilege in their peer group, they may have lacked wider economic, cultural and political privileges. This is based on a system of privilege on a societal scale, which structurally maintains positions of privilege and dispossession along racial and class lines. Respondents reported how men draw upon their privileged position in order to gain control over situations and other people. For these men in a privileged predisposition, it is significantly easier to attain the position of an alpha male, than for men whom this system subordinates. An important outcome for the privileged men in this system, is that they have the power to divert critical attention away from themselves. This becomes evident in situations where normative masculinity traits have visible negative outcomes for other people. Giovanni offered an account, which clearly illustrates this mechanism, as he described how one of his white class mates used his privilege to get away with drugging and raping women, which the white young man himself confided in a group of black fellow students. Giovanni was part of this latter group and he and his other black classmates started warning especially female students for this white man's toxic behavior. The latter rescued his own reputation as follows:

At some point, somebody told him that we were warning people about him. So he confronted us with that and it resulted in some sort of discussion, in which more than half of the students chose his side, because he made use of his white privilege. He said: "Do you really think that I, a white guy from Zeeland, would do that? It is the shady type of people who do that in our society. I would never do such a thing." So it is through this

manner, that he gained people's faith, because of which people got the idea that all of us were in fact lying. He turned this thing into a racial matter really quickly, like, "Okay, that is what these colored guys say about me. That is what these Moroccans say about me, because I'm white. I don't do such things. Look at me."

Giovanni's abusive white fellow student was able to divert critical attention for his harmful behavior away from himself by using his white privilege. His rhetoric reveals how he crafted a clean image of his whiteness, as he directly opposed "a white guy from Zeeland" to "the shady type of people who would do this in our society". In his narrative, white guys from Zeeland are not shady and they would not commit the crimes he was accused of. In addition, since his denial also directly contradicted the stories of the black men he confided in before, he redirected the critical attention towards them, convincing others that they must have been lying, in fact, because they are black. According to Giovanni, the abusive student seemed to imply that "these guys are hating on me because I'm just a respectable white boy and because I don't want to join them in their criminal activities".

The social acceptance of his racist argumentations demonstrates how privilege can serve to divert critical attention away from a member of a privileged group in society. Respondents who were sexuality informants touched upon an interesting factor that explains how they themselves became more critical of lowly educated and non-Western young men. They stated on the one hand that highly educated (mostly white) students utter less sexist slurs than lowly educated (mostly North African and black) students. On the other hand, they also stated that their own highly educated white peers continuously made sexist remarks as well, although in more private settings. In other words, the latter were not less sexist than the former, they merely knew better how to play by the rules in public. This public-private contrast reveals the ability to divert critical attention away from their harmful behavior, as they tended to save their sexist remarks for private encounters with male peers, while showing more politically correct behavior in class. This stands in contrast to lowly educated students, who were reported to utter them in public. Therefore, in addition to white privilege, we can also see here how playing by the rules adds an important aspect to the direction of critical attention.

The alpha male's position of control grants him another benefit, which is to impose norms on other men. This is, as respondents stated, mostly a result of other men who look up to men in an alpha male position. This norm-imposing behavior within peer groups has been reported to work in two directions. The first concerns the rather traditional masculinity norms, which consist of what we previously referred to as normative traits. Respondents described how, when the alpha males of the group behaved in a more traditionally masculine way, the group would usually support and/or copy this behavior. Furthermore, the alpha male has also been reported to criticize his peers for failure to conform to traditional masculinity traits. Respondents also stated that when they witnessed men of lesser social status who deviated from the traditional norm imposed by the alpha male or peer group, they met criticism and mockery.

Deviation from traditional masculinity norms is more likely to be accepted when an alpha male practices this sort of behavior himself. This takes us to the second direction of norm-imposing behavior, which concerns alternative masculinity norms, of which characteristics have been referred to as non-normative traits. Being in a position of influence, alpha males enjoy the privilege of being able to occasionally deviate from traditional masculinity norms. Out of the respondents, especially sexuality informers and youth workers witnessed how this mechanism works. As a youth worker, Kevin noticed that he was able to change young men's attitudes about finding legal employment through the alpha males of their peer groups: "We only need one or two of these alpha males to tag along with us and to believe what I say and to actually realize it, and the rest of the sheep will follow." Mauro's anecdote illustrates this mechanism in more detail:



I've stood in front of a group, they were boys from Street Pro, and they really are school drop outs, so boys with quite a baggage. ... And there were some guys who said "Yeah, I really don't want children." Kind of that selfish image, like "I am the man, and nobody tells me what to do." And then there was this other guy, just a little higher in the pecking order, just a little more macho than he was, and he started telling about his past, about his dad, how he never knew him, and really vulnerable, that he found it really important for his children that he'd be there for them. And then you saw how the other guy got a lot of resistance, whereas the positive guy got a lot of allies. And then you saw the other guy turn.

This norm-making behavior is important for understanding how men develop certain traits in relation to their peer groups. When the alpha male from Mauro's narrative expressed alternative traits of vulnerability and to be involved in family, the other boys followed his thinking and joined in the resistance against the other boy's point of view. He revealed alpha male's power hereby to impose his norm on other members of his group. Furthermore, as a role model, we can also look for alpha males outside of the peer group. For instance, older male family members such as the father, older brother or uncle have also come up as important role models, or even direct authorities. Celebrities and fictional heroes have also come up as important alpha figures, whose influence has worked in these two directions as well. Youth workers and sexuality informers, as slightly older and knowledgeable instructors in relation to young men, reported to make use of the non-traditional direction this mechanism of norm-making can take. They used their position of authority in front of clients and school children to function as a positive role model on the one hand, while creating awareness through dialogue on the other.

### *Inferior male*

The *inferior male* is the second type of masculinity to be discussed. It has close resemblance to Connell's *subordinated masculinity*, in that they both describe an inferior position in the masculinity hierarchy, due to failure to conform to (traditional) normative traits, most notably compulsory heterosexuality and the imperative to not be feminine. In the interviews, the inferior male was mostly distinguished by the low social status he received from his peers, and his inability to change the normative climate of his peer group. The inferior male's low social status becomes evident as he is at the receiving end of other men's ridiculing, bullying, social exclusion or even abuse. As explained above, exhibitions of non-normative masculinity traits, or merely exhibiting too few normative traits, make men prone to this kind of treatment. Robin, for instance, described how his lack of commitment to acting *stoer* and to practice sports during primary school were the main reasons that he did not belong to the boys' groups in his class. A male friend that he did have at the time had a more inferior position, as he had a tendency to cry over little things. This exhibition of vulnerability gave way to intense bullying, as other boys made a sport out of triggering his tears time and time again. Another respondent who exhibited non-normative traits is Luuk, who in his high school peer group regularly found himself in the position of the inferior male. The last thing for which he was ridiculed in this peer group was the fact that he is a vegan, and perhaps this was the last, because he did not trouble to share that he is in fact a feminist activist. In this same vegan debacle, however, Luuk also touched upon two other important aspects of inferiority:

Luuk: There just were two or three guys who always shouted the loudest and that remains the same. ... with those jokes about my veganism, one of those guys started doing that,

and subsequently I noticed that the entire group tagged along. Also the people whom I know that I would level with if I would talk to them in private. So I found that they often negatively won over other guys in their targeting of somebody else. And that was a different person each time.

Simone: Was it occasionally their turn as well? Those two, three guys?

Luuk: No, hardly. I tried at times, but it never worked. No. I would find something really witty or good, but people would not join me in my attempts. That was a shame.

First, Luuk noticed that in his peer group, the alpha male figures easily influenced the group in targeting the subject of their choosing, whereas they themselves never became the subject of ridicule. Their control over the distribution of ridicule however, could not exist without a scapegoat to focus their mockery upon. In this light, a scapegoat is in fact instrumental for other men to showing off their control over group dynamics. When Luuk told his friends that he is a vegan therefore, he became instrumental to the alpha males in his group to show off their control over the group dynamic. A second important insight from his story is that, once one finds oneself in an inferior position, it is difficult to be released from this position, despite attempts to conform to the group's norms and behaviors.

This continuation of one's inferior position is an important aspect of inferiority, as it takes being an incidental target towards a more structural position of inferiority. Whereas Quincy for instance experienced temporary ridicule, his homosexual friend faced social exclusion for a longer period of time. Respondents who repeatedly found themselves in the position of an inferior male reported that it impacted their experiences and choices during later stages of their lives as well. Adriaan disclosed that he has been deeply affected by his feelings of not being able to measure up to the masculinity norms he experienced during his life:

It was really deep – at some point, my mind became dominated by the idea that what men do, that it is bad. ... If you don't see that power relation as something positive, for me personally it became something negative and I didn't feel the appeal to express myself as a man. ... And at home I never learned to be a man, like, so that you can stand your ground in that competition. ... My father and mother, they love each other, but I did not see that man-woman dynamic like you see in the rest of society. It made me more vulnerable and therefore also more a victim to how society deals with men and women. ... I think that this, among other things, expressed itself in that porn addiction.

*Adriaan (27), gender activist*

Adriaan explained his feelings of inferiority in relation to other men as a result of not knowing how to take his place in the gender order. Having struggled since he was six years old with his partly unwillingness, partly ignorance of how to measure up to society's masculinity norms, Adriaan developed a porn addiction during his adolescence. Other respondents reported that the impact of inferiority was vital to some of their choices as well.

Mauro found himself in the inferior position when he was bullied for wearing girly boots and having a Surinamese accent. The bullying became so unbearable that, beside begging his mother for new shoes, he hit a boy and a girl who were teasing him. This resulted in, firstly, his release from bullying, while secondly, it became his ambition to become the hero of the school and rescue other schoolmates from being bullied. His resort to physical solutions however caused him to continue his high school career fighting with other students. Other reports also included the adoption of traditional masculinity traits in

order to free oneself of inferior status. Including Adriaan's turn to porn, these respondents compensated for their (perceived) lack of masculinity, by overconforming to traditional masculinity norms. For some of them, it worked to climb the male pecking order. For Luuk, who had in fact tried to do the same, his practice of ridiculing some of his peers failed to change his position.

A final release from inferiority reported consists of social context. Most respondents who had experienced inferiority during their lifetimes liberated themselves from their inferior position when they left the peer group in which they were made inferior. After high school, it became easier for most of these respondents to find new situations in which they could express non-normative traits, without being degraded because of it. An important note hereby is that the respondents of this study are all active in organizations that aim to change masculinity, which means that a significant part of their social circles contain likeminded people. Therefore, we need to be weary that men in other milieus likely still experience less liberation, even after high school. Within this sample, Sander noticed for instance that he still feels pressure to conform to traditional masculinity norms in his peer group, which he has outside of his organization.

### *Conforming male*

This brings us to our third masculinity concerning the *conforming male*, which is similar to Connell's *complicit masculinity*. The conforming male represents a position of medium social status: the type of masculinity that insufficiently measures up to a traditional ideal image of masculinity, while remaining off the radar for repeated penalization of non-normative masculinity. A conforming male is not at the forefront of the group hierarchy, yet he enjoys some of the privileges that alpha males achieve for the group. Importantly, although the conforming male may disagree with some of the harmful behavior of his fellow men, he generally supports, and conforms to, the dynamics of the group, as exclusion would deprive him of the group's benefits. The men who belong to a group while staying off the bully radar have been described as "the surrounding group of friends" (Robin), the boys who adapt in order to belong to a group (Kevin), followers (Nadir), remaining silence (Sander) and justifiers of harm (Giovanni). They are the group members who praise an alpha for his non-normative traits, as described in Mauro's illustration above, while joining in when the alpha male scolds an inferior for his non-normative traits. In this sense, conforming males are instrumental for maintaining a social structure, in that they function as allies to the powerful in return for membership, social status or other benefits. With Giovanni's story about the fact that he lied about being sexually active, Giovanni offered a telling example of his conformity to the strict masculinity norms of his peer group.

For me it came really late: my first time was at eighteen years old. However, I always lied about it. That I was active since I was twelve or fourteen years old. Otherwise, it would have been impossible for me to even make friends at all. Because, sometimes I just walked girls to some place and I really just politely brought her home. I was sixteen years old, like, she joined me on my bicycle and gave me a kiss. But yeah, when the guys asked me "Where were you?" then I had to tell them "Yes I joined her in her home" and "You know I can't talk too much about what we have done, but..."

In his maneuvers to maintain his friendships, Giovanni felt obliged to create fictional sexual conquests, whereas he in fact was just not that eager to have sex with the girls he was seeing. His lies presented him with a moral dilemma however, as they ruined the perceived chastity of the girls whom he lied about. This resulted in more efforts from Giovanni's side to, on the one hand, protect the girls' safety, while on the other hand, keeping his lies intact by claiming ownership of the girls and disallowing other guys to have any form of contact with them. Although he did

not actually do the deed that would grant his place in the group, his make-belief was sufficient to prevent a dilemma for the group to either bring him down or show that they accepted alternative behavior. As a result, the group requirements remained unaltered, but Giovanni did receive social status and bottles of beer.

In this light, we may state that some of the men described under *inferior male*, who conformed to traditional masculinity norms in order to be released from inferiority, have taken a position of conforming masculinity as well. What they also show us, is that an important benefit of fitting in with the group that surrounds an alpha male, is that one belongs to a winning team. As Quincy chose to take distance from his gay friend for instance, he avoided being part of a team that would be bullied and excluded. The conforming male in this sense represents a manner of social survival in a context where alternative behavior, or belonging to the wrong group, is punished.

### *Deprived male*

The fourth masculinity to be discussed here is the *deprived male*, which is similar to Connell's *marginalized masculinity*. This form of masculinity concerns the intersection of masculinity with other social structures, such as most notably ethnicity and class. 'Deprived' corresponds to marginalized, as the peripheral treatment (marginalization) of groups in society deprives members of those groups of economic resources, cultural validity and political representation. In this study, this mainly involves black and Middle-Eastern men regarding ethnicity. Class is mostly divided in terms of educational level. At various instances, these two were mentioned interchangeably, as a significant deal of lowly educated men appeared to be black or Middle Eastern.

Deprivation of cultural validity involves the negative cultural image of ethnic minorities and lowly educated people. The majority of respondents depicted them as men who express more harmful masculinity traits than white and/or highly educated men. They were said to express less vulnerability, more cockiness, more peer pressure, less understanding of sex education, less respect of women and an overall more traditional interpretation of gender roles. Whether respondents were right to observe that these behaviors are indeed more present amongst groups with non-Western ethnic backgrounds and/or lower education or not, we may observe that the majority of respondents linked at least some negative behaviors to these ethnic and educational backgrounds. Meanwhile, a white and highly educated background gave way to more positive feedback. The following quote clearly illustrates this mechanism:

Look, you'll have your feelings of lust and with that, you'll have to have your social inhibitions, like they say, so to act like a proper citizen. By that I mean the values and norms that we have in our Western society. ... For instance, I have young men who are Muslim, and they can talk all tough about "bitches" and who knows what. ... But then I'm like, "Hey, we don't directly see women as an object of lust."

*Pim (37), youth worker*

Pim, a white native Dutch male himself, speaks of feelings of lust and social inhibitions, the latter of which would lead to being a proper citizen. He then goes on to say that the virtue of containing oneself is part of Western society, and that "we" (people native to a Western society) do not directly see women as objects of lust. He opposes these values and norms to Muslim young men whom he works with. His rhetoric hereby creates an us and them contrast, in which Western society is contrasted against a Muslim other, the latter of whom apparently sees women directly as objects of lust. Hence, in order to become

a proper citizen, one would need to conform to Western norms and values, which apparently prescribe social inhibitions against feelings of lust. Pim's statement hereby illustrates a pattern of cultural contrast that other respondents tended to offer as well. Not all of these respondents went as far as to speak of "us" and "them", yet differentiating between class- and racial groups was pervasive all the same. This pattern of thinking in terms of cultural contrasts grants cultural recognition to the white and highly educated, while it deprives non-white and lowly educated people of cultural recognition. This way of thinking corresponds to Giovanni's fellow student's racialized argumentation that he, as a proper white boy, would never commit sexual violence. This demonstrates how the deprivation of cultural validation of one group can be instrumental to members of the group who do receive this validation.

