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Male Emotionality: 'Boys don't cry' Versus 'It's good to talk'

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Abstract

In this article male affect within intimate relationships is examined as a product of the tension between two competing discourses: 'it's good to talk' versus 'boys don't cry'. Central to this tension is how men perform 'manliness' within intimate relationships, a space where there is pressure to perform affect and emotionally participate. Using in depth interview data (N=16) from Scotland, I examine how far and in what ways emotions can be boundary breaking within performances of masculinity. It appears that men are drawn to being emotionally open, but find this difficult. A pervasive sense of vulnerability rooted in their identification of affect with 'weakness' underpins their difficulties. Accounts of reflexivity around affective moments within intimate contexts highlight the complex ways cultural discourses are negotiated. Through recognising affect as socially constructed in interaction, this paper considers how men manage their emotional lives and perform emotion work while navigating the boundaries between traditional, hegemonic performances of masculinity and more emotionally expressive ways of being manly. The concluding discussion examines how these arguments connect with debates in critical studies of masculinities and processes of social change.

Introduction

This paper will argue that something has changed in how men disclose their intimate emotions within intimate relationships, in contrast to sociological couple research in the 1990s and 1980s in the UK which revealed most men did not want to discuss their emotions, despite a desire for emotional closeness from their female partners (Duncombe and Marsden, 1993, 1998; Mansfield and Collard, 1988). Duncombe and Marsden (1993) conducted interviews and focus groups which gave the strong impression that "Most of our women respondents felt their male partners were lacking in what might be called 'emotional participation' in their relationships" (p.225). According to Duncombe and Marsden (1993), emotional participation is related to the idea that there is a gendered inequality of emotional response within the relationships of their participants, whereby men say they care about their couple relationships, but within those close relationships fail to disclose their intimate emotions. This paper will focus on personal emotions only, not interpersonal emotions, in order to consider whether there is a new form emotion work required by to disclose feelings in intimate relationships – that of *admission*.

Duncombe and Marsden claimed that "gender asymmetry in relation to intimacy and emotion work may be the last and most obstinate manifestation and frontier of gender inequality" (1993, p.150). While there has been little recent sociological research into emotional disclosure in intimate relationships, it is worth noting that there has been extensive research into specific emotions within dyadic relationships oriented towards psychology (for example Parkinson et. al., 2016). Part of the

argument being made here relates to the idea that emotions are 'less masculine' and therefore 'good' for gender equality (de Boise and Hearn, 2017). The central concept of Connell's (1983) 'hegemonic masculinity' has been taken up within masculinity studies, framing much of the research and theoretical work taking place within this area since the 1980s. It is a structural-level theory of masculinity, and as highlighted by Hearn (2004), is critical when combined with Connell's (1987) theory of gender and power. While Connell (1995, p.82) stresses that a vast majority of men will never live up to hegemonic masculinity in their own lives, their complicity in sustaining it as an ideal provides them with a 'patriarchal dividend' bringing 'honour, prestige and the right to command'. Within this research hegemonic masculinity is considered to represent the 'traditional' idealised form of masculinity that; valorises strength and control, including emotional control or a lack of empathy (Kimmel, 2008) and is symbolised by the discourse 'boys don't cry' (Shamir and Travis, 2002).

This paper explores the tensions between cultural discourses around how to 'be manly' and 'do emotion' where doing emotion usually refers to how men *talk about* emotion, focusing exclusively on 'disclosing intimacy' (Giddens, 1992), while recognising this is not the only form of intimacy within couple relationships (Jamieson, 1998). The nature of *disclosing* is a central tenet of the therapeutic discourse which 'incessantly conveys...that all bonds can be formed and maintained through partners' ability to express verbally their needs, emotions, and goals and to negotiate those needs through language.' (Illouz, 2008, p. 134). This understanding of intimacy has become a new norm since the 70s and stresses the hardest part is 'taking the step of uncovering yourself' (Klagsbrun, 1985, p.21). Implicit in this interpretation of intimacy is the core premise that women are 'naturally' more emotional, reinforcing the commonsensical notion of the unemotional man versus the emotional woman (Lupton, 1998), a simplistic account of gendered emotion which has been questioned by psychologists and sociologists (Cohen, 1990; Galasinski, 2004).