Another frequently named aspect of deprived masculinity is social-economic deprivation. This refers to the structural social-economic dispossession of groups in society along racial and class lines. Especially youth workers spoke of their work in neighborhoods where unemployment and poverty are pervasive. Some young men spoken of, live with great debts, fail to get a job and stay on welfare. One normative trait of masculinity however, as explained above, is to be rich and to afford luxury. When living in poverty, it is extremely difficult to measure up to this normative trait. Furthermore, traditional norms to not show vulnerability and to be self-reliant have been reported to lead to denial of one's deprived financial state, leading to the build-up of debts and refusal to accept help. Another reported way of dealing with unemployment is to make money outside of the legal economy. Kevin explained the process:

If I put this really simple, then masculinity is, I think, a little bit based on status. So the higher you're on the ladder, especially on the street, the more respect you'll receive and the more *stoer* you'll be. ... But I also think it's about how you're able to take care of yourself. ... That was my motivation to finish my academics. But to others it is also that they want to be independent, that they can't find employment and then earn their money in a completely different way. ... Yeah, that could be drugs, I have seen it a lot.

What Kevin introduces here, is a form of compensating for a lack of normative masculinity traits, such as financial self-reliance, by finding alternative means to still conform to that masculinity norm. If a lack of income and self-reliance prevail, street status can still be attained by dealing drugs.

Deprivation of cultural validity and socioeconomic wellbeing creates lines of otherness, in which groups are cast as culturally inferior, while these same people are also structurally more likely to be unemployed, lowly educated and poor. The relation between these two aspects of deprivation has not been clarified in the data, but it is clear that mostly ethnic minorities find themselves in positions of deprivation. This is not to say that the white poor do not face similar problems; they merely have been discussed less in the interviews – perhaps due to the urban regions in which the respondents work. The negative cultural image, as deduced from respondents' narratives about deprived males, comes down to a hyper masculine stereotype of deprived men, as it consists of cockiness, disrespect of women and various characteristics of toughness. When deprived of cultural validity and economic resources, inflated masculinity becomes an attractive option in order to compensate for what is lost. Self-reliance through criminality is one aspect of it, aggression and showing off control over women and other men are other ways to gain street status. One role model who shows this sort of behavior is Badr Hari, a Moroccan-Dutch boxing superstar:

Badr Hari is *the* macho, *the* tough guy of whom everyone is afraid. And that is their image of *the* man, so to say. ... Then, we do try to turn them a little, like: "Yes okay, can you tell me more? What else is he known for?" And then his criminal offenses come to the surface.

... There is always someone who says “Yeah, but he beats women” ... so that they start thinking: “Yeah, that is not really good, is it? Yeah you know, he also does boxing at the disco. That is not okay, is it?”

Jack

This tough guy image, which the boys from Jack’s lowly educated group idealized, consisted of a hyper masculine, aggressive and frightening persona, as represented in Badr Hari’s reputation. Although these boys did not justify Hari’s violent behavior; it was the role model which they at first adhered to. Finally, gaining street status by showing off a hyper masculine persona brings us back to the public-private contradiction discussed in the context of the alpha male. Since this hyper masculine behavior is highly visible to the public eye, the groups of men who tend to turn to this sort of public demonstrations of masculinity are more vulnerable to being cast as a dangerous other.

This may explain the negative depictions that respondents offered regarding their lowly educated and mostly Muslim subjects. Meanwhile, privileged men, who may rather show socially desirable behavior in public, may tend keep their harmful behavior under more private circumstances. Hence, the generalizations of respondents with regard to white and highly educated men on the one hand and non-white lowly educated men on the other, indicate towards the presence of social stigma surrounding class and ethnicity. In this sense, we need to be careful to not assume behavior of any man due to his group membership, at least for the purpose of avoiding to make false and non-scientific conclusions.

### *Resisting male*

The final masculinity to be distinguished is the *resisting male*, which is not similar to any of Connell’s masculinities. In fact, she did not distinguish a fifth masculinity. From this study, however, respondents represented an alternative position within the male hierarchy, which has not been captured in the male types above. The resisting male concerns a type of masculinity that disagrees with the current culture of gender inequity and actively attempts to make a social change. What distinguishes him from other males, is that resistant masculinity is rather about the refusal to conform itself, than about how it is received by other men – these aspects of social status are rather captured in the other masculinities. A resisting male does however take a position within the male pecking order, as a critical opponent who wishes to alter its structure.

Whereas an important deal of resistance comes from boys and men outside of a gender-transformative context, the resisting male has mostly been represented in the personal narratives of sexuality informers and gender activists, who developed most of their ideas during their gender studies or work at gender transformative organizations. However, resisting men have developed a significant deal of their stances with regard to gender in relation to a myriad of people outside of their organizational contexts. These have been reported to consist of male and female role models within their families, female friendships, female family members, girlfriends and a feminist university teacher. Another important reason to resist gender inequity involved the struggles and feelings of injustice, which resisting men had experienced during their lives, and to which gender transformative perceptions offered an answer. Robin and Maurice their struggles involved their own sexual orientation and gender identity, to which queer theory and the LGBTQ scene offered solace, as well as led to their interest for gender activism. Luuk, Frank, Adriaan and Giovanni raised how they personally witnessed gender injustice, and how this shaped their desire to transform gender inequity, which they further realized in activist organizations. Jack and Sander first grew into most of their transformational gender perspectives and ideals as they coincidentally bumped into their jobs as sexuality informers.

Respondents took a position of resistance in three ways. The first is to educate other men about gender inequity, the second is to refuse to conform to some of the normative traits of masculinity at some point in time, and the third is to actively pursue non-normative traits. The education that resisting men offer takes place in interpersonal contexts, where they offer alternative ideas on masculinity through dialogue. Maurice for instance, calls out his roommate when he makes sexist remarks about women. Luuk frequently dialogues with his brother, in order to awaken him to the relevance and prevalence of gender inequality. These are examples of peer education in a private setting. Meanwhile, most of the respondents of this study are active in an organizational context. They encourage groups of young men to dialogue about their perspectives on masculinity, women and sexuality through transformative exercises and methods. Their goal hereby is not to simply tell boys and young men how to think and behave, but rather to challenge them to rationalize and justify their inequitable thoughts and behavior. Apart from education, respondents also reported that they at least at some points in their lives, refuse to conform to normative masculinity traits, as some of these traits do not fit their principles for change. For instance, Luuk left his old peer group as he no longer wished to play the invulnerable and superficial role that he was expected to play. Quincy cries from time to time in order to make space for his vulnerable self. Robin wears make-up, as he does not wish to conform to a single gender. Maurice walks away during arguments, as he refuses to conform to the masculinity norms of competition and showing defeat. Furthermore, other respondents rather described their alternative behavior in relation to women, which will be discussed in the chapters hereafter.

Although resisting males dedicate themselves towards achieving gender justice, no respondent claimed to have all the answers to how to reach this goal, and gender justice did not look the same to all of them. Where Adriaan for instance sees transforming potential in rather traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity as represented in Tantra principles, Maurice and Robin explicitly oppose the existence of this gender binary thinking altogether. In any case, most respondents reported that their transformative ideals and solutions were part of a learning process, in which they took new knowledge on the subject and interactions with various people as lessons to reinvent their resisting selves.

The resisting male his desire and active involvement for gender justice shows us an important perspective on the current gendered system of power and privilege. They offer us a perspective that change is possible, and in fact, that it is already happening. Whereas the previous masculinities were either at the forefront of male supremacy and hierarchy, or at least instrumental to it, the resisting male is rather at the forefront of altering structural inequality. The refusal of resisting males to conform to traditional gender roles shows us that alternative masculinities are possible. Their alternative behavior denaturalizes existing constructs and beliefs on masculinity, as they expose and advocate the presence and validity of non-traditional masculinity amongst men.

#### *4.2.3 Conclusion*

The findings on masculinities thus far concerned compositions of normative and non-normative masculinity traits, dynamics between men, and masculinity types. First, it is important to note that normative masculinity constructions are composed in relation to the suppression of femininity, which is cast as inferior to masculinity and strongly associated with male homosexuality. Looking at the composition of masculinity within, we can distinguish normative and non-normative masculinity traits. Deviations from normative masculinity traits repeatedly lead to punitive consequences. In the process in which men impose masculinity norms on one another, of which invulnerability has appeared as the most important, a man's relative position within the male hierarchy plays a crucial role.

These positions, as described as masculinities, are not to be confused with individuals or groups of men. They rather tell us something about the positions that men may find themselves in, as they move through a hierarchical gender order. By manner of illustration, Giovanni poses an interesting example: he finds himself in the position of a deprived male when he is identified with a stigma that people attach to his ethnic background, while he is also a resisting male when he functions as a gender activist in front of a class. Furthermore, he may hold a position of authority as a project leader for his organization, whereas in his younger years, he rather took the position of a conforming male in order to fit in with his peer group. As Giovanni experienced, amongst all of his fellow respondents, men may shift between masculinities during their life course, depending on the context in which they find themselves. Masculinities are in this sense fundamentally relational, positions in the gender order are taken and assigned between men. Moreover, as argued above, whereas the alpha male is at the forefront of the gender hierarchy, the inferior, conforming and deprived males are each in their own way instrumental to the current gender order. However, this chapter identified a masculinity that is not instrumental: the resisting male presents us with a masculinity that refuses to conform to traditional gender norms. He hereby disrupts common concepts of what it means to be a man, by demonstrating deviations from traditional role patterns towards other men.

These insights on power structures between men will serve as a foundation to understanding men's notions and feelings towards women and sexuality, as well as their behaviors with regard to women and sex. The following chapters will explore the linkages that respondents present between their experiences with masculinity and their ideas and behavior with regard to women and sex.



### 4.3 Notions of the Sexual Self

- entitled to sex • first encounter with sexuality • man must be rough • man must pursue sex • man must take the lead • marry/date a chaste woman • men are equal to women • men have a high desire for sex • physical traits • principle to wait for consent • seduce (many) women • sex is exciting/scary • sex is/should be like porn • sex is/should be unlike porn

#### *4.3 Codes on “Notions/norms of the sexual self”*

Exploring the link between masculinities and sexuality, it is important to first understand how men see themselves sexually, as this reveals norms and beliefs against which men measure themselves and each other. Where men position themselves sexually can be informative about how they position women. We will also explore the link between dynamics amongst men and masculinities. This chapter will hereby delve into the ideational realm surrounding sexuality, and combine this with behaviors that result from such ideas. The sub-research question this chapter aims to answer is: How do men see themselves sexually?

The first section discusses sexual masculinity norms that concern quantity: the encouragement for men to have sex with many women. The second section concerns other norms, namely of how to have sex and with whom. These sections furthermore explain how these sexual norms of masculinity influence the perceptions that men have of themselves and of sex, and how this influences their sexual practices.

#### *4.3.1 Norms of quantity*

##### *Seduce many women*

Norms about masculinity traits do not limit themselves to the platonic realm; they are omnipresent in the romantic and sexual realm as well. The normative composition of masculine sexuality traits can be characterized by an archetype: the hunter in pursuit of sexual conquests over women. The characteristics of this hunter prescribe men's behavior as well as describe how men are regularly perceived to be by nature.

The most prevalent normative sexual trait is that men must seduce many women. The quantity of sexual conquests is a way to instantly gain social status amongst peers. Respondents described young men, who are known to have had sex, as being able to sit back and relax, to receive admiration from their peers and to rise in the hierarchy. On the other hand, failure to conform to this trait has been reported to lead to personal disappointment, or criticism from peers. The quest to seduce women has frequently been reported to be a goal in and of itself, occupying the minds of young men when they go out, in their encounters with women and when they are spending time with their peers. Luuk illustrated the process in his narrative:

Amongst the boys, it was kind of a thing that kissing multiple girls on a night, that was really cool. ... [But] Boys who went out explicitly with the goal to kiss a girl, they were moody and disappointed afterwards because they didn't succeed.

Seducing women as a goal in and of itself predominated the minds of Luuk's peers enough to kill their mood after going out if they did not succeed.

##### *High desire for sex*

Next to seducing many women, a man is also expected to have a high desire for sex and to act on this desire whenever chances avail. This trait is highly normative, as men were repeatedly reported to criticize each other when a prolonged interaction with a woman did not end up in sex, or when a man admitted that he was not ready to have sex. As mentioned above, Giovanni experienced this when he felt the need to lie when he walked a girl home without having sex with her. Whereas Giovanni's repeated conformity to his peer's expectations kept him safe from social punishment, one of his friends confessed to be feeling insecure about having sex amongst other men after he refused to join a gang bang:

People questioned us, like "Why did you not join in? Were you scared?" You know, so we had a lot of explaining to do. ... I believe I told them that I didn't think it was hygienic, or some other lame excuse. But in reality I felt insecure. ... I think that the other guy said "I didn't dare with so many people around." ... So they were understanding towards me, and they left me alone. But the other guy had a really tough time because he told the truth. They bullied him really bad and long for that. For a while he wasn't also welcome in our group. So eventually he made up for it by having sex with another girl with someone watching, something like that. And then he was allowed to come back.

We can see here that a man's desire for sex is a norm that can be strong enough to exclude a man for not joining a gang rape. Insecurity hereby was another non-normative trait that made matters worse for Giovanni's friend. Sexual activities, such as even rape, have hereby become a way of conforming to masculinity norms. The threat of inferiority lurked over both Giovanni and his friend's heads, out of which lying and public sex proved to be manners of social survival.

Men's high desire for sex is beside a norm also a belief or assumption about men's nature. Respondents spoke of men's "lusts", which they are assumed to have in abundance and which they should or should not control. Maurice, a female-to-male transgender, described how his parents implicitly held this assumption in their warnings about men, back when Maurice was still a girl:

"Hey, as a girl, you shouldn't go to certain places at certain times, because then something could happen." This was really from the idea that "As a girl, you shouldn't do that, because boys could do something to you."

*Maurice (27), activist and peer educator*

In Maurice's parents' words, there is an assumption that boys are automatically likely to do something to a girl. They do not question boys' behavior, they merely take it as a given, expecting girls to avoid the possibility of encountering a boy or man at night. More accounts of the like stated about men that "You'll have your lusts" (Pim) or "He looked at me in this strange way. Like, which guy wouldn't want to have sex?" (Giovanni). Men's high desire for sex is in the cases above an assumption, as it is believed about someone, simply because he is a man. This does not imply that there are no men who do in fact have a high desire for sex. Maurice himself, as he took testosterone, experienced that his desire for sex grew considerably. Furthermore, reports included men who obsessed over sex, or who simply had a high number of partners (35 at 18 years old). Therefore, we may conclude that at least some men have a high desire for sex. Nevertheless, the assumptive nature of this trait has been linked with a second assumption about men's sexuality. This comprises of the assumption that, with their expected high desire for sex, men do not have sexual boundaries of their own. This assumption leads to boys thinking: "I always have to like it" (Quincy). We could also relate this to the normative trait that men should not be vulnerable. Drawing a sexual boundary, or "not liking it", would not only show that a man's desire

for sex is limited, it also shows that he is vulnerable sexually, as he has boundaries, which women may be able to cross.

#### 4.3.2 *How to have sex and with whom*

##### *Take the lead*

Normative sexual traits do not merely involve the quantity of desire and conquest; they also comprise of directions on how to have sex and with whom. First, a man is expected to take the lead, an expectation which nearly all respondents spoke of. Taking the lead between men and women usually entails that a man takes initiative, ranging from first meeting his woman of interest, to initiating sexual interactions.

This has several implications. Sander experienced this as an opportunity to show off to his friends that he had the courage to go about initiating the first contact with a girl. First initiations consisted of talking to a woman on a house party, as well as of pinching women in the buttock or breast, which is something that Sander's friends still do today. Luuk described it as a sort of sport that he and his friends practiced when they went out. With regard to sexual activities, a number of respondents assumed their role as initiator, in which they had found tactics to make sure to please the woman they were with. On the other hand, respondents have also experienced the expectation to take initiative as a pressure and sometimes as a nuisance. Some men were described to be too insecure to approach women, as the shadow of rejection continuously hung over their head. With regard to sex, men also felt pressure from the expectation to take the lead, as they did not always know what a woman was into. In this sense, sex was an exploration of a woman's boundaries, which they may or may not cross.

Expressing another form that taking the lead can take, Adriaan described how he, in his search for how to be the classic masculine man in the bedroom in order to fight his insecurities, found the "Sex God Method", which taught him how to take the lead in the bedroom:

Well, with that dominance, which was one of the main pillars of the Sex God Method, and that clearly came to the fore in that how-to-make-your-girlfriend-give-you-a-blowjob story. Like okay, mostly that dominance is key. And then also a sort of "be rough", that also came to the fore. So that is what I started to do with my girlfriend.

In this narrative, taking the lead sexually as a man entails being dominant and rough. It also entails the idea that sexual activities are something that need to be achieved, which would in turn confirm a man's dominance.

Putting oneself in this position of sexual domination, while on a quest to achieve sexual activities, may either reflect or give cause for believing that one is in fact *entitled* to receiving these sexual activities from a girl. Giovanni explained how some of his wealthy and highly educated college classmates believed that if a girl took a drink from them, they would own her. Or, literally, "That is my whore". "And they could handle "no" really poorly" (Giovanni). One of these highly educated classmates confessed to using date rape drugs to "Make sure you seal the deal", while showing no awareness of any feelings of guilt. He took his right to having sex with women for granted.

##### *Sexual entitlement, porn and frustrations*

Frank (24, activist and peer educator) had feelings of entitlement to receiving erotic photographs from his girlfriend Anne, even though he would never send any erotic pictures of himself:

Frank: No. I have never made nude pictures of myself. ...

Simone: Do they not fancy that?

Frank: Yes... they did drop a hint.

Simone: Okay!

Frank: But that is really a boundary I wouldn't cross, because I do not trust Whatsapp and Facebook.

When his sexual frustrations due to Anne studying abroad reached a level that he convinced her to send sexts after her saying "no", he held onto her sexts after she ended the relationship:

Because she has regretted breaking up with me for months, or at least doubted it. And that is why I felt like I had the right to those photos, because there was a chance that she might come back.

In retrospect, Frank reflected critically upon his actions:

And actually, it feels really douchey to ask nudies from someone who isn't actually intending to... and that she would cross a certain boundary, just because I have a boyfriend status. Because normally, she wouldn't do that.

Missing out on the sexual aspect of their relationship, Frank felt entitled to his girlfriend's nudies on grounds of his boyfriend status. After they broke up, he held on to them because he expected himself and her to come back together after she would come home. Meanwhile, he did not expect himself to return the favor, although he had a feeling that his girlfriend (and later his next girl, who sexted him spontaneously) wanted him to. He did not trust the social media platforms, which he expected them to use, for himself. This reflects an aspect of entitlement that consists of inequality: 'entitled: believing oneself to be inherently deserving of privileges or special treatment' (Oxford Dictionary of English). Men who feel entitled to sex from women in this sense apply double standards, in which men have the right to receive sexual favors from women. This comes to the surface when the situation is turned around, and a man would not expect himself to return the same sexual favors as he would expect from a woman.

Adriaan and Frank linked some of their own and some of their friends' sexual desires and feelings of entitlement to porn. As they both explained, porn generally reflects scenarios of men who sexually dominate women and who make these women do sexual favors for them. This position of control, in which porn puts men, reflects men as sexual initiators, who achieve sexual activities from women, and who often play it rough. Adriaan explained how this impacted his image of self in his porn addiction:

I think that if you watch porn, then you'll have a certain image like, being a man, this is what I desire and should receive from a woman. ... And things are always pretty rough in porn, really like that male dominance, like ejaculating in the face and that sort of things. And I think, that is also what I would desire. In a way, instead of being with just the two of you, you'll get a third perspective of how you usually see it reflected and how it should happen.

This third perspective that Adriaan got from porn instructed his image of self, as he identified with the men in porn and desired what they "received" on-screen. He also explained how porn's extreme gender

roles, in which men dominate over women, formed a way for him to compensate for his longstanding feelings of inferiority. In his sexual relationship with his girlfriends, this translated into frustrations on his side for not getting what he wanted:

It started merrily, but at some point I got this obsessive urge to get something out of sex that wasn't there, and that caused me to lose contact with the other.

After having studied the Sex God Method while abroad, in which male dominance and roughness are key, Adriaan returned to his girlfriend with new sexual practices:

I have treated her pretty roughly. And yes, I think that it was not good at all. I think I really hurt her with that. ... She didn't really vocalize a boundary, but considering her insecurities and how she blamed herself for all of it, I can imagine that she wouldn't do that. And yeah, I crossed a boundary, because I saw her cry. And for me at that point, it was really not clear whether that was a good or bad thing.

Adriaan conformed to a rough, hyper masculine image of men, which shaped his perception of sex with his girlfriend to the extent that he crossed her sexual boundaries and could not work out if her crying was a good or a bad thing. Part of this masculine Sex God and porn imagery, is that masculinity comprises of achieving sexual activities, preferably in a rough manner.

Frank explained the role that porn played in his friends' sexual frustrations, which had something to do with the fact that some of them had never had sex. In their frustrations when they interacted with women who merely wished to be friends, Frank's friends interpreted nearly every gesture as a possible lead to something more: "Because they saw in porn, like, "Oh I need to stay over", and he says "you can stay in my bed" rather than offering her a mattress next to the bed." Since porn will by definition show scenarios that lead to sex, some of Frank's friends who watch porn look for similar cues in their platonic interactions with women. This is not to say that porn automatically leads to frustrations, desires and constant search for sexual cues. Nevertheless, the statements offered here do demonstrate that porn has the potential to do so for some men, as they see themselves reflected in its male image.

#### *Only get serious with a chaste woman*

Finally, there is a normative sexual trait which, together with the norm for men to seduce many women, poses quite a double standard. Men are reported to expect one another to only get serious with a chaste woman. This norm consists of an expectation from women, which directly opposes what is expected from men. Dating or simply having sex with a chaste woman elevates the status of men in front of their peers. Giovanni explained that if he would have had sex with a girl who had a chaste reputation, then his friends would have said: "Yeah, you're the man! You are really awesome." Then he would have gotten beer and other such presents, as he stated. Luuk explained how, although he and his friends made a sport out of kissing multiple girls on the same night, his friends mocked him for kissing a girl who had kissed another guy that same evening. As a result of the mockery, Luuk felt ashamed of being with girls who had "a reputation" in high school since. Furthermore, Frank declared how his friends praised him for being with a girlfriend whose reputation was chaste, as opposed to the girlfriend he had before her, as his friends said: "You made a lot of progress, being with her".

On the other hand, whereas some men mock each other for kissing women with "a reputation", the men whom Giovanni described would rather criticize their peers for letting the opportunity go of having sex with an unchaste woman, assuming that she would easily agree to having sex. Moreover,

some young men expect themselves and their peers to not get seriously involved with any woman, as that would be either showing a weak heart, or have the consequence that one lets down his friends in order to be with his girlfriend.

In any way, getting serious with an unchaste woman, rather than keeping it to a casual fling, has generally been reported to be frowned upon amongst men. This sexual norm for men to date or have sex with a chaste woman is in line with seeing the male as a hunter, who is after sexual conquest. If he sexually conquers a chaste woman, it means that he has achieved something that other men have not proven to be able to do. Male competition plays a clear role in this narrative, as men need to be the first in order to be the real conqueror. This does not however fully explain the norm; men's judging of women further clarifies the mechanism. This will be explained in the following section, along with what makes a woman chaste in the eyes of men and its further implications.

#### *4.3.3 Conclusion*

How men see themselves sexually has been informed by norms and beliefs about masculine sexuality, in which the male is represented as a hunter, who is always ready to have sex, and who is able to achieve sexual conquests over women, with extra social credits for conquering a chaste woman. Non-normative traits hereby consist of not being ready for sex, showing sexual vulnerability as well as to get serious with an unchaste woman. Male sexual dominance is hereby a norm, as well as an assumed privilege of men, who feel entitled to sexual favors from women. This image is reflected in – and reinforced through porn, in which these sexual masculinity norms are pervasive. This chapter also demonstrated how a hyper-masculine rough imagery of men, as well as feelings of entitlement, can lead to sexual boundary-crossing behavior, amongst which sexting and rape.

#### 4.4 Notions and Behavior towards Women and Sex

● (in) love ● apply double standard ● assign to family/household role ● dependent ● disrespect women ● divide women in chastity categories ● do not take woman serious ● expect woman to say "no" ● expect woman to want it ● female family/girlfriend's chastity ● men are equal to women ● principle to wait for consent ● respectful of women ● seduce (many) women ● sex is exciting/scary ● sex is/should be like porn ● sex is/should be unlike porn ● slut shaming ● slut/whore ● unequal to men ● victim blaming ● virgin/chaste ● weak/vulnerable ● wild/loose ● woman as lust object

● abuse/harass women ● abused/harassed by woman ● addicted to porn ● approach in person ● be romantic/spoil a woman ● be rough ● be with multiple women ● beat/attack woman ● befriend woman ● brag about sexual conquest ● call out name sex partner ● control woman's decisions ● defend a woman/women ● do not wait/ask for consent ● drug a woman ● experiment with sex ● gang bang ● get drugged by woman ● get paid for sex ● group sex ● have sex/be sexually active ● have unsafe sex ● have/send sexts of women ● improve quality of sex ● lie about sexual conquest ● live/work separately from women ● look away/ignore/deny/justify ● maintain relation purely sexual ● maintain relationship ● manipulate woman into sex ● no romance ● pimp/loverboy ● proceed/convince after "no" ● protect woman's privacy ● rape ● refuse sexual act ● respectful of women ● rush to sex ● seduce (many) women ● seduce women on social media ● send sexts of self ● sexually intimidate woman ● sexually molest woman ● stop after "no" ● take responsibility for boundaries ● takes the lead ● treat woman with disrespect ● usher into submission ● wait with sex ● wait/ask for consent ● woman pushes for sex/romance ● woman takes the lead

#### *4.4 Codes on "Notions and feelings towards women and sex" and on "(Sexual) behavior towards women"*

This chapter aims to answer the sub-research question: How is masculinity expressed in how men think about and treat women, and how they think about and practice sex? Having discussed how men look at themselves sexually, it is important to shift our focus towards the ways in which men feel about and see women, in order to understand how they treat women sexually. This will furthermore reveal the role that notions of sexuality and representations of women play in dynamics between men and vice versa. We will take this information from men's narratives that involve women, analyzing how women are represented in these narratives. This chapter will first discuss the construction of femininity in general, sexually and in relation to men. This is followed by an explanation on victim blaming, after which the chapter analyzes women's chastity and how this relates to categorizations of femininities. Throughout, these perceptions of women will be discussed in relation to practices, which respondents linked to the perceptions they or other men held with regard to women and femininity.

By way of introduction, sexuality informants described young men's responds to an exercise, in which they are asked to offer synonyms of women or girls. The most popular synonyms are: whore/ho (*hoer*, *ho*), slut (*slet*), *trut* (literally: "cunt", however rather used as "cow") and bitch. Strikingly, these terms are mostly used as terms of abuse for women, whereas the young men were merely asked for synonyms. It was reported as a rather rare occasion that positive synonyms such as honey, sweetheart or hottie were uttered. After this first part of the exercise, the participating young men were asked to name important women in their lives. These mainly consisted of girlfriends, mothers, sisters, aunts and grandmothers. Subsequently, the boys were asked to link their previously named synonyms to these women in their lives. In all the reported exercises, this latter instruction lead to distressful reactions amongst the young men, stating that they did not want to choose between slut, whore, bitch and cunt for describing their female loved ones. This dissonance is interesting, considering that in general, the young men who participate in this exercise use terms of abuse in their synonyms of women, whereas they would not wish their own name-calling on their female loved ones. This dissonance consists of,

on the one hand negatively representing women, while on the other hand caring for– and protecting women in their lives. We will continue this section by deconstructing this dissonance, while explaining how this reflects on masculinities.

#### *4.4.1 Unequal to men*

The first representation of women to be discussed is that women are seen as unequal to men. This entails a construction of femininity that is made in opposition to masculinity. The following statement is inspired by Tantra, and clearly illustrates this opposition between “the masculine” and “the feminine”:

Masculinity symbolizes the calm, for standing, on the soil, round like a ship that crosses the ocean. And the woman rather symbolizes the ocean. Very grand, and deep, it could go in any direction, unpredictable. The feminine, right? Not women. The feminine. Kind of like that Yin Yang idea. ... And there is also something like the man with the scepter, you know, who stands. Who stands still and the woman can hold onto him. Or, the feminine can hold onto him.

*Adriaan (27), activist and peer educator*

This narrative, which Adriaan held onto as a more positive replacement of the porn and Sex God Method-informed narrative of the dominating male and the woman he dominated, contains several notions that define femininity in opposition to masculinity. Indeed, this represents a single masculinity, as well as a single femininity, although Adriaan did acknowledge that women and men could take on either of these personae. Whereas the masculine is cast as calm, stable and firmly in the soil, and as the one who holds the scepter (a symbol of leadership and sovereignty), the feminine is cast as grand but unstable, unpredictable and in need of a sovereign man. In other words, women lack steadiness, soil and firmness and are dependent on a man to direct them. Furthermore, Adriaan referred to Yin and Yang, which is another binary representation of masculinity and femininity, and represents the former as active, while representing the latter as passive.

#### *Dependent, weak and vulnerable*

As stated by other respondents, another but not unrelated notion of women, is characterized by assigning women to their role in the family and household. Such associations with women included cleaning, motherhood, homely and a caretaker of the children. This family-assigned image of femininity was acknowledged to be a traditional role for women, which was generally presented in combination with a man who was the financial provider of the family. This narrative represents women as domestic caretakers who are financially dependent on men. This financial dependence is furthered in utterances on the gold digger, which is a stereotype of a woman who seduces men for their money.

This dependent representation of women is furthermore supplemented by the following trait of femininity, which casts the female as weak and vulnerable. The Tantra tale gave a hint of this weak and vulnerable image of femininity, describing the female as unsolid and too weak to stand on her own feet, since she is rather like the unpredictable ocean, in contrast to the standing male in the soil. Frank found another representation of female vulnerability in a video game named Tomb Raider:

In one of the cut scenes, ... she was more or less raped. And that was a little controversial, but a lot of the players thought it was cool or awesome. ... Like, with a female character who is in a lot of ways the same as for instance Crocodile Dundee or Indiana Jones, but that she, because she is a woman, has certain vulnerabilities that a man... if Indiana Jones would be sexually molested in a movie, then that would probably just be weird.



Lara Croft, the female protagonist in Tomb Raider, was more or less raped, which is a sign of vulnerability that is not usually shown in male characters. This sexual vulnerability is further perpetuated in narratives about women, in which the respondent ascribed a sexual vulnerability to the women of the story, which the men did not receive.

Giovanni expressed his worries about women who join guys to parking lots and bushes for casual sex:

And you should decide that for yourself, because that is your right to autonomy. But then I think, you are so much more worth than just letting yourself be taken in the bushes. Or, you're so sweet and beautiful and then you let somebody treat you like dirt.

Although Giovanni stresses women's right to autonomy and free choice, his narrative of casual sex in the bushes and on parking lots singles women out as delicate and passive. First, he links a woman's worth to how she is treated sexually by a man. Her beauty and sweetness adds to her image of innocence and delicacy: she is beautiful and sweet and therefore needs to be handled with care. Secondly, note how he uses passive sentences to describe sexual activities that are apparently done *to* women, rather than done *by* women. On the other hand, this image of vulnerability and innocence has also worked against Giovanni at some point, when a woman sexually harassed him in a night club. After she broke his necklace and ripped his shirt, a guard sent him out of the club, arguing that it must have been Giovanni harassing the young woman, giving him a dismissive look when Giovanni told him he refused to have sex with her. In this situation, multiple gendered assumptions played a role in the guard's judgement: he assumed that Giovanni was unlikely to refuse a woman for sex, he refused to believe that the woman was rather an active harasser than a passive victim, and it did not come to his mind that Giovanni might have been vulnerable to sexual harassment just as a woman can be.

This passive representation of women does not only add to the image of femininity; it is also complementary to the construction of masculinity. If women are vulnerable and dependent, whereas men are strong, invulnerable and self-reliant, then in relation to women, men are potential aggressors, but also potential leaders who guide women and heroes who save women from other dangerous and invulnerable men, or anything else for that matter. This is reflected in men's tendencies to play the hero in everyday situations, such as Kevin, who consistently refused to let his girlfriend carry her own grocery bags, up until the point where she gave up trying to carry them herself. This is also reflected in some men's attitudes on women going out alone, as they would become prone to other men's advances. This has been reported to have led to beating women for not picking up their phone, collecting and bringing girls from and to school by car every day and cutting women off from the outside world.