The idea that men 'should' be more emotional is not new, and has been largely attributed to a feminist agenda from the 1960s onwards (Seidler, 1991). While the rhetoric around men becoming more emotional has generally had a positive approach, there is also a backlash against this view on the grounds that it is changing economic and social relations that have led to 'emotional insecurities' felt by men (de Boise, 2015, p.3). What has emerged from this complex political picture is a discourse that suggests that 'it's good to talk' a discourse that, as Illouz (2008) highlights, 'works' in people's everyday lives as it makes sense of social experience and provides guidance in uncertainty (p. 20). Uncertainty in this context relates to the breaking down of traditional ways of life (Giddens, 1990), which impacts on concepts of self, and specifically emotion. New emotional models permeate multiple social sites in 'gender-blind narrative[s] of identity' encouraging men to become more emotionally reflexive and talkative (Illouz, 2008, p.15).

The pressure applied on (some) men through the therapeutic discourse (Brownlie, 2014) to talk about their feelings is directly in contradiction to men not being seen as willing to express their emotion (Duncombe and Marsden, 1993). Defined in relation to the rise of self-help books, a focus on the self or a cultural system (Illouz, 2008), the therapeutic culture emphasises how it is 'good to talk' (Brownlie, 2014). Examples of this discourse can be seen in campaigns around male mental health and media descriptions of 'metrosexual men', which supports the premise that men need to change to become more emotionally open. The tension between the traditional and progressive discourses is tangible in the accounts of the men presented in this paper highlighting the complex realities that contrast with the idea of 'unemotional men'. Through considering their accounts of navigating the boundaries between these two discourses, this paper will look at how social change

takes place to consider whether gendered power in the private sphere is changing, or not. The central argument being made is that there has been a change in how some (white, mainly heterosexual and western) men disclose their emotions in intimate relationships due to the increasing influence of the therapeutic discourse.

Male Emotionality in Intimate Relationships

The concept of discourse can be slippery to define. Lupton (1998, p. 2) defines discourses as 'patterns of words used to describe and explain phenomenon'. Alternatively a poststructuralist perspective suggests that discourses do not simply reflect reality, but rather construct knowledge, experience and identity (Lupton, 1998). Extending this approach to emotion privileges the role of language in the construction of emotions, recognising the *social* nature of emotions as discussed by Burkitt (2014). As Hearn (1993, p. 148, emphasis in original) states 'it is more helpful to see discourses as both *producing* people assumed to be 'subjects' that are or are not emotional, and *produced* by people assumed to be subjects. In both senses subjects do emotions, they do not just happen 'automatically'; they have to be *done*'. In reference to the therapeutic discourse, Furedi (2004, p.1) has argued that 'therapeutic language and practices have expanded into everyday life.' placing greater importance on emotion than ever before. So that the therapeutic discourse is widely influential in society, but particularly in intimate relationships (Illouz, 2008).

Defining emotions is a difficult task. The term 'emotion' itself derives from common language, and as such refers to a wide array of experiences including both positive and negative, from mild to intense, and sensations that can be simple or complex (Gross and Thompson, 2007). The term 'emotion' subsumes others including sentiments, affect, feeling and the like (Turner and Stets, 2005), so that it is being used in a broadly defined manner, to include all aspects of affect and affection (Burkitt, 2014) in this paper. In attempting to get away from understanding emotions in a psychological, individualistic sense, sociologists have characterised emotions as socially shaped and embodied responses to social stimuli. Through understanding emotion as being *in* social relationships, Burkitt (1997) claims that it is vital to recognise emotions as essentially communicative 'occurring *between people* and not expressions of something contained inside a single person' (p.40, emphasis in original).

Through prioritising the interactional loop of emotional expression and experience which occurs in social relations, mediated by the internalised expectations of others' viewpoints, Burkitt acknowledges the role 'others' play in emotional experiences (2014).