### *Sexual objects*

This passive representation of women is further reinforced when men talk about or treat women as sexual objects. We speak of sexual objectification in this study, when men reduce women to their sexual usability for a man. In this case, men do not look at a woman's own sexual agency and desires, or her other qualities beside her sexual attributes. This process includes the purely sexual interactions, which respondents and the men they discussed sought with regard to women. It also includes the instrumental use of women's sexuality in order to gain social credits amongst peers. It furthermore includes the sole focus upon female sexualized body parts, as well as their usage for male pleasure or entertainment. In this sense, sexual objectification strips women off of their humanity and reduces them to their sexual

appeal to a man. Frank's narrative about his friends, who are gamers, presents a clear case of sexual objectification:

The gamers, they run into a lot of difficulties. For instance, a few of my friends still live at home and so they miss a certain interaction. And all of their friends are male, so they miss an entire dimension of what a woman is. So they'll look at films of naked women every day. Porn. ... And if they ask me for advice and I say "Go and just talk to someone and just have a nice time." Then they're like "Yes, maybe I should treat women more like people. Rather than as objects which I need to conquer." ... So the women got pretty much objectified. Like, "We are going to look for *wijffes* [Dutch for female animals] to mate with", they literally said that. And because they'd use biological terms and refined language, they thought they could get away with it. And yes, that principle to score, that *stoer* language from *Jiskefet* [Dutch tv-show], like when you see someone [male friend] again, "Did you fuck anyone?" That prevailed.

Frank's friends lack of interactions with women beside a few female family members, in combination with sexualized imagery of women they saw around them in porn and games, resulted in their sole focus on women's sexuality, which prevented them to connect with women in a non-sexual manner. This lack of interaction with women can also be seen as a failure to conform to masculinity norms concerning the pursuit of sex and seducing many women, while also still living at home, which suggests a lack of self-reliance, which is another normative masculinity trait. Frank reported how this gave them a feeling of inferiority compared to peers who were sexually active. Referring to women as *wijffes* and using television-inspired sentences as running gags were not merely part of their playful manner of interacting amongst their male friends, this behavior was also a form of conforming to masculinity norms that prescribe sexual conquest. Meanwhile, this meant that women's sexuality continuously became instrumental to the laughs and jokes in their peer bonding, as well as to their conformation to masculinity norms.

#### 4.4.2 Victim blaming

##### *Responsibility to say "no"*

The representations of women as passive, vulnerable, and weak in opposition to men's active role in relation to women, can be characterized by a prey-hunter duality. Where men are represented as hunters, depictions of women could rather be condensed into the metaphor of prey, who are sexually acted upon by hunting men and therefore vulnerable to men's desires. This comes with a certain expected responsibility for women when they are interacting with men. This is the responsibility to say "no", in order to protect their own sexual boundaries or chastity. If a man hunts in his pursuit of sex – which has been described above as both a norm and an assumed natural part of being a man – a woman simply needs to stop him by saying "no". This principle has repeatedly been literally mentioned, as well as implied when men spoke of women who became victims because they were not resilient enough, or because they were not outspoken about their boundaries.

Several assumptions underlie this explanation of a woman's victimhood to sexual assault. First, its one-way direction towards women assumes that only women have sexual boundaries, which men are likely to cross. Secondly, its emphasis on setting clear boundaries has an underlying expectation that women are aware of their sexual boundaries at all times – or at least when men make a sexual move. Third, it assumes that a woman's resilience or "no" is enough to prevent a man from crossing her sexual boundaries anyway. An important consequence of this line of thinking is that, if men stay

out of this picture, the responsibility of “not being assaulted” solely rests on women. Note hereby how the passive sentence structure erases the assailant from the story.

In effect, there are multiple reports that feature narratives on female victims of assault, in which the narrator ends up blaming the victim when a man crosses her sexual boundaries. Returning to Frank’s sexting experience with Anne, we can see how this works. After he disclosed having asked for Anne’s erotic photos, he held Anne responsible for sending hers, whereas *he* convinced her after “no”:

Frank: Yes, but she should have picked a safer network to send it through. Anne sent it through Whatsapp... That is something I would never do.

Simone: So did you expect her to use another medium for sending her photos?

Frank: No I did not expect that. But the only thing I expected, is that if I would make clear that I fancied her photos, then she can always still say “no”. And that would have been fine for me.

Simone: Oh, so she said yes from the start?

Frank: Uhm, she did not say yes immediately. So maybe I whined a little, but she could have been more resolute saying “no”, I guess.

Reliving this story as he told it, Frank realized that he had been blind to his own role in it, which had caused him to completely hold Anne responsible for sending him her nudies. He realized that, by continuing to convince her after “no”, he actually crossed the sexual boundaries she set the first time he asked.

#### *“Asking for it”*

Furthermore, beside the expectation for women to say “no”, there is another representation of women that gives way to victim blaming. Of some women, men described in the interviews tended to think that “she was asking for it”. One way in which women are perceived to be “asking for it” is when they dress in a way that shows their feminine features. This was pointed out when students of sexuality informers justified the whistles and sexual remarks fired at women in educational videos. Another occasion when a woman’s chastity played a role in men’s victim blaming, was when a sixteen-year-old girl became the victim of a gang bang. The boy who orchestrated the event had manipulated her into it, by first pretending it was only going to be him and her. Later, four or five guys turned up in the room upstairs where the girl and the first guy were already having sex. Giovanni was witness to the event and, while he did not join in, he sat downstairs justifying the sexual assault that his peers were committing:

Downstairs I laughed about it with some of the guys, and I justified what was happening: “Yeah she deserved it, because she fucks everybody anyway. So what is bad about her fucking four, five guys? That is her own fault.” And at that moment, we were just laughing really hard about how demeaning they treated her. And that is why the boys who joined in were super cool.

Although the boys had orchestrated a surprise attack, Giovanni used her unchaste reputation to blame her for her gang rape at the time. Meanwhile, his peers gained social credits for raping her, while she was blamed for getting raped, and shamed for her perceived lack of chastity. Again, by holding her accountable for what happened to her, Giovanni granted approval to his peers, allowing them to remain unpunished, un-criticized, and to even be awarded for rape. It also prevented him from being the killjoy

amongst his friends and maintain the status quo. In this sense, when a bystander blames the victim, he conforms to the present power relations that underlie the event of abuse. Hence, the victim-blaming bystander can still belong to the group of the rapist(s). Importantly however, this is at the cost of having empathy for the victim, as well as of acknowledging who is actually responsible for raping a woman.

#### 4.4.3 *Women's chastity: femininities*

As the story above demonstrates, chastity is a crucial aspect of men's representations of women. Respondents described a strong tendency amongst men to judge and value women by their perceived chastity. Underlying this normative climate is a double standard, in which women are expected to avoid sexual interaction, or to put one's sexuality out there in her appearance. This is in stark contrast to the norms for men, who are expected to pursue and achieve sexual interactions, as well as to boast one's sexuality in public. This normative contrast forms a complex web of paradoxical expectations, in which men are on the one hand pressured to have sex with women, whereas they devalue these same women after the latter had sex with one or more men. On top of that, as explained above, there is an expectation of men to only become serious with a chaste woman. A prevalent way in which men have been reported to deal with these expectations, is to divide women into chastity categories. Simply put, there are two main categories of women: the virgin or chaste woman on the one hand, and the slut or whore on the other. Some men spoke of an in-between category of women who have had some sexual experience, but who kept their number of partners to a minimum.

##### *The virgin*

The chaste woman is a category of women, who have had no sex, or who keep it to a minimum. In order to belong to this category, refraining from sex itself is not always enough, one also needs to refrain from showing overt sexual desire, and dress in a way that covers enough of her feminine features (typically by avoiding short skirts). The chaste woman is furthermore associated with homeliness and motherhood – the type of woman who is expected to be able to take care of a man and his children. This fits the norm for men to seek for a chaste woman when it comes to long-term commitment. This following quote presents a case of a young man and his expectations of a chaste woman:

I've had a conversation once with a boy, which was about oral sex. Like, "Yeah, you wouldn't want oral sex, would you? With that same mouth, she'll kiss your children!" ... But then I inclined further: "What do you mean? Isn't that nice?" And then he told me, I don't know if it was true, but he told me that he had a girl who gave him blow jobs, but he just wouldn't introduce her to anyone. That was a kind of secret.

*Robin (27), sexuality informer*

The boy from Robin's class directly linked the mouth of a hypothetical girlfriend to his future children. If he would let a girl give him a blowjob, he would not introduce her to anyone and keep her a secret. On the other hand, young men who regularly treat women with disrespect, or talk about them in a disrespectful manner, have been reported to make exceptions for this chaste category of women, a category to whom they would commit in a relationship. Meanwhile, the chaste category of women has also been reported to deal with men's feelings of entitlement to ownership and control. Ownership and control do not merely concern girlfriends; they also extend to female family members. Men have generally been reported to expect female family members, most notably sisters, to remain chaste at all times. This expectation comes to the surface when men demand their girlfriends or sisters to dress chastely, when they protect their girlfriends or sisters from other men, or when they forbid their girlfriend to work with men or to go out without their boyfriend. This chastity expectation has at some

points manifested itself violently, as men have been reported to beat their daughter or spit on their cousin after intercepting sexually inclined letters, or beating a girlfriend after she cheated on her boyfriend. This behavior can be summarized as to protect one's girlfriend's and female family members' chastity, even when the woman whose chastity is protected is attacked or pervasively controlled in the process. One could think that a motivation behind this tendency to protect is that men feel affection for these women and do not wish for them to be treated badly, or to become victim to slut shaming. However, this empathetic motivation has hardly been reported in the interviews. Rather, protecting a girlfriend or female family member was taken for granted. More often, men reported that an unchaste girlfriend or family member reflects negatively on themselves or on their family in general. The following quote illustrates this point:

I have one sister. An older, little sister. And I have organized parties, proms. And there it was the case that she bought a dress, but I have to approve of it first, before she is allowed to wear it to the party. Because first, I don't think it is pretty, and I don't think it is proper, if too much nudity is revealed. And I have that with my girlfriend, but also with my sister or my mother or my female friends, with whom I associate.

*Kevin (29), youth worker*

Explaining his motivations, Kevin on the one hand stated that he did not wish for these women that other men would talk badly about them, and that his protective behavior was preventive. On the other hand, he also stated that he did not wish to be associated with women who dress improperly, because he wanted to have a civilized reputation – a reputation that is in line with his wish to raise children one day. He hereby presented men's negative communication about women as a default, while expecting women to adjust their behavior around men. Furthermore, the responsibility that Kevin took for women's chastity in order to protect his own reputation, suggests a contaminating effect that unchaste women apparently have on the men they associate with. Subsequently, Kevin expects women to change their behavior to the benefit of his own reputation. These ideas are in line with the normative expectation of men to only get serious with a chaste woman. In this sense, regulating the women around oneself to make them conform to femininity norms, can be seen as a man's conformation to masculinity norms.

### *The slut*

The other category in which men place women is the slut/whore category. This category contains women who are said to be "easy", "wild", "loose", "afgelikte boterham" (literally: licked-off sandwich), or simply, women who have had multiple sexual partners. It may also contain women who are merely associated with being a sexual being. This has been concluded by women's clothing, by their kissing multiple men on a night, by their having had more than one or two high-school relationships (sexual or non-sexual) or because they were merely seen with a man. It has also been reported that women who were assigned to this category were known to not be a virgin anymore, meaning that to be considered a slut or whore does not necessarily require to have had multiple sexual partners.

The process in which women are assigned to this category mainly consist of men's mutual conversations, in which they show off their own sexual conquests, naming the women with whom they had performed particular sexual activities. The judgement of a woman in such a conversation is based on the way in which the man treated her, or the number of times this particular woman came up in several of men's disclosures on sex. Interestingly, while a man's rough or rushed pursuit of sex raised his peer status, it negatively impacted the judgement that men had of the woman in question.

The shaming of these women, also known as slut shaming, is directly a way in which women are humiliated. Frank described how slut shaming had become integrated in his school's yearbook, in which a chapter was made on who had kissed whom – this list was alphabetically organized along the girls' names. This meant that girls' numbers of kissing partners were immediately visible by the number of times a girl was mentioned in a row, while counting boys' kissing partners required more work. As for the consequences: "Well, a yearbook has a lot of consequences. Because that is how you'll be remembered." The prioritization of girls' names in this case demonstrates an important aspect of slut shaming, which is visibility. Focusing on women's chastity creates especially visibility of women's sexuality, while pulling attention away from men's sexual behavior.

This becomes mainly evident in the functionality of slut shaming. Creating – and assigning women to – a slut/whore category served respondents and the men they discussed to point out which women they should not become serious with. Another reported function of this category is to work out which women will be easily persuaded into sex. This latter function is based on a widespread underlying assumption that women from this category are generally willing to have sex, and that they do not have sexual boundaries such as other women do. As demonstrated above in Giovanni's narrative on the gang rape he witnessed, this assumption can also be used to justify sexual assault. Mauro clearly explained how this undermining of the sexual boundaries of women assigned to the slut/whore category works:

Mauro: And you have the girls about whom you really know, "there I can really cross boundaries". So because of those conversations, girls are put in those categories. Yeah that happens, and that is for you, as a guy, information. And for some guys it is very useful information, because they are purposefully using it to...

Simone: ... So there was that category like okay, those girls are the easiest. And you also said "There you can cross boundaries." What did that actually mean? They were already easy, right?

Mauro: No, but easy in the sense that... Look, young people look for boundaries, they automatically do so. And yeah, boys are also just preoccupied with sex. Not all of them to the same extent, but boys who are preoccupied with sex, they are searching for what is possible and what isn't. What is allowed, and what isn't? And if they know – that doesn't count for all of them – but if they know that with a certain girl they are going to score, then there is a big chance that they will try and that they will cross boundaries while doing so. And not because they are crooks or evil bad boys, but because they have the opportunity and they're looking. And if there is a situation in which a boy is looking for boundaries and a girl doesn't know how to make those boundaries clear, then you can get really tough situations where boundaries are crossed and a lot of damage can be done.

Mauro describes boys' pursuit of sex as a search in which boys try to figure out what they can do to a girl. They hereby look for boundaries, which a girl may or may not be vocal about. A girl in the "easy" category, a category which boys created themselves, becomes entangled in an opportunistic hunt, in which boys target her as a girl who is not likely to draw sexual boundaries, or who does not even have them. This implies for a girl in that category that she will be targeted for sexual activities more often than other girls, and that boys are less likely to wait for consent before they proceed their sexual advances. We can see hereby how creating a slut/easy/whore category can directly lead to sexual assault. Giovanni offered several other examples in which he described how his old friends would sexually target girls as soon as they learned that these girls had lost their virginity. The girl from the

gang rape had also been put in the slut category, which the boys subsequently saw as an opportunity to trick her into a gang rape.

Another striking aspect of Mauro's narrative, in which he frames young men's pursuit of sex as something with automatic risks, is the idea that crossing sexual boundaries is somehow inevitable. Three crucial factors underlie this way of thinking. First, it is based on a notion of difference between men and women, in which men have a role of chasing after women for sex. In this process, they are somehow blind to women's sexual boundaries. Secondly, it leaves out the possibility of communication between two sex partners, in which both the man and the woman get the chance to get to know each other's boundaries verbally, which would eradicate the issue of not knowing one another's boundaries and therefore crossing them physically. Furthermore, assuming that this communication does not take place, this leaves a considerable amount of empathy through non-verbal assessment on behalf of the sexual initiator, in order to know where the other person's boundaries are, without being vocal about it. In short, a lack of communication *and* a lack of empathy for one's sexual partner are important factors of sexual assault as well.

#### *4.4.4 Conclusion*

Seeing women and men as essentially unequal is a crucial factor of maintaining double standards and gender role divisions, in which men are expected to act as hunters, and women as passive prey, the latter of whom need to watch their own chastity by drawing up their sexual boundaries and by doing anything to prevent themselves from leading men on. As a result of the preoccupation that respondents described on women's chastity and their responsibility to say "no", the naming and shaming that comes with slut categorization and sexual assault mostly targets women only. This preoccupation with women's chastity pulls attention away from the role of men in these assaults. In this sense, focusing on women's chastity functions as a way of concealing power relations in which men who are responsible for sexual assault remain invisible, while women are being targeted for public humiliation and sexual advances, as well as held accountable for their chastity. This comes at the cost of having empathy for women before, during and after they (might) become victim to sexual assault.