Burkitt (2012) stresses the importance of conceptualising reflexivity as involving not only an internal conversation, but the role others play in our reflexive stance, saying 'this cannot be disentangled from the way that others regard us and respond to us, evaluating our actions and ourselves, or from the way that we *imagine* that they do.' (p.460). The key word here is 'imagine', emphasised by Burkitt (2012) – this imagining is related to what we expect others to think of us. The expectations of others' viewpoints can also be stimuli for emotions. Within this paper it is the expectations of what is considered a successful performance of manliness that directly informs emotionality for many men. So that the values of the 'boys don't cry' discourse frame emotional experiences in a relational loop. Central to this process is a sense of reflexivity. Reflexivity is a capacity developed in response to the increased unpredictability of the social world (Giddens, 1990). Emotional reflexivity is defined as 'relationally reflecting and acting on interpretations of our own and others' emotions and as

describing the way in which emotions are central to how we make our way through the world' (Holmes, 2015, p. 177). As Holmes points out, gendered emotional reflexivity is open to change and is a core part of navigating changing gender hierarchies (Holmes, 2015, p. 188). The role of reflexivity in emotion work is to provide a point of reflection in contexts in which the feeling rules are unclear, I argue one such situation relates to the performance of masculinity and disclosing emotion within intimate relationships. Wherein reflexivity is central to a successful performance by facilitating a judgement of appropriacy in emotional disclosure.

Cohen (1990) suggests that stereotypes of men not being as emotional as women are limited, and not based on psychological fact, suggesting that men experience emotion as often as women, but *express* emotion less, as supported by the work of Simon and Nath (2004). Craib (1994, p.6) takes a more theoretical approach to male emotionality, stating that men express emotion less than women because emotional expression is intimately linked with hierarchy, with emotional control being a sign of superiority. Emotional control is part of a successful performance of manliness which leads to an ability to claim an identity as a member of the privileged gender group, a desire that can be satisfied only by putting on a credible manhood act. Men's emotional expression is therefore submitted to an ongoing social scrutiny. In competitive, hierarchical societies, especially those that are classically patriarchal, this means signifying a capacity to exert control over one's self, the environment and others (Craib, 1994). There is also a body of more recent scholarship on masculinity and emotion which questions the premise that men are less emotional (de Boise, 2015; de Boise and Hearn, 2017; Galasinski, 2004; Holmes, 2015; Pease, 2012). De Boise and Hearn (2017) suggest this work can be categorised into three themes, softening masculinity, hybridization and constructionist, stating that this body of work needs to proceed from a clear understanding of emotions themselves, and to maintain a focus on gender inequalities. The connection between male emotionality and power has been discussed by many scholars who highlight the ways hierarchy is linked with emotion (Bourdieu, 2001; Burkitt, 1997; Craib, 1994; Duncombe and Marsden, 1995; Galasinski, 2004; Hearn 1993; Pease, 2012; Seidler, 1997). It is important therefore to maintain a focus on 'how men's emotions are shaped by and help to reproduce structural inequalities' to maintain a critical perspective of masculinities (de Boise and Hearn, 2017, p.5). Emotional control, directly related to Hochschild's (1983) idea of 'emotion management', is highly valued, and a sign of superiority over both women and men.

Emotion work has been a popular concept within sociology and social psychology since it was coined by Hochschild (1979, p. 561) as referring to the 'act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling. ...'emotion work' refers to the effort – the act of trying – and not to the outcome, which may or may not be successful'. A wide range of research has been conducted to look at emotion management and emotional labour in the context of organisations and the workplace (Zapf, 2002). The term 'emotion work' relates primarily to the private sphere and has been widely used within research on intimacy and personal relationships where the focus has been on *relational* emotion work, that done by one person for the benefit of another (for example Duncombe and Marsden, 1995; Erickson, 2005; Umberson et al, 2015). This paper considers the emotion management of personal emotions only, *not interpersonal emotion management*, in order to look at two types of work being done by the men in this research: the traditional work of constraining emotion, and the therapeutic work of disclosing emotion. Hochschild (1979) distinguishes between *suppression* when an undesired feeling is initially present and *evocation* when a desired feeling is absent. The correlation between Hochschild's (1979) 'suppression' and traditional expectations of manly emotionality in the 'boy's don't cry' discourse is clear to see (Connell, 1995). However the description of 'evocation' does not fit with the therapeutic discourse around male

emotional disclosure as it describes a lack of authenticity (described as expressing an absent feeling) which is antithetical to the core premise of the therapeutic discourse of prioritising one's true self (Illouz, 2008).

I suggest that the emotion work required to disclose feelings in intimate situations is *admission* - acknowledging feelings that are present but may not fit with traditional feeling rules. 'Feeling rules' are the guidelines that regulate what one should feel in any given situation; emotion work is necessary when feelings do not fit with what is expected. Hochschild (1979) refers to the effects of social change on feeling rules as leading to 'contradictions between contending sets of rules' (p. 568) so that the move from a traditional to therapeutic discourse around male emotionality leads to a sense of uncertainty about how one should feel. Illouz (2008, p. 21) refers to the impact of a cultural shift as being 'messy' because 'new ideas, values and cultural models coexist with, incorporate, and rework pre-existing cultural material. In that sense, culture is always a palimpsest in which the new is superimposed upon the old'. It is this messy uncertainty about how the men interviewed 'should' feel that is focused on, with a particular focus on the presence of vulnerability.

Vulnerability relates to our agency to 'emphasize the capacity to do things, but our vulnerability is as important as our capacities; indeed the two sides are closely related, for vulnerability can prompt us to act or fail to act, and both can be risky' (Sayer, 2011, p. 5).

As Jamieson (1998, p. 7) notes, 'it is only relatively recently that talking about yourself, disclosing, 'sharing' are generally advocated as part of an individual's emotional well-being and of good relationships'. In contemporary society and within the context of an intimate relationship the expectation of emotional disclosure is highly informed by the therapeutic discourse (Illouz, 2008). While the nature of this *disclosing* varies by gender, class and age across cultures, it is directly related to vulnerability for many men (Criab, 1994, Seidler, 1997). Vulnerability is in turn correlated with a need for emotional control and therefore male power, the patriarchal dividend (Connell, 1995) and structural gendered inequalities (Bourdieu, 2001; Burkitt, 1997; Craib, 1994; Duncombe and Marsden, 1993; Pease, 2012; Seidler, 1997). This paper is focused on how men experience emotional disclosure and how in turn this relates to gendered power in intimate relationships.

The Study

In total 16 interviews were conducted with men living in Scotland with a good spread according to age and class as can be seen from table 1 below. The class position of participants was chosen by them, with 'transitional' referring to those men who felt they had had a working class upbringing but now have a middle class lifestyle. All of the interview participants chose pseudonyms for themselves to be used when anonymising their interview transcript and in reporting on the content of their interviews. Of the sixteen participants all but two were British with one man from mainland Europe (all of whom were white) and one man from the Middle East. Three men identified as homosexual while thirteen identified as heterosexual, the sample is therefore relatively homogenous as presenting the voices of mainly heterosexual, white, Western men.

[Table 1 near here]

All participants were recruited after maintaining contact with the researcher after taking part in the initial two phases of data collection which included both men and women, these were an online survey (n=1081) and telephone interviews (n=43) this data is not presented within this paper, neither is the data collected from interviews with 16 women interviewed. This paper focuses on the

in depth narratives of the men in relation to emotion while the other data is presented in forthcoming papers. There was no selection criteria for the face to face interviews participants other than their continued interest in being involved in the research project, self-selection bias is therefore present in the sample of participants (Bryman, 2006).

Interview topics included how participants demonstrate love and closeness, what they understood emotional participation (Duncombe and Marsden, 1993) to mean and negotiation within the home. While I acknowledge that class and gender are inextricably linked in relation to power (Connell, 1987), due to a lack of clear class differences within the interview sample and the low number of participants, class was not a focus of analysis in the face-to-face interviews but would provide a rich area for further study with a larger sample in order to consider the impact of cultural background on male emotionality. Interview data was analysed using a combination of content analysis and narrative analysis (Ritchie et. al, 2003).

Tensions between disclosing and remaining silent

This section considers to what extent intimate relationships (often couples) provide a place for men to resist the 'boys don't cry' discourse and embrace the values of the therapeutic discourse. What is clear from the interviews with men is that intimate relationships are highly valued as a place where they can be themselves as described by David in this interview extract in which he is talking about his wife:

I'm extremely exposed to her, my feelings, and she is extremely exposed to me, so I have no problem whatsoever to tell her what I feel, what's going on in my head, my heart, my needs and for everything in our relationship, and because we work on it, we talk about it...but can openly discuss the issue with her without the fear of being judged or she might think I'm a bad person.

Here David highlights how an intimate relationship is a social space in which he can be 'exposed' and say what he feels. The sense of couple relationships being a 'safe space' to share feelings (Giddens, 1992) is not universal such as with Chaser. He finds relationships exposing and therefore chooses to be single as described in this interview extract when he is discussing whether he is emotionally open in his couple relationships:

Chaser: As soon as I enter into a relationship, and I've spoken to other men about this and we've shared this, aye there's a need to be in a relationship, but when you're in it there is an anxiety there that wasn't there before...I could be quite easily hurt if that somehow is used against me.