Empathy is however an important factor in the prevention of crossing sexual boundaries, in combination with mutual communication about sexual boundaries. These latter two aspects will be explained in the following section, which explores the role of empathy and communication in the prevention of sexual assault and -harassment.

## 4.5 In Search of Empathy and Communication

- crossing boundaries is normal • discuss sex implicitly • do not discuss sex • first encounter with sexuality • ignorance about boundaries • ignorance/taboo about sexuality • men are equal to women • openly discuss sexuality/consent • principle to wait for consent • purely physical information on sex • sex is exciting/scary • sex is/should be like porn • sex is/should be unlike porn

### 4.5 Codes on “Notions and feelings towards women and sex”

This final analysis chapter explores knowledge, empathy and communication. The linkage of these aspects to masculinity and gender is less clear cut than the gendered traits and norms discussed above. Yet, they cannot be neglected, as they have been demonstrated to play a crucial role in sexual assaults, when a lack of them was reported. Therefore, activists and sex educators aimed to stimulate knowledge, empathy and communication when it came to preventing sexual assault. Furthermore, this chapter will explain how knowledge, empathy and communication are related to masculinity and gender, and how they have the power for men (and women) to resist traditional gender roles and to transform the sexual practices in which gender norms manifest themselves.

#### 4.5.1 Knowledge

Respondents reported a widespread lack of knowledge about sexual boundaries, amongst their younger selves, as well as amongst their young male students whom they provide with sex education. Closely related to this lack of knowledge is a taboo that surrounds sex, and the awkwardness that respondents sensed when they aimed to talk about it, or when their elders attempted to. An important deal of respondents reported that they had received a form of sex education in biology class, or in a book about sex and puberty, which their parents bought for them. This information however merely consisted of the physical aspects of sexuality. This includes vaginal penetration, pregnancy, STIs and how to use a condom. The complex social and psychological questions surrounding reproduction and sex, which for example consist of consent, how to find out what both partners like during sex, and gender roles (beside whose use of which genitalia), have not been reported to be a part of any of that education. Furthermore, one might have noticed, that the sole focus on reproduction and vaginal penetration is a heteronormative perspective on sexuality, with a substantial blind spot for homo- and bisexuals, transgender people, hermaphrodites, and other people who do not fit the heterosexual cis-gendered default for traditional sex education.

In any case, if one has received such traditional sex education, one misses out on a vast amount of information, which is crucial in order to prevent sexual boundary crossing behavior. Moreover, respondents reported that a considerable number of boys in their classrooms have not received any sex education at all – besides porn:

I have encountered a group of boys in the eighth grade [end of primary school, around twelve years old], and they were able to tell me all possible sex positions. ... Their knowledge of porn was on point. Super. But their knowledge with regard to reproduction, condoms, birth control... They've never touched a condom. Never used a condom. They also didn't know how children are made. They really didn't know.

*Mauro (35), sexuality informer*

Porn is playing an increasingly important role in the early development of boys discussed in the interviews. In combination with the lack of sex education, these boys have been reported to believe that what they see in porn is a true representation of how sexual encounters in fact are, or how they are



supposed to be. They furthermore remain blind to reproductive and health-related consequences of sex. Classic sex education, as well as porn, leave children and (young) adults in the dark as they are about to become sexually active.

For some young men, as well as women, it is more difficult to receive any sex education at all. Respondents stated a variation of factors, including the voluntariness of offering sex education at school, which repeatedly leaves an important responsibility for parents to educate their children on sexuality. However, respondents also stated that, amongst Islamic students, they sensed that sex is a more tabooed subject than amongst Judeo-Christian and secular students. It is interesting to further explore these cultures of taboo and to include ethnic and religious factors in order to gain a broad and deep understanding of sexual knowledge and taboo. Nevertheless, in this study, all respondents reported to have experienced this lack of knowledge and taboo themselves, as well as amongst a wide range of their students from all backgrounds. Therefore, this study will not discuss this issue as a particularly religious or ethnic subject.

#### 4.5.2 *Empathy*

Along with a lack of knowledge on sexuality itself, empathy has also been reported as an important factor for preventing sexual assault and harassment. Respondents reported that, by thinking about how a woman or girl would feel in a situation, they realized that it was not right for them to make certain sexual advances, which they would have made otherwise. Sander explained how he himself used to pinch women in the butt or breasts, but that he stopped doing that since he realized that "... it is simply sexually boundary-crossing behavior, and that could be really harmful to girls." Mauro's statement demonstrates that empathy of how a woman experiences a sexual encounter is furthermore informed by knowledge about sexuality, boundaries and consent:

I have had a girlfriend with whom I had sex. And as we were doing it, it wasn't clear to me whether she did or didn't enjoy it. Or she was in doubt. But then I didn't take a moment like okay, stop, wait. I let it continue. And afterwards she said "I enjoyed it", but I think that at that moment, if she had the choice, that she would have said "I'll stop". ... She was just way too tense. Too much tension in her body. Yeah, I think it just hurt. And when you're that young, I mean I was fourteen and she was thirteen, then there are moments that you don't dare to say that. And this also happened the other way around. That she did hurt me, but that I didn't dare to say anything because I didn't want to disappoint her, and that I was like, just continue and then... I didn't check [whether she liked it] because she was my girlfriend and because I thought that it was just part of the deal. A little pain, a little blood. Because that is what I was told and what I had heard. ... Yeah, so in retrospect, with my knowledge today, I would have handled this differently.

Because Mauro had learned that pain, blood and tension were simply part of having sex, he used this knowledge to decide whether or not to continue when his girlfriend showed signs of tension, as well as when he experienced pain himself during sex. Although he sensed that his girlfriend may have been uncomfortable, he did not know how to deal with whatever happened during the process of having sex. This shows how empathy, 'the ability to understand and share the feelings of another' (Oxford Dictionary of English), can still lead to situations in which the sexual partner's boundaries are unknown and may or may not be crossed. Having the knowledge that he has today, Mauro would not have continued the way he did. Sander and Mauro's cases demonstrate therefore that empathy combined with knowledge of boundaries and consent can lead to men's prevention of crossing women's sexual boundaries. Understanding their sexual partner's feelings, as well as the wish to not inflict harm to a

woman, were fundamental attributes to these cases. Therefore, as respondents stated, sexuality informers attempt to strengthen young men's and boys' empathetic abilities with regard to women.

However, it is important to make a distinction between whom these men learn to empathize with: with the possible victim of harassment or assault herself, or with the men who perceive her as a loved one? A common attempt at encouraging empathy amongst young men, is by asking men to imagine that it was one of their female loved ones who would be getting harassed or assaulted – most often “your sister” is referred to. This method has resulted in young men's understanding of the impact of their actions on other men, as well as encouraged them to see women not merely as sexual objects of their desire, but also as some other men's family members. However, considering men's tendency to protect their female loved ones' chastity, one may argue that this method alludes to that, rather than to their ability to empathize with women themselves. As argued above, protecting the chastity of female loved ones has more often been motivated as a conformation to masculinity norms, rather than an act of empathy for the woman in question. Furthermore, considering the feelings of ownership also argued above, which this protection of chastity is related to, this method rather alludes to men's ownership and entitlement of controlling and regulating women's behavior, in the attempt to regulate men's behavior. This amounts to a somewhat roundabout and cumbersome way to increase men's empathy in order to prevent sexual harassment and assault against women.

One way in which empathy with victims of sexual harassment and assault has been stimulated, was by simply highlighting that harassment or assault can seem innocent to the perpetrator, whereas the victim can experience this as seriously harmful (Sander). Another way consists of an exercise, in which one participant is asked to walk towards another participant until the standing participant starts to feel uncomfortable and says “stop”. The walking participant is also asked to then take an additional step towards the standing participant. The standing participant is thereupon asked to reflect upon his feelings during the exercise. This exercise is meant to give participants a sense of how it feels to have one's boundaries crossed. This study however only came across one case, in which participants were too uncomfortable to seriously cooperate in the exercise and reflect on their feelings.

#### *4.5.3 Communication*

Another important reported aspect of preventing sexual harassment and assault is communication about sex. As stated above, sex is a taboo subject, about which little education and knowledge is offered. Beside spreading knowledge about sex outside of the deed however, communication also consists of communicating one's desires and boundaries before, during and/or after doing sexual activities with one's sexual partner. Luuk, Giovanni, Frank and Adriaan reported that they preferred to openly discuss sex with their sexual partners before they started certain sexual activities, or as soon as they entered a situation in which they were about to have sex. The most important reasons for this were to make sure that their partners and themselves would have the best experience possible, as well as to prevent that they would do something their partner did not like, or was not ready to do. All four of them have had various experiences in their lives in which they developed the need and the practice of communicating about sex with their sexual partners – both one-night stands and long-term partners. This section will discuss two of these cases.

Luuk had his first girlfriend when he was about fourteen to fifteen years old. Two months in, she told him that her uncle continuously raped her, which lasted throughout their relationship. This impacted Luuk during this and all the relationships that would follow, in that he preferred to extensively discuss sexuality and consent with his partners. He wanted to prevent that his sexual partners to come, would have similar experiences as his first girlfriend had with her uncle. Although she quite easily told him

exactly what he could and could not do, with his following partners, Luuk had a little more probing to do, which was not easy at first:

I don't know. Awkward or something? The feeling that you're not supposed to talk about it, but that you just need to do it. And this was when I was eighteen. And I think I have learned a lot the past one and a half years, and that has something to do with a previous girlfriend, with whom I have had a lot of conversations about gender. ... We had a lot of conversations about how it was between us and I feel that I really learned that from her.

Luuk's communication about sex is mostly important to him as a way to prevent crossing his partner's sexual boundaries. He also added that it always made his relationships and sexual experiences better. For him, communication is a safe way to explore what both he and his partner are into. If he needs to wait for his partner to say "no", he tends to be careful in initiating sexual activities to the extent that he also does not start things which his partner would have actually wanted. Two interesting gender role expectations here are involved in Luuk's dedication to prevent crossing sexual boundaries. First, Luuk's narrative speaks of sexual initiative as a one-way direction, which comes from him. This is in line with the expectation of men to take sexual initiative. In combination with his need for consent before doing, he takes responsibility for gaining consent for his sexual initiations. Meanwhile, he does not expect his sexual partners (who are all female) to return initiative or to ask for consent. He would like them to, but he never really expected them to. This shows a double standard that Luuk holds for himself, as he expects himself to take responsibility for sexual boundaries, whereas he does not expect the same from the women he is with.

However, some of his sexual partners do not feel comfortable communicating about sex as openly as he does, or even to discuss it at all. These women told him that discussing certain activities beforehand made them feel overly self-conscious and that it would take the spontaneity away from sex. They rather had Luuk initiate certain sexual activities, and then say "no" themselves whenever they did not want something he initiated. In this case, these women acted in line with the classic expectation of women to say "no" and to be rather passive than active. Although he found it difficult, Luuk did respect their preference to not discuss sex and to say "no" if needed.

Giovananni started to openly discuss sexual preferences before, during and after sex, since the first time he had sex. Before his first time, he had prepared himself by watching porn, which he had never watched before. Unfortunately, his porn education did not work out too well:

So I thought, okay, I have watched porn, I can do this. So I started imitating those things from porn and, well, it was terrible. She told me "Hey man, you're doing something wrong." I had found the right hole. But after an entire day watching porn, you just can't miss it. Like, okay, that is where I need to be. But the moves, you know. The moves! They were too intense, too eccentric. That wasn't normal sex. Things I just couldn't physically achieve. So she said to me "What are you doing?" And I said "Yeah I'm doing my thing, what are you doing?" But I thought okay, I have two options. I can get mad and leave, but I thought, I gotta learn at some point. So I said "Okay, you know what? You want it, you do it. Teach me if you're so good at this." ... So then she told me what she liked, and so I did that, and the rest of the time it was a success. ... And whenever I had a new girl, and we are doing it, I just ask bluntly. I say: "What is your favorite?" And also "Hey, I'm not just here for myself, but also for you. So what do you fancy? What do you enjoy?" And then I just agree and do it. It sounds stupid, but it really helps.

Giovanni learned his sexual communication skills with sexual partners when his first partner told him she did not like it. For him, communication is mainly a way of learning how to cater to his partner's specific sexual desires. After sex, Giovanni also asks for feedback as a personal evaluation, as well as in order to make sure he did not do anything his partner did not like. Just as Luuk, Giovanni uses his role as active initiator to make sure he pleases his partner, rather than to probe and wonder whether it was good or bad. This stands in opposition to Mauro's experience, when he did not open communication with his first sex partner. He had doubted ever since, whether his girlfriend liked it, and he never told her that he also did not like it at some point.

Nevertheless, verbal communication is not the sole most appreciated answer to gaining positive sexual experiences. Similar to Luuk, Giovanni encountered women who shushed him whenever he opened up the conversation. As soon as that happened, he told them to take the lead and said he would follow. Especially younger eighteen-year-old women acted surprised when he asked what they were into. As he and his partners became somewhat older (up to 25 years old), they responded more pleased when he did. From Luuk, Giovanni's and Mauro's experiences therefore, we may conclude that verbal communication can feel awkward and unaccustomed, but it can also be a safe option to explore what both sex partners are into. Beside a way to prevent crossing sexual boundaries hereby, it is also a manner of improving the quality of sex and catering to one another's specific sexual needs.

Beside these potentials, perhaps most interesting about verbal communication, is how unaccustomed, ill at ease and surprised women can respond. As Luuk, Giovanni and Mauro stated, it is rather common to not discuss sex with one's partner and "to just do it" and continue until "no". They spoke hereby of heterosexual encounters with mostly an active male and a receiving female. Hereby, the way in which verbally communicating respondents attempted to cater to their female sex partners, in a sense, conformed to gender role expectations of an active male initiator and a rather passive female receiver of sex. However, their practices also deviate from traditional masculinity norms, as their sexual activities are rather something through which they cater to women's needs, rather than something they achieve for themselves, or for their conformation to masculinity norms. Furthermore, their open attitude of enquiring what they should do and their asking for feedback afterwards, show signs vulnerability: they admit that they still have something to learn and they open themselves up to the possibility of receiving negative feedback. In this sense, these sexual practices can also be seen as a deviation from wider masculinity norms, such as invulnerability and self-reliance. Perhaps it is Luuk and Giovanni's partial gender role reversal that is part of what makes some of their female sex partners uncomfortable. At least, we may conclude that it is something which these women are not accustomed to, and which an important deal of them are not ready to embrace – concluding from the fact that some of them refused communication and returned to their traditional passive role with the additional responsibility to say "no". Refusing to fall back into their traditional masculinity roles, Giovanni and Luuk both responded to this with a compromise to either take a passive role or repeatedly remind a woman of her option to say "no".

These cases demonstrate how sex can become an arena in which men resist masculinity norms by partially turning around gender roles and refusing to fall back into expected sexual practices. With this refusal to conform to traditional masculinity norms, men hereby take a position of the resisting male. Furthermore, they also refuse to let women fall back into traditional femininity roles. This is not to say that this form of refusal to conform to gender norms by definition leads to a better sexual experience or vice versa. Undoubtedly, there are more verbal or non-verbal options for improving the quality of sex for both sexual partners. These could be interesting to explore in further studies. In this study, nevertheless, respondents brought verbal communication and partial role reversal to the fore, and they experienced its potential to offer a new and safe way to openly explore their partners' sexual desires and preferences.

#### 4.5.4 Conclusion

Sexual knowledge, empathy and communication about sex are important factors of how respondents experienced and practiced sexual activities with their sex partners. Empathy proved to be an important aspect of refraining from sexual harassment and –abuse. Stimulating this empathy, it is important to distinguish between empathizing with the possible victim herself or with the men who perceive her as a loved one – the latter of which presents men with a detour method to motivate them to not harm the victims themselves. Furthermore, empathy and the will to not harm women are not sufficient to prevent crossing sexual boundaries, as without intricate knowledge and communication about sex and the sex partner's specific desires and needs, it is difficult to know which sexual practices both partners will enjoy.

The taboos and expected gendered roles that prevail with regard to sex and sexuality frustrate the spread of wider sexual knowledge, as well as communication between sex partners. Sex education today depends on the voluntariness of schools, individual teachers, biology books, parents and the sex education books they may or may not present their children with. Meanwhile, porn is making its way into boys' and young men's surroundings, and has shown to be an omnipresent sex educator. However, its content does not offer sufficient information on the intimate and complex psychological and social implications that play a role between sexual partners before, during and after sexual encounters.

Nevertheless, this chapter also demonstrated that there are men who are discovering new ways to gain and spread knowledge about sex and to communicate with their sexual partners. First, the sex educational work, which the majority of the respondents are doing, offers information that supplements knowledge from traditional sex education, and opens up conversation about the rather social aspects of sex including gender roles, consent and empathy, as well as about porn. Secondly, various respondents found verbal communication with their sex partners to be a safe and clear way to improve the quality of sex. Besides pleasing themselves, they reported that they used their initiating role with regard to sex to open up the conversation and take the lead in getting to know one another sexually. Their vulnerable attitude is hereby a deviation from traditional masculinity norms, which describe sex as an achievement for men and their masculinity, as well as prescribe invulnerability and self-reliance. This demonstrates that sex is both a domain in which men can conform, as well as deviate from masculinity norms. Refusal to conform to masculinity norms hereby shows an interesting role for resisting masculinity for positive sexuality and the prevention of sexual boundary-crossing practices.

## 5. Discussion

In order to answer the general research question ‘What is the relation between masculinities and sexually aggressive behavior in life histories and stories about young men’s sexual development by gender-transformational activists and social workers?’ this study used Connell’s gender order theory as a theoretical framework for comprehending masculinities. The chapters on empirical findings used this framework as a starting point to look for multiple masculinities in a hierarchical gender order and applied this framework to sexual harassment, sexual violence and sexuality in general. This research has been subdivided in the sub-research questions: 1. How is masculinity defined? 2. How is masculinity constructed in the dynamics between men? 3. How do men see themselves sexually? 4. How is masculinity expressed in how men think about and treat women, and how they think about and practice sex? This discussion chapter will first evaluate the usefulness of Connell’s theoretical framework for answering these research questions. Secondly, this discussion will assess the extent to which this study’s empirical findings are in line with the literature of Jackson Katz, Fahlberg & Pepper and Philippe Bourgois.

### *5.1 Theoretical Framework: Connell’s Gender Order Theory*

As a theoretical framework, two questions about Connell’s gender order theory are relevant to explore. First, how is Connell’s gender order theory useful for understanding masculinity and its multiple gradations? Secondly, how does Connell’s theory help us gaining insight into the relation between masculinities and sex(uality)?

#### *5.1.1 Understanding masculinities*

Connell’s gender order theory defines gender as a relation. Gender hereby constitutes a social structure, which consists of patterned relations between women and men, as well as amongst women and amongst men. Practice in this theory is socially structured in terms of gender, which means that masculinity and femininity are configurations of these gendered practices. In the contemporary European/American gender order, gendered patterns and practices are characterized by the overall subordination of women and dominance of men.

This study explored how masculinity is expressed in practice, by identifying normative and non-normative traits of masculinity, depending on whether they were mostly punished or rewarded. This is in line with Connell’s statement that gender configurations are made under compulsion, and demonstrates how this is expressed in Butler’s ‘punitive consequences’. This empirical section also demonstrated how there was a close association expressed in the interviews between homosexuality and femininity, which, when enacted by men, came with reactions of stigma and devaluation. This is in line with Connell’s statement on men’s overall domination of women, as well as the domination of heterosexuality over homosexuality. It also demonstrates how gender hierarchy is constituted in a relation between masculinity and a devalued other (femininity and homosexuality), which it depends on in order to maintain a relation of subordination.

Another leading aspect of Connell’s theory is her identification of a gender hierarchy amongst men, which she captures in four masculinities. In this study, the principle to speak of multiple masculinities rather than one, gave way to understanding how we should locate the widespread deviations from normative masculinity into our understanding of masculinity. If we acknowledge a gender hierarchy amongst men, we can identify how patterns of conforming to normative and non-normative masculinity traits relate to power and hierarchy. Namely, where some masculinities gave way to social acceptance

of certain practices, other masculinities were shown to give way to punishment for enacting those very same practices. Defining these masculinities, Connell explains that they are positions within a pattern of gender relations, and that they are always contestable.

This study adopted the principle of distinguishing multiple masculinities in the power dynamics amongst men, and identified five male types, of which four are similar to Connell's. Furthermore, considering that these two categorizations were based on different studies and empirical data, it was to be expected that they would also turn out to have dissimilarities. The following table summarizes the main characteristics of Connell's masculinities and this study's (Tijdink's) male types. The columns represent the masculinities or male types. The rows represent of each masculinity or male type respectively: its position within the male hierarchy; its relation to privilege; its relation to masculinity norms; its function for continuity of the current gender hierarchy; its use of violence.

|  | <b><i>Hegemonic Masculinity</i></b>                             | <b><i>Subordinate Masculinity</i></b>                                  | <b><i>Complicit Masculinity</i></b>                                  | <b><i>Marginalized Masculinity</i></b>                           |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| <b><i>Position</i></b>                                 | Leading position  | Lowest position  | Middle position  | Marginal position  |
| <b><i>Relation to privilege</i></b>                    | Embodies masculinity norms                                      | Fails to embody masculinity norms                                      | Embodies some masculinity norms, yet insufficiently to be at the top | Associated with tough hyper-masculinity norms                    |
| <b><i>Relation to masculinity norms</i></b>            | Has privileged access to resources and institutions of violence | Social, cultural and economic exclusion                                | Enjoys dividend from overall subordination of women                  | Institutional oppression and physical terror sustained by whites |
| <b><i>Function for continuity of current order</i></b> | Legitimizes patriarchy  | Serves as repository of what is symbolically expelled from masculinity | Complicit to hegemonic project without being at the front line       | Plays symbolic role for white, high-class gender constructions   |
| <b><i>Use of violence</i></b>                          | Violence underpins and supports authority                       | Victim of other men's violence and abuse                               | Does not commit violence   | Violent masculinity  |

Table 5.1.1: *R. W. Connell's Masculinities*

|  | <b><i>Alpha Male</i></b>  | <b><i>Inferior Male</i></b>   | <b><i>Conforming Male</i></b>   | <b><i>Deprived Male</i></b>   | <b><i>Resisting Male</i></b>  |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| <b><i>Position</i></b>                                 | Leading position  | Lowest position   | Middle position   | Marginal position   | Opposing position   |
| <b><i>Relation to privilege</i></b>                    | Praised for embodying normative traits of masculinity                   | Ridiculed for failure to conform to masculinity norms   | Insufficiently embodies normative traits, but avoids penalization                     | Embodies – or associated with – hyper masculine toughness   | Refuses to conform to traditional masculinity norms   |
| <b><i>Relation to masculinity norms</i></b>            | Able to influence norms and divert critical attention away from himself | Unable to influence norms and change his position within the group                            | Maintains membership and its benefits by conforming to the group norms                | Membership to groups deprived of resources and cultural validation  | Actively alters traditional norms through education and behavior  |
| <b><i>Function for continuity of current order</i></b> | Functions as masculine role model for group members and beyond          | Instrumental to alpha males, so that alphas can demonstrate their control over group dynamics | Instrumental to maintaining social structure, as he functions as ally to the powerful | Deprivation of resources and cultural validation is instrumental to resources and validation of white and highly educated | Interrupts gender order by openly questioning and refusing to conform to traditional norms of masculinity |
| <b><i>Use of violence</i></b>                          | May commit violence to dominate   | May commit violence to compensate   | No violence reported, yet not ruled out   | May commit violence to conform to hyper-masculine norms   | No violence reported; violence does not match with alteration of masculinity norms                        |

Table 5.1.2: *S. D. Tjink's Male Types*



As we see, Connell's masculinities consist of four positions within the gender hierarchy. They either succeed in embodying masculinity norms, fail to do so, pass sufficiently or conform to norms of hyper masculinity. The first four male types correspond almost identically to that.

#### *5.1.2 A perspective on social transformation*

Looking at the functionality of masculinities and male types for continuing the hierarchical gender order, an interesting mechanism comes to the fore. Taking into account only the former four male types and Connell's masculinities, one might notice that all of these categories contribute to reproducing the current hierarchical gender order. Where hegemonic masculinity legitimizes patriarchy, it uses subordinate masculinity to deposit what is expelled from masculinity, it is supported by predominating complicit masculinity and uses marginalized masculinity to construct its own image. This cycle also resonates in the first four male types. What these masculinities show us however, is a process in which conformation to masculinity norms, as well as and non-conformation, both lead to reproducing the current gender hierarchy. For this reason, however, they fail to account for how deviations from traditional masculinity norms succeed at making a change.

According to Connell, change is possible when the criticism of subordinate groups gains enough support to stimulate hegemonic groups to adapt and change some of their practices and beliefs. However, this perspective leaves a blind spot for the variety of groups and classes where resistance is in fact coming from. The majority of respondents in this research actively worked to reconstruct patterns of masculinity and they did not necessarily lose social status for it. This study introduced therefore the resisting male, which is a male type that refuses to conform to traditional masculinity norms, and also refuses to be instrumental to the existing hierarchical gender order. A resisting male hereby distinguishes oneself from an inferior male, who experiences an inability to influence group norms because of his oppression by other men. This is not to say that a resisting male always succeeds at changing other men's traditional notions of gender. His refusal rather than failure to conform, and his persistence to do so, however deserve to be recognized as constituting a change in and of itself, without assigning him to a category of inferiority or suppression. This can be done by acknowledging a location within the male hierarchy, which alters its normative climate. The resisting male includes hereby the possibility of change into masculinities, or, moreover, it includes where it is already happening.

When incorporated in masculinities, one is better able to see how resistance comes from multiple classes. It is important hereby to repeat that a man, who takes up aspects of the position of a resisting male, may also take up some aspects of the position of an alpha, inferior, conforming and/or deprived male. If we look at these combinations, we can specify where resistance is coming from. This means that, in our attempts to find the origins of gender transformations, we may note that a man who takes the position of an alpha male or a conforming male may also be a resisting male in some situations. This way, we can see how resistance can come from subordinate, as well as dominant groups in society. This presents us with a perspective that sees social change as something that can come from the subordinate and the dominant, and that this change is not merely a settlement from the dominant to maintain their dominant position. This notion that transformation comes from the dominant, is based on the resisting male, who is socially and culturally dominant as a man relative to women, and perhaps also as an alpha male, yet who resists the very system that sustains his dominance. The resisting male hereby transcends Connell and Gramsci's hegemonic cycle of a power continuum, and attempts to break with a system of hegemony altogether.

### 5.1.3 Connell and understanding masculinities, sex and sexual violence

The second question concerns how usable Connell's theory is for understanding the relationship between masculinities and sex. Although violence plays a relatively minor role in her work, Connell's gender order theory does offer several interesting theoretical insights on the theme.

First, Connell distinguishes two patterns of violence. On the one hand, this consists of the violence of privileged men, who use violence to maintain their dominant position. On the other hand, Connell describes violence as an important part of gender politics amongst men. This corresponds with the violence of the male types in this study, as also here, alpha males were reported to be violent in order to underpin or maintain their dominance. Furthermore, violence as part of gender politics amongst men clearly resonated in inferior- and deprived males' reassertions of masculinity through violence against peers and (sexual) violence against women.

Secondly, Connell explains how sexual violence is part of a culture of difference, which involves the structuring of a masculine/feminine opposition. This culture of difference is an important concept, which can be applied to the hunter-prey duality described in the chapter "Notions and behavior towards women and sex". The hunter-prey duality, as well as the broader definitions of masculinity versus femininity, is based on a belief that women and men are essentially unequal, which is in turn a crucial factor of maintaining double standards and gender role divisions. Understanding these essentialist notions of inequality as a *culture* of difference, adds an argument of how ingrained this inequality is in the ideas, customs and social behaviors in our particular society, and simultaneously rules out the idea that these inequalities are somehow natural.

Third, Connell argues how the structuring of a masculine/feminine opposition can lead to sexual violence. Sexual violence is not the logical result of nature hereby, but rather a body practice through which a culture of difference becomes social reality. Difference in this culture is characterized by masculine supremacy, which becomes culturally or intimately realized through body practices such as sexual harassment and –violence. The concept of body-reflexive practices offer an important insight into the relation between the social and the body. In order to know how masculinity as a social construct translates into sexual practices, it is crucial to gain an understanding of what process links the two. In line with this, 'Notions and behavior towards women and sex' described how respondents reflected on their own bodily- and sexual practices, as well as how they defined women and their sexuality. A link was made between social and cultural ideas of masculinity and sexuality, and how this influenced their image of self and their sex partner(s). Furthermore, the double standards and gender role divisions, which was linked to a culture of difference in the paragraph above, played a fundamental role in the ways in which men and women engaged in sexual activities. Male supremacy characterized normative traits of masculine sexuality, and this also played out in men's feelings of sexual entitlement, as well as their personal reassertion of masculinity through sexual practices.

Connell's explanations for sexual violence and –harassment have been demonstrated in respondents' reports on masculinity and sexual violence and –harassment. Nevertheless, the insights that Connell offers for the particular theme of sexual violence and harassment, are not most extensive in her work on masculinities. The intimate ways in which conforming to masculinity norms exactly lead to committing sexual violence, remain rather inexplicit. Yet, her theorizations on masculinities offer a useful base for understanding masculinities and she offers a sound first indicator of how (sexual) violence can be understood in her gender order theory. She leaves researchers hereby considerable room for using her gender order theory, while discovering new insights on the intimate ways in which sexuality and sexual violence are related to gender and masculinity.

This study did exactly that, by using Connell's gender order theory to explain sexual violence and –harassment, and identified several other crucial explanations for sexual violence. One of these concerns a widespread taboo, as well as a lack of basic and intimate knowledge on sex and sexuality, which have been found to be fundamental issues that play a leading role in sexual abuse and –harassment. Furthermore, linkages have been specified between normative masculinity traits, sexual masculinity traits and sexual practices. These linkages will be discussed in the next section, as Katz, Fahlberg & Pepper offered more specific insights on traits of masculinity and sexual practices. Finally, the perspective of change, which this study added through its fifth male type, furthermore offered a perspective on sexual transformations. Introducing the resisting male, this study presented the ways in which men refuse to conform to traditional norms of masculinity when they have sex with a woman. In order to prevent crossing their partner's sexual boundaries and to improve the quality of sex, several respondents learned to communicate about sex with their partners and to subvert gender roles when communication was refused. They present us hereby with examples and evidence of how positive sexual change is possible and that it is already happening.

## *5.2 Literature: Katz, Fahlberg & Pepper*

In order to expand our theoretical knowledge on the link between masculinity and sexual violence and –harassment, this study's theoretical and conceptual framework furthermore presented theorizations of Katz, Fahlberg & Pepper. This discussion section will work out how their literature and these study's empirical findings reflect upon one another.

### *5.2.1 Katz's paradigm shift*

The first important finding from Jackson Katz, is his argumentation for a paradigm shift to the way we look at violence against women. Namely, whereas men are the main perpetrators of violence against women, attention is usually paid to women rather than to men. Katz argues that this is part of a system of power and privilege, in which the dominant group is rarely challenged to even think about its dominance. The idea that violence against women is a women's issue, furthermore leads to victim blaming, rather than critical reflection about what is going on with men and the ways in which society produces (sexually) abusive men. Katz's proposed paradigm shift is in line with this study's direction, as this study focused on men and masculinity as a social issue of gender. The section 'How men feel about and see women' similarly identified victim blaming as a consequence of a sole focus on women in issues of sexual abuse.

This study went slightly further, however, in finding out how men regard women, femininity and their expectations that came along with that. Namely, this study demonstrated that men's focus on women with regard to sexuality in general, repeatedly had something to do with how these men perceived women's chastity and sexuality – the latter of which was often expected to be passive. This recurrently went hand in hand with expectations of women to say "no", or expectations that "unchaste" women will probably want or deserve certain sexual practices. In cases where men sexually abused or harassed women, these manners of thinking rather held women responsible for the abuse that men committed against them. The other way around, if men showed empathy for the victim, they rather held the perpetrator responsible for the abuse. By analyzing femininity through the eyes of men, this study hereby adds a perspective on femininity to the analysis of sexual violence against women, without losing focus on examining the notions and practices of men with regard to women.