Int: If what is used against you?

Chaser: The fact that I'm emotionally open.

Chaser highlights the danger of an intimate relationship, particularly a couple relationship, that there is an expectation of emotional openness which can lead to anxiety; emotion is central to the therapeutic discourse (Furedi, 2004). This reticence of being emotionally exposed is echoed by George who describes his fear of being in a couple relationship, something he craves yet is wary of:

Being in a relationship is partly about losing control, and, you know, letting the other person catch you, so to speak, which takes a hell of a lot of trust, and that's something that's scary.

The deep rooted conflict inherent in intimate relationships makes them an ideal context within which to examine a clash of cultural ideals around male emotionality. There is an expectation that couple and other intimate relationships are a social space in which intimacy is inherent and required (Jamieson, 1998). What is less clear is the extent to which men share their feelings within this intimate space and the role masculinity in framing cultural discourses of emotion.

Within the interviews a desire to emotionally participate in relationships was complex and highlighted the 'messy' nature of contemporary male accounts of emotional disclosure within intimate relationships. As while participants wanted to be able to emotionally participate with their partners, they often found this confusing or frustrating. One example of this is Davie who towards the end his interview mentioned his partner crying, when asked how her crying made him feel, his response was:

I don't know what to do, it's made me feel angry, it has made me want to run away, other times it has made me feel really, it's hard for me to describe how it has made me feel, it has made me feel like I care for her so much.

This extract from Davie's interview highlights the complexity of dealing with emotion within intimate relationships as Davie struggles to describe the complex emotions he feels towards his partner when she is crying. The dyadic nature of the relationships being discussed means that within intimate situations there is a social interaction taking place between two people in which feeling rules aren't sufficiently detailed to provide guidance on how one 'should' feel. Instead there is a messy collection of feelings that are at times hard to convey and articulate, a central problem in asking anyone to *talk about* their emotions is the complexity of their experience (Williams, 2001). One point that was repeatedly discussed by participants, in all but two of the interviews, was a pervasive sense of vulnerability.

Pervasive Sense of Vulnerability

Vulnerability was consistently described as a central feeling for men when they talked about disclosing their emotions in their intimate relationships, while the impact of feeling vulnerable varied between men it consistently was described as related to controlling emotions. The 'boys don't cry' discourse is evident here as it stresses the importance of control – particularly emotional control – in order to successfully perform manliness (Craib, 1994). The difficult sensation of vulnerability described by men in this research is essentially a policing mechanism to enforce the values of the 'boy's don't cry' discourse. Men police themselves and their own ability to disclose intimacy through internalising the values of the 'boy's don't cry' discourse and doing emotion work on themselves to abide by gendered 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1979). A clear example is given by Davie, who describes why he controls conversations with his partner about things that are upsetting him to avoid them lasting too long:

Davie: I would speak to Megan about it if I was really upset about something that had happened then I would speak to her, but it does have to be on my terms, finished when I want it to finish and not go on and on and on.

Int: What is that about that not going on and on thing?

Davie: I suppose it is a bit being in control, sort of staying in control of it...I don't know, I wonder if I would end up feeling exposed or I can't even cope with this or helpless, a bit

pathetic, vulnerable, that would be vulnerable if I sort of said too much or it went too deeply that sort of thing would end up feeling quite vulnerable myself.

Having control over the depth of disclosure within interactions is directly related to vulnerability here. Talking about feelings is exposing, so control must be maintained for Davie in order to avoid feeling 'helpless' or 'a bit pathetic' which are the opposite of the strong ideal of manliness traditionally encouraged. Emotional control is exerted to avoid vulnerability as it is uncomfortable to feel - Davie makes this clear when he associates vulnerability with a sense of 'I can't even cope with this'. The 'boys don't cry discourse' has shaped the feeling rules for Davie so that he experiences his emotions as threatening, they therefore must be controlled to avoid feeling vulnerable. Emotion work is being performed by Davie to arguably suppress his emotions, at least to minimise the *disclosure* of his emotions in this intimate context, a key aspect of being shaped by the 'boys don't cry' discourse'.

The sense of vulnerability described by many of the men interviewed can be seen in the next interview extract as Caracticus talks about a time when he deliberately controlled his feelings of grief for a period of months while serving in the army:

Int: What about when you were younger in your 20's can you remember were you more emotionally demonstrative then?

Caracticus: No I would only show emotions in really private quiet times or with really close friends. I was in the army, in Northern Ireland. So I knew, well I knew one man who was blown up but never expressed anything about that except with my closest friend, a civilian, a few months afterwards...I felt, like I didn't know this guy well enough.

Int: To be the one that got upset?

Caracticus: Yes. He wasn't in my unit, he was an officer of the different unit and it came to the bit where I was working...He told me about his wife and kids and that kind of thing, for an officer just what a great guy.... But I held it off for months, it was when I came home on leave, I went camping with my friends, and I told my friend about it... I felt like a weakness showing things, until I was with a totally secure friend. Yes I was even still nervous about showing my feelings then.

Int: What's the fear?

Caracticus: (Pause) I don't know about strength, strength of character, yes just being seen as being weak.

Caracticus pauses but states plainly that weakness is to be feared. I argue this fear is due to weakness being damaging to his performance of manliness; it feels threatening and highly uncomfortable for him. Vulnerability is therefore avoided through the performance of emotion work on the self, of suppression of emotion in 'trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling' (Hochschild, 1979, p. 561) in order to fit with gendered feeling rules. The 'boys don't cry' discourse frames the feeling rules for Caracticus and discourages him from sharing his feelings of grief until he is with a 'totally secure friend' – an intimate relationship in which the feeling rules are different. The importance of context to emotional disclosure is highlighted here within an intimate space the

therapeutic discourse becomes more influential so that Caracticus no longer fears being seen as weak.

When theorising emotions as occurring *in* social interactions the role of the 'imagined other' comes to represent dominant cultural values (Burkitt, 2012). This can be seen in Caracticus' account of waiting to disclose his emotions in an intimate situation in order to avoid other people thinking he was weak. A distinction is established here between 'others' or wider society, and an intimate connection. The role of the imagined other clearly refers to 'others' rather than a specific known person, and as such represents the feeling rules, in this case, of the 'boys don't cry' discourse. It is through accepting these feeling rules that masculinity is policed internally through suppressing emotions, but emotional reflexivity provides a way for men to question the values projected onto the 'imagined other'.

Wanting to Emotionally Participate?

While all but two of the men interviewed in this research felt a sense of vulnerability around disclosing their emotions, particularly things that upset them, these same men also wanted to emotionally participate with their partners. The value placed on being emotional represents a shift in attitude from the men discussed in previous research who did not value being emotional and did not want to emotionally participate with their partners (Duncombe and Marsden, 1993 and 1998; Hochschild, 1990; Mansfield and Collard, 1988). I argue this shift is due to the influence of the therapeutic discourse. Many aspects of this discourse are present in the following interview extract from Biffer, including a sense of danger in containing emotions and the implications for mental health, particularly for men:

Int: But you don't think it's bad to say how you're feeling?

Biffer: No it's a good thing to do, should get your emotions out in the open, the more you hide things the more they hurt you, that's always been the case, I've seen it so many times... So yes I do think it's important to discuss your emotions, hiding your emotions is a crazy thing to do, it's like having a bag of explosives, if you don't open it up and get rid of them they're going to blow up in your face at some stage, you have to discuss things... Yes it's good to discuss what's on your mind and you need to, because you become insane if you don't, it would drive you bananas.

Within the context of heterosexual couple relationships it is often women who are described as helping men be more emotionally open as they value emotional participation highly (Duncombe and Marsden, 1993 and 1998; Hochschild, 1990; Mansfield and Collard, 1988). An example of this gendered dynamic is evident in Caracticus' desire to be more emotionally fluent:

Int: When you're looking for a partner would you rather have somebody who doesn't push you to talk about how you're feeling or do you actually quite like it?

Caracticus: No I would like to be better at it, so yes I like it.

Int: Does it feel comfortable?

Caracticus: No!

Caractus highlights the way men often characterised their role of being encouraged to be more emotionally open, or develop their emotional skills, by their female partners which is arguably evidence of the feminist agenda from the 1960s onwards having been successful (Seidler, 1991). The increase in value placed on being emotional by men within intimate relationships can also be seen as a product of the influence of the therapeutic discourse. The clash between the 'boys don't cry' and therapeutic discourses leads to the 'messy' (Illouz, 2008) 'uncertainty' (Hochschild, 1979) in how men *feel* within intimate contexts. Emotion work is therefore changed from *suppression* of emotion to an attempt at *admission*; although these attempts can be constrained by the presence of vulnerability which, at times, retains its influence.