### *Katz's tough guise*

The second insight from Katz consists of his theorization of what it is about socially taught masculinity that leads to (sexual) violence, and is marked by his concept *tough guise*. According to Katz, boys are taught to take on a tough guise, which consists of a readiness to use violence and disallowance to back down when one is disrespected. Furthermore, he speaks of popular media, which carries out a narrative that being a man is about sexual conquest, telling boys and men that caring about girls and women is for “pussies” and “fags”. Women are hereby often turned into trophies, as instruments to gain the approval of other men. He also emphasizes the crucial effect of porn, which has shifted towards hardcore misogyny and sexual brutality. In real life, this culture of misogyny has normalized rape in various peer groups as just another way of bonding among members of the group.

Similar to the normative masculinity traits that Katz described, this study's chapter ‘Masculinity traits’ identified invulnerability as one of the most important normative traits of masculinity. Disallowance to back down and the readiness to use violence were described as violent manifestations of how men put up a tough persona to avoid showing vulnerability. Sexual violence was furthermore demonstrated in ‘Notions of the sexual self’, as manners of conforming to this tough image of masculinity. This chapter furthermore described how men see themselves sexually, specifically describing sexual norms of masculinity, which is summarized by the archetype of a hunter. A crucial element of this hunter was sexual conquest. In order to publicly conform to this hunter image, men sexually instrumentalized women for peer approval and peer bonding in the process – mainly by showing off one's sexual conquest over a woman, or by sexually objectifying women in front of peers.

What this study added to Katz's tough guise theory, was an explanation and specification of how these peer dynamics work. Where Katz speaks of masculinity and a tough guise to which men wish to conform, he does not pay considerate attention to how exactly the power dynamics amongst men work in conforming, overconforming or deviating from tough-guise norms work. This study's multiple masculinities offered an insight of how to understand the relation that individual men reported to have to various positions of power within the male hierarchy and how this influenced their sexual experiences and practices.

Focusing mainly on peer dynamics, this study paid less attention to media and its influence on men's sexual notions and practices. Nevertheless, this study demonstrated how porn is able to influence the way in which men view themselves sexually, as well as how they approach women sexually. Porn masculinity is characterized by a hyper masculine persona, who is sexually aggressive with women, and who succeeds at achieving sexual favors from them. Katz suggests a relationship between porn and a culture of misogyny, in which sexual violence against women is normalized to the extent that rape becomes just another form of peer bonding. Although a link between porn and sexual violence has been confirmed in this study, the extent to which Katz speaks of a normalizing effect of porn on sexual violence against women needs more empirical evidence to be verified. This study does support however that porn *can* have a normalizing effect on violence against women, as it spreads an ideal image of a hyper masculine man who ushers women into sexual submission, which has indeed affected one respondent to the point of abuse. This is part of a bigger remaining question surrounding the influence of media on thoughts and behavior.

### *5.2.2 Fahlberg & Pepper's masculinity threat*

Finally, another question in this discussion remains at this point. As Connell and Katz mention, sexual violence against women is often a way to gain peer approval. Yet, how is sex a way to gain approval of other men, if it happens in private when no other men are around? Fahlberg & Pepper explain this as the ‘masculinity threat’, which refers to the feelings of inadequacy and emasculation that men often

experience in relation to body shame, social exclusion and masculine insecurity caused by rigid social norms of masculinity. Amongst these social norms, Fahlberg & Pepper found traits identical to the aforementioned. They add hereby that sexual aggression and –violence are often tactics for men to reaffirm their sense of power, security and identity. The authors hereby refer to a personal process that men experience to restore their own masculine sense of self, which peer dynamics have caused. Yet, they offer less explanation on how the private act of sex can lead to peer approval. How does it work the other way around?

This study identified both of these public-private directions. First, *because* traditional masculinity consists of power, control, invulnerability and a lack of empathy, anger and aggression are sometimes the only outlets left in the range of emotions that men can resort to, without feeling further emasculated. As Fahlberg & Pepper already mentioned, this outlet can result in sexual violence, as compulsory heterosexuality and conquest over women are also crucial elements of normative masculinity. In addition to their theory, this study worked out how men restore their social status through sexual practices – in some cases these were violent and abusive, which in these particular cases made them even more restorative. Namely, if the practices had not been public, men made them public by telling their peers about them, which increased their social status. In various cases, however, these stories about sexual conquest were not based on the truth. Nevertheless, true or false, using women for sex in order to restore one's sense or status of masculinity instrumentalizes women for the sake of men's mutual power struggles. Sex has hereby become about sexual achievement in order to restore and affirm one's masculinity, which is a process in which social pressure overshadows one's readiness to sexually please and take responsibility for sexual boundaries.

## 6 Conclusion

For this study, sex educators, gender transformational activists and social workers were interviewed about their sexual life histories and about the young men they work with, in order to explore the link between masculinity and sexually aggressive behavior. This research objective is built up in three sub-questions, which work from masculinity and dynamics between men to notions and behavior with regard to women and sex. This concluding section will first answer the sub-research questions, after which the main research question is answered. This will be followed by conclusions about the theoretical relevance, social relevance, limitations and recommendations for further studies and practice.

### *6.1 How is Masculinity Defined?*

The first analysis chapter of this study explored the sub research question ‘How is masculinity defined?’ This chapter delved into the general composition of masculinity, in order to gain a clear idea of what respondents referred to when they talked about masculinity. The composition of masculinity consists of normative and non-normative masculinity traits, the categorization of which depended on whether the practice of a certain trait was met with acceptance or devaluation. Important for understanding how masculinity is composed, is to understand that masculinity is part of a hierarchical binary gender order, characterized by masculine supremacy and the devaluation of femininity. Closely associated with femininity is male homosexuality, and both have been reported to come with stigma, devaluation and punitive consequences. The men discussed in this study have been reported to perform an important deal of their behavior in order to avoid association with femininity and homosexuality, and to rather be associated with masculinity.

The most important normative trait of masculinity is to show no vulnerability. Another important normative trait is to be in control – of situations, other people, and of one’s own emotions. Various manners have been reported to conform to these norms of invulnerability and control, and they can be captured in the following types: the playful, uncomplicated doer who takes things lightly and ridicules other men; the stable, rational uncomplicated doer who is breadwinner, self-reliant and able to afford luxury; and the tough, aggressive and dangerous persona who does not back down in conflict, and who shows neither compassion, nor empathy.

Respondents’ narratives demonstrated that non-normative masculinity traits were also widely practiced, although they were suppressed. They were often present under the guise of norm-conforming appearances. They consist of showing vulnerability and of showing empathy. Other non-normative traits were to be involved in the household, to be kind and respectful, and to be peaceful and/or quiet. These traits have been reported as non-normative, due to the punitive consequences that respondents experienced as a result of expressing them.

Yet, if non-normative traits are generally cast in opposition to norms of masculinity, what does the wide practice of them imply for masculinity? How do we understand conformity and deviance in relation to normative masculinity? This study adopted the notion of multiple masculinities, as well as power and hierarchy into its definition of masculinity, as it is the processes between men that further explain deviance and conformity to normative masculinity traits.

## *6.2 How is Masculinity Constructed in the Dynamics Between Men?*

The chapter ‘Dynamics between men’ discussed the second sub-research question ‘How is masculinity constructed in the dynamics between men?’ This chapter first looked at the general ways in which men treat each other, followed by a categorization of five male types as positions within the male hierarchy.

Generally characteristic in narratives about men’s mutual dynamics, is hierarchy. Men were reported to be in constant competition with one another for a higher rank on the social ladder. One strategy was to ridicule or challenge other men, in order to raise one’s own relative position by devaluing another man. Men expressed to be prone to ridicule and bullying mostly when they expressed non-normative masculinity traits. This was furthermore met with repeated humiliation and social exclusion. The threat of these consequences was reported to be pervasive enough for men to constantly avoid non-normative behavior, or even avoid people who were associated with it.

Another strategy to (re)assure one’s position within the male hierarchy was to show off masculinity by exhibiting normative masculinity traits. Inflating one’s masculinity has been reported to be a way to avoid to, as well as compensate for, being associated with femininity and gayness. Showing off also consisted of mocking and challenging other men as ways to show off control over others. Furthermore, a predominant way in which men conformed to heterosexuality norms, was to brag in front of peers about their sexual conquests over women. Aside from these experiences, peer dynamics such as ridicule and showing off are not necessarily harmful in and of themselves. This competitive behavior can also be brotherly, and it has also frequently been experienced as playful and fun. Nevertheless, respondents have disclosed that they have felt victimized by fellow men who acted in this way at various points in their lives.

In order to further capture the hierarchy of masculinities and its relation to the incorporation of normative and non-normative traits, this study presented five male types, of which four resemble Connell’s masculinities. Masculinities and male types refer to locations within the male hierarchy. No man can be assigned to a single of these masculinities; they are rather to be seen as ideal types, and as positions within a gender hierarchy of masculinity, in which a man in various situations and aspects of his life can find himself. The four male types that resemble Connell’s masculinities have been found to work in a cycle. Namely, where the alpha male is at the forefront of the gender hierarchy with his embodiment of normative traits and norm-making privileges, the inferior, conforming and deprived males are each in their own way instrumental to the current gender order: by either failure to conform, alignment with the powerful, or being a scapegoat for males of privileged classes. This study identified however a fifth male type, the resisting male, which is a male type – or masculinity – that refuses to conform to traditional gender norms. He hereby disrupts common concepts of what it means to be a man, by demonstrating deviations from traditional role patterns towards other men.

## *6.3 How do Men See Themselves Sexually?*

The chapter ‘Notions of the sexual self’ discussed the question ‘How do men see themselves sexually?’ This could be condensed into a hunter archetype, which is both prescriptive – as it is normative and socially imposed – and descriptive – as men are often believed to be natural hunters, unlike women. The normative sexuality traits that characterize this hunter are to seduce many women and to have a high desire for sex, and to act on it whenever chances avail. Another trait is to take the lead, which ranges from initiating the first acquaintance, to being the initiator of sexual activities. To be dominant and rough in bed are also normative sexual traits of masculinity. This hunting mission that is part of normative masculinity, defines sex as something that men need to achieve. In combination with a cultural position of domination, men have repeatedly been reported to belief that they are entitled to

receiving sexual activities from a woman. These normative sexual masculinity traits are reflected in porn, in the shape of a rough, hyper masculine image of man who achieves sexual favors from a woman – often in extreme ways and exaggerated traditional gender role patterns. From men’s reports, it became clear that porn has the ability to influence and shape men’s sexual desires, as well as the sexual role they assign to themselves.

These sexual normative traits of masculinity are tied to peer dynamics similar to those of the further abovementioned general traits of masculinity. Ridicule and showing off continually revolved around sexual matters as well, and sexuality norms played the same role in men’s locations in the male hierarchy as the other masculinity norms did. An important consequence of that, is that with sexual norms – such as male domination over women, to seduce many women and to always pursue sex – conforming to these norms is regularly at the expense of taking responsibility for a woman’s sexual boundaries. This is especially the case in hyper masculine ideals, where crossing women’s boundaries has become the norm in and of itself. Furthermore, the sexual domination of men over women presents us with a culture of difference, which offers men a position of dominance that regularly causes them to feel entitled to sexual activities from women. These men hereby cross women’s sexual boundaries, because they feel believe have the right to the sexual activities they pursue.

#### *6.4 How is Masculinity Expressed in How Men Think about and Treat Women, and how they Think about and Practice Sex?*

The fourth and final empirical analysis chapter ‘Notions and behavior towards women and sex’ discussed the sub-research question ‘How is masculinity expressed in how men think about and treat women, and how they think about and practice sex?’ After discussing how men see themselves sexually, this chapter studied the ways in which men were reported to see women. Normative femininity is constructed in opposition to normative masculinity. Where men were represented as hunters, depictions of women could rather be condensed into the metaphor of prey, who are sexually acted upon by hunting men and therefore vulnerable to men’s desires. Sex was hereby often described as something that is done *to* women, and not *by* women. This hunter-prey duality came with an expected responsibility for women to say “no” to men’s sexual advances. This normative responsibility regularly led to victim blaming, assuming that women knew and dared to be vocal about their sexual boundaries at all times, and that their “no” was always taken seriously – which was regularly not the case. Another crucial femininity norm was to be chaste. A pervasive practice of men hereby was to create chastity categories of women, which men were reported to use for deciding how carefully they would treat a woman’s sexual boundaries, and whether they would commit to a woman – putting the unchaste or slut category at higher risk of sexual assault and emotional rejection. As a result of this extensive focus on women’s chastity and their responsibility to say “no”, the naming and shaming that came with slut categorizations and sexual assault targeted women only. Focusing on women’s chastity hereby functioned as a way of concealing power relations in which men who were responsible for sexual assault remained invisible, while women were being targeted for public humiliation and sexual advances, as well as held accountable for their chastity. This came at the cost of having empathy for women in general, as well as for women who became victims of abuse and humiliation. Meanwhile, this study identified empathy as a powerful quality for preventing sexual abuse.

#### *6.5 In Search of Empathy and Communication*

The chapter ‘In search of empathy and communication’ offered another three important explanations of sexual boundary crossings, as well as a possible solution for change. First, respondents reported a widespread lack of knowledge about the complex and intimate ways in which sex becomes pleasurable or unpleasant. This was accompanied by a lack of awareness of how traditional gender norms shape the



ways in which men and women have sex. This lack of knowledge and awareness makes men especially vulnerable to taking sex lessons from porn, which often portrays male sexual domination over women and abuse as the norm.

Secondly, empathy has been identified as an important quality to prevent sexual abuse, as empathy refers to understanding another person's feelings and needs, which helps a person to make the right judgement of a sexual situation and pick up cues on somebody else's sexual needs and limits. This also requires a person's willingness to not inflict harm.

Finally, communication has been found to be an important practice for preventing to cross one's sexual boundaries. Silence during sex is currently the norm, which typically entails a man trying out sexual activities with a woman, while unaware of her sexual desires and boundaries. Various respondents actively resisted these traditional sex role patterns by openly communicating with their sex partners before, during and after they had sex. This showed to be an important addition to empathy, as individual sexual desires and boundaries were often found to be too complex to pick up by imagining what one must feel like, by 'reading' somebody's body language only. If a woman refused conversation, these resisting men turned around the gender roles and asked the woman to take the lead. This way, they prevented themselves from doing things that a woman was not into, and minimized the risk to cross her sexual boundaries.

#### *6.6 What is the Relation between Masculinities and Sexually Aggressive Behavior?*

Having concluded on the sub research questions, we have now reached the main research question 'What is the relation between masculinities and sexually aggressive behavior (in life histories and stories about young men's sexual development by gender-transformational activists and social workers?)'. The answer presented to this question will be twofold. First, it will describe the relation between the masculinities that uphold the current gender hierarchy, and how this culture of difference leads to perpetrations of sexual harassment and violence. Secondly, the relation between a masculinity that resists the current gender hierarchy, and the prevention of sexual harassment and violence, will be presented.

This study presented sexual violence against women as a cultural issue of gender and masculinities. Normative masculinity traits were hereby found to be prescriptive as norms that men imposed on one another. As these norms consisted of control and sexual assertiveness towards women, as well as a high number of sexual conquests, crossing women's sexual boundaries was often a way to conform to masculinity norms and to hereby gain the approval of other men. Especially for inferior and deprived males, overconforming through sexual violent behavior was a way of overconforming to traditional masculinity norms in order to reassert their feelings and status of masculinity. Alpha males often gained their position at the top by already embodying such normative masculinity traits, which made them exemplary for other men who look up to them. Conforming males formed alignment with them in order to assure their membership to the group. Furthermore, femininity norms added to cycles of abuse, as women's perceived responsibility to say "no" and to remain chaste, repeatedly led to victim blaming and slut shaming, when it was in fact a man who was the assailant in a case of sexual abuse.

These normative masculinity traits were also descriptive, as they were generally believed to be naturally inherent to men. Believing that men and women are essentially different, gives way to believing that men's position of control – which is underpinned by their perceived strength, rationality and self-reliance – is only a logical byproduct of their natural differences to women – who are painted as weak, emotionally unstable and dependent. Men's dominant positions can hereby lead to their thinking that they are in fact entitled to the sexual activities they wish to perform with women. Believing men to be natural hunters furthermore casts men's sexual violence against women as inevitable, leaving

women with the responsibility to shape their self-protective behavior around (possibly) abusive men, while preventing men to critically self-reflect and change their behavior.

Three additional factors added to men's sexual violence and –harassment against women. The lack of knowledge, empathy and communication was demonstrated to put men at risk of crossing women's sexual boundaries, as gender role patterns traditionally assign men to the position of initiator, and women to the position of receiver. Not knowing what makes sex pleasurable or unpleasant, in combination with failure to emphasize with and/or communicate about a woman's sexual desires and boundaries, were all factors that left men in the dark of whether they crossed sexual boundaries or not. A widespread taboo around sex and sexuality further obstructed communication and the spread of intricate knowledge about sex.

A masculinity that resists the culture that upholds these traditional norms and beliefs about gender and sex, is in this study referred to as the resisting male. This study interviewed men who actively strive for gender justice, by refusing to conform to normative masculinity traits. They hereby both resist reinforcement of masculinity norms, and disrupt beliefs on how men naturally behave: I am a man, and yet I behave in a way generally seen as unmasculine. Resisting men were also reported to attain and spread intricate knowledge on gender and sex, and hereby attempt to break with the cultural taboo that surrounds gender and sexuality. Some of them furthermore demonstrated how communication and gender role reversal with one's sex partner can prevent men from crossing women's boundaries. This is importantly a part of resisting traditional male-female roles of dominance and submission, and of hunter and prey.

#### *6.7 Theoretical relevance*

This study used Connell's gender order theory as a theoretical framework, which proved to be a useful base for understanding masculinities, as well as a sound first indicator of how (sexual) violence can be understood in terms of gender and masculinity. As similar to Connell's masculinities, this study identified male types as locations within the male hierarchy. Men were shown to take up these locations at various aspects and times in their lives, and described behavior to maintain or change their position within this male hierarchy. These male types found in the empirical data, named alpha male, inferior male, conforming male and deprived male did not show meaningful differences from Connell's hegemonic masculinity, subordinated masculinity, complicit masculinity and marginalized masculinity. Yet, it is important to note that these male types and masculinities form a cycle, in which they all support the continuation of the gender hierarchy, which they constitute.

The respondents from this study, however, represented men who actively try to transform the current gender order and who hereby refuse to reinforce the cycle that these male types and masculinities uphold. Therefore, this study introduced the resisting male, in order to include change into its perspective on masculinity. This does more justice to the possibility and reality of transformation, which the men in this study presented us with. Importantly, this offered us insights on which sexual practices have the ability to prevent sexual abuse, such as communication and gender role reversal.

Importantly, whereas Connell's gender order theory gave limited attention to sex and sexual violence, applying her 'culture of difference' to sexual harassment and violence, this study demonstrated the intimate ways in which a culture of difference plays out in sexual interactions between men and women. The empirical data does not counteract her findings on sexual violence as ways of maintaining one's social position; it mostly offers sexual case studies that demonstrate the particular workings of her rather general findings. Furthermore, Katz's and Fahlberg & Pepper's findings were similarly reflected in the case studies. These studies did not tell us, however, about the crucial roles that intricate sexual

knowledge, empathy and communication play in sexual practices. They hereby miss out on intimate practicalities that can make a significant difference between unpleasant and pleasant sex.

Taking account of new sexual practices performed by men who actively adapt old gendered patterns, this study offers a perspective of transformational sexual practices. Furthermore, besides offering sexual novelties, this also presents the field of gender and sexuality research with methodological implications for future research about preventing and overcoming sexual violence. If one wishes to study transformational sexual practices, as well as other social transformations, one may wish to find respondents who can show them what alternative ideas and practices they uphold. It is important hereby, however, to also account for the current system, of which these novelties are deviations, as well as of the politics that support or suppress them.

### *6.8 Social relevance*

Sexual harassment and –violence against women have taken epidemic proportions since the last decades. Finding the right angle to fight this problem at its core is crucial if one wishes to establish real and sustainable improvement. Focusing on women and their victimhood in sexual violence discourse has thus far raised attention for the issue, yet this focus has also led to further holding women responsible for attacking the problem, which is a mechanism that has been shown to reinforce the privileged position of men, who are the main perpetrators of sexual violence and –harassment.

Demonstrating how respondents, and the men they discussed, used sexual violence against women in order to conform to masculinity norms, present us with powerful evidence that sexual violence against women is a product of social masculinity norms, rather than a product of nature. This study also showed the danger of the beliefs that differences between men and women are natural, as assumed differences regularly cause men to feel entitled to crossing women's sexual boundaries. This implies that efforts aimed at preventing sexual violence and –harassment need to target the culture that upholds these traditional norms and beliefs itself, and dismantle the gender hierarchy it upholds. Furthermore, awareness of how traditional and alternative gender roles play out in sexual interactions, combined with intricate knowledge of what makes sex enjoyable or unpleasant, is crucial to stimulating alternative sexual practices. Sharing intricate sexual knowledge amongst the entirety of our society, from cradle to grave, and amongst all social and ethnic classes – dominant groups included – will make people less vulnerable to committing and experiencing sexual abuse, and will probably give way to more positive sexual experiences for everyone. This takes the courage to break deeply ingrained taboos on sex and sexuality, yet, the transformations are likely to be rewarding.

### *6.9 Limitations*

This study's focus, sample and methods pose a few limitations that require attention. They may well give rise to future studies on sexual violence and –harassment.

This study only discussed sexual violence and –harassment from the perspective of men and masculinity. This left a blind spot, however, on the impact of women on gender, masculinities and sexual practices. This study invites future researchers therefore, to explore women's beliefs and practices with regard to masculinities and sexual violence, as well as on the role of women and femininities herein. This study has also been focused on sexual violence between men and women, and not on homosexual or pan-sexual abuse. It would be interesting to learn more about these forms of sexual violence as well.

This study's sample consists of a small number of activist men and youth workers, of which most have, at some point in their lives, decided to transform men, masculinities and sexuality. In order to gain more knowledge about the majority of men who are not active in this gender transformational field, it is necessary to gather a wider sample of men. This study's use of qualitative research furthermore eliminated the possibility of having a sample that is truly representative for a wider

population. If one wishes to present findings on masculinity and sexual violence that extrapolate beyond its study's sample, one would need to create a quantitative design able to answer similar questions. Perhaps a mixed methods study could bridge the gap between findings from qualitative case studies on the one hand, quantitative representative findings on the other. This could offer insight on the scope of this study's findings.

Finally, as one of this study's most important theoretical and methodological contributions consisted of creating a perspective on change, this study encourages future researchers to continue and expand theoretical and empirical perspectives of change. For instance, a mixed methods study could combine qualitative findings on alternative practices with quantified results on the scope of these practices. Factors of change require further qualitative and quantitative studying, as they show us how transformations already prove to come about. Yet, this focus on change is not fruitful for a realistic and complete understanding of the situation, if one loses track hereby on conservative viewpoints and backlashes that continue to exist alongside. Although this study mainly focused upon peer groups rather than media, keeping up with social changes also requires keeping up with the fast-changing production and consumption of media and the virtual and real-life phenomena it represents. An interdisciplinary approach that combines a variety of social sciences with psychology, could be able to account for the complex ways in which media represent as well as influence people's beliefs and practices with regard to gender and sexual violence.

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## Appendix 1: Masculinity traits code co-occurrences

|                                   | (show) no vul | aggressive | body posture | challenge/ridi | cocky | competition | dangerous/fri | defy rules/the | heroic/be imp | humorous/pla | in control | into sports | lazy | manipulative/calculating |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|------------|--------------|----------------|-------|-------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|------------|-------------|------|--------------------------|
| (show) no vulnerability/affection | 0             | 6          | 0            | 8              | 0     | 2           | 1             | 0              | 0             | 3            | 3          | 0           | 1    | 2                        |
| aggressive                        | 6             | 0          | 1            | 4              | 2     | 3           | 4             | 3              | 2             | 2            | 5          | 1           | 1    | 3                        |
| body posture                      | 0             | 1          | 0            | 0              | 1     | 0           | 1             | 0              | 0             | 0            | 0          | 0           | 0    | 0                        |
| challenge/ridicule other men      | 8             | 4          | 0            | 0              | 0     | 5           | 0             | 1              | 1             | 3            | 0          | 1           | 0    | 1                        |
| cocky                             | 0             | 2          | 1            | 0              | 0     | 1           | 1             | 3              | 0             | 0            | 3          | 1           | 0    | 1                        |
| competition                       | 2             | 3          | 0            | 5              | 1     | 0           | 0             | 0              | 1             | 2            | 0          | 0           | 0    | 0                        |
| dangerous/frightening             | 1             | 4          | 1            | 0              | 1     | 0           | 0             | 2              | 0             | 0            | 1          | 0           | 0    | 0                        |
| defy rules/the law                | 0             | 3          | 0            | 1              | 3     | 0           | 2             | 0              | 0             | 0            | 3          | 0           | 0    | 3                        |
| heroic/be important               | 0             | 2          | 0            | 1              | 0     | 1           | 0             | 0              | 0             | 0            | 0          | 1           | 0    | 0                        |
| humorous/playful                  | 3             | 2          | 0            | 3              | 0     | 2           | 0             | 0              | 0             | 0            | 0          | 0           | 1    | 1                        |
| in control                        | 3             | 5          | 0            | 0              | 3     | 0           | 1             | 3              | 0             | 0            | 0          | 1           | 0    | 3                        |
| into sports                       | 0             | 1          | 0            | 1              | 1     | 0           | 0             | 0              | 1             | 0            | 1          | 0           | 0    | 0                        |
| lazy                              | 1             | 1          | 0            | 0              | 0     | 0           | 0             | 0              | 0             | 1            | 0          | 0           | 0    | 0                        |
| manipulative/calculating          | 2             | 3          | 0            | 1              | 1     | 0           | 0             | 3              | 0             | 1            | 3          | 0           | 0    | 0                        |
| not feminine                      | 1             | 2          | 0            | 8              | 0     | 0           | 0             | 0              | 0             | 2            | 0          | 2           | 1    | 0                        |
| physical characteristics          | 1             | 1          | 1            | 0              | 0     | 0           | 0             | 0              | 0             | 0            | 0          | 3           | 0    | 0                        |
| racist                            | 0             | 1          | 0            | 1              | 1     | 0           | 0             | 1              | 0             | 0            | 0          | 0           | 0    | 3                        |
| rich/material luxury              | 0             | 0          | 0            | 0              | 1     | 1           | 0             | 2              | 0             | 0            | 2          | 2           | 0    | 1                        |
| risky behavior                    | 0             | 0          | 0            | 0              | 0     | 0           | 0             | 1              | 0             | 0            | 0          | 0           | 0    | 0                        |
| self-reliant                      | 1             | 0          | 0            | 0              | 3     | 0           | 0             | 1              | 0             | 0            | 0          | 0           | 1    | 0                        |
| show no compassion/empathy        | 5             | 0          | 0            | 3              | 0     | 0           | 0             | 0              | 0             | 0            | 2          | 0           | 0    | 0                        |
| smoke/drink/use drugs             | 0             | 0          | 0            | 1              | 0     | 1           | 0             | 0              | 0             | 2            | 0          | 1           | 0    | 2                        |
| strong                            | 6             | 3          | 0            | 3              | 2     | 1           | 0             | 0              | 2             | 0            | 2          | 6           | 0    | 0                        |
| sturdy/cool                       | 6             | 5          | 0            | 7              | 4     | 5           | 1             | 3              | 1             | 3            | 3          | 4           | 1    | 4                        |
| treat woman with disrespect       | 2             | 1          | 0            | 1              | 0     | 0           | 0             | 1              | 0             | 0            | 3          | 0           | 0    | 1                        |
| uncomplicated/does                | 3             | 1          | 0            | 2              | 0     | 3           | 0             | 0              | 0             | 1            | 1          | 0           | 0    | 0                        |
| well styled                       | 1             | 1          | 0            | 1              | 0     | 1           | 0             | 0              | 0             | 0            | 0          | 3           | 0    | 0                        |

|                                   | not feminine | physical chari | racist | rich/material | risky behavior | self-reliant | show no comp | smoke/drink/ | strong | sturdy/cool | treat woman | uncomplicate | well styled |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|----------------|--------|---------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| (show) no vulnerability/affection | 1            | 1              | 0      | 0             | 0              | 1            | 5            | 0            | 6      | 6           | 2           | 3            | 1           |
| aggressive                        | 2            | 1              | 1      | 0             | 0              | 0            | 0            | 0            | 3      | 5           | 1           | 1            | 1           |
| body posture                      | 0            | 1              | 0      | 0             | 0              | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0      | 0           | 0           | 0            | 0           |
| challenge/ridicule other men      | 8            | 0              | 1      | 0             | 0              | 0            | 3            | 1            | 3      | 7           | 1           | 2            | 1           |
| cocky                             | 0            | 0              | 1      | 1             | 0              | 3            | 0            | 0            | 2      | 4           | 0           | 0            | 0           |
| competition                       | 0            | 0              | 0      | 1             | 0              | 0            | 0            | 1            | 1      | 5           | 0           | 3            | 1           |
| dangerous/frightening             | 0            | 0              | 0      | 0             | 0              | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0      | 1           | 0           | 0            | 0           |
| defy rules/the law                | 0            | 0              | 1      | 2             | 1              | 1            | 0            | 0            | 0      | 3           | 1           | 0            | 0           |
| heroic/be important               | 0            | 0              | 0      | 0             | 0              | 0            | 0            | 0            | 2      | 1           | 0           | 0            | 0           |
| humorous/playful                  | 2            | 0              | 0      | 0             | 0              | 0            | 0            | 2            | 0      | 3           | 0           | 1            | 0           |
| in control                        | 0            | 0              | 0      | 2             | 0              | 0            | 2            | 0            | 2      | 3           | 3           | 1            | 0           |
| into sports                       | 2            | 3              | 0      | 2             | 0              | 0            | 0            | 1            | 6      | 4           | 0           | 0            | 3           |
| lazy                              | 1            | 0              | 0      | 0             | 0              | 1            | 0            | 0            | 0      | 1           | 0           | 0            | 0           |
| manipulative/calculating          | 0            | 0              | 3      | 1             | 0              | 0            | 0            | 2            | 0      | 4           | 1           | 0            | 0           |
| not feminine                      | 0            | 0              | 1      | 0             | 0              | 0            | 1            | 0            | 1      | 2           | 0           | 0            | 1           |
| physical characteristics          | 0            | 0              | 0      | 0             | 0              | 0            | 1            | 0            | 5      | 1           | 0           | 0            | 0           |
| racist                            | 1            | 0              | 0      | 0             | 0              | 0            | 0            | 1            | 0      | 0           | 0           | 0            | 0           |
| rich/material luxury              | 0            | 0              | 0      | 0             | 0              | 2            | 0            | 0            | 1      | 0           | 0           | 0            | 1           |
| risky behavior                    | 0            | 0              | 0      | 0             | 0              | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0      | 0           | 0           | 0            | 0           |
| self-reliant                      | 0            | 0              | 0      | 2             | 0              | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0      | 0           | 0           | 0            | 0           |
| show no compassion/empathy        | 1            | 1              | 0      | 0             | 0              | 0            | 0            | 1            | 4      | 1           | 1           | 3            | 0           |
| smoke/drink/use drugs             | 0            | 0              | 1      | 0             | 0              | 0            | 1            | 0            | 0      | 3           | 1           | 2            | 0           |
| strong                            | 1            | 5              | 0      | 1             | 0              | 0            | 4            | 0            | 0      | 5           | 0           | 1            | 1           |
| sturdy/cool                       | 2            | 1              | 0      | 0             | 0              | 0            | 1            | 3            | 5      | 0           | 2           | 1            | 4           |
| treat woman with disrespect       | 0            | 0              | 0      | 0             | 0              | 0            | 1            | 1            | 0      | 2           | 0           | 0            | 0           |
| uncomplicated/does                | 0            | 0              | 0      | 0             | 0              | 0            | 3            | 2            | 1      | 1           | 0           | 0            | 0           |
| well styled                       | 1            | 0              | 0      | 1             | 0              | 0            | 0            | 0            | 1      | 4           | 0           | 0            | 0           |