Mitt describes his experience of getting into a new relationship after nursing his terminally ill wife for several years. Despite being in a new relationship for five years in which he is happy, he is reluctant to live with his new partner or to say to her 'I love you':

I think it's just the thought of the commitment itself is uncomfortable, I mean getting married, you know, there's a reason when you're talking about 'getting into bed' with somebody, is an opening up, everything is stripped bare and you're making yourself open and vulnerable in a particular kind of way and I think that's what marriage requires for it to work ... And I don't think there's any shells or armour or holding back, we are literally in bed, but I think that this unwillingness to take it any further is a kind of armour that I've got ...

Here Mitt acknowledges the central tenets of intimacy in the therapeutic discourse, to 'open up' or to be 'stripped bare' are 'required for it [a marriage] to work', demonstrating his knowledge of this discourse. However Mitt is arguably resisting the therapeutic discourse here, he wants to maintain his armour after being devastated by the death of his wife. He does not want to feel vulnerable with his new partner and so avoids the depth of relationship he previously had; he maintains his 'shell or armour'. Mitt demonstrates that for him vulnerability is a central aspect of intimately disclosing with someone, a requirement of the therapeutic discourse in achieving intimacy, but it is a price too high for him. It is interesting to note that vulnerability was not mentioned in the accounts of any of the 16 women interviewed for the broader research of which this was a part. The association of vulnerability and emotional disclosure was only referred to by men, and repeatedly so.

Felix is one of three men who described having done a significant amount of work on themselves to improve his emotional awareness. While other men (Mitt and Davie) have undergone counselling, Felix is a unique case within this research as the only man who has had a dramatic change within his emotionality, talking at length about his journey from being the type of man who struggled with his emotions, to now feeling very competent within this area. Felix is currently married, but has undergone a significant period of change psychologically and especially emotionally due to his ex-wife insisting he went to counselling. Their relationship subsequently broke down and the 'new Felix' met his current partner. Here he reflects on the ways his emotionality has changed since his counselling began:

I mean for me it's transformed; I'm such a different man from who I was to my poor first wife, who never saw that side of me, well I never saw that side of me... So she kind of demanded that I go to therapy and I absolutely loved it and thought, oh my God there's this other world, who knew that! ... Essentially they are two different people tied together by a strange history. So Felix fifteen years ago was quite semi-detached and divorced from the rest of the world in many ways, emotionally... I'm much more upsettable, because the old

me was much more brittle, much more limited in his tools and in the world he lived, so he constantly lived in a defended place, so being more undefended now, yes, has its downsides, but not really... It feels like a 3D world, so, vulnerable, but also immensely much more resourced to cope and kind of not really frame it as vulnerability... it's like, I'm upset, well okay, feel upset. You don't have to do anything with upsetness... Before I had no language, I had no sense of my body holding emotion.

Felix is now able to accept vulnerable feelings and re-define these as 'upsetness', which is acceptable and doesn't need to be 'dealt with'. The presence of a sense of vulnerability that has persisted despite Felix feeling he lives in an emotionally '3D world' reinforces the deep rooted role of vulnerability in policing male emotionality. Felix describes how his sense of 'vulnerability' is akin to 'feeling upset', an interesting comparison as it no longer needs to be controlled, he can just 'feel upset'. The 'upsetness' is still present but no longer threatening as he does not feel as brittle. The idea that emotion is threatening and in need of control is central to the 'boys don't cry' discourse, yet instead of doing the emotion work to suppress his emotions, Felix has rejected this interpretation of his emotions. The 'messy uncertainty' that results from a clash of cultural discourses around male emotionality has resulted, for Felix, in a process of reinterpreting his emotional life through the use of therapy. Felix demonstrates a high degree of emotional reflexivity here, actively performing the emotion work of admission to emotionally participate in his intimate relationship, but in his wider life too.

A central aspect of the therapeutic discourse is the value of emotionally disclosing, the premise that 'it's good to talk' which is supported by Jack who is one of two men within the sample of this research who did not describe feeling emotionally vulnerable at any point in his interview. Jack actively pursues opportunities with his partner to talk about their emotions, often despite her resistance. The following interview extract is from a point in the interview when Jack was asked about whether he finds emotional participation easy:

I think it comes fairly easy, I'm probably more the one that keeps on about it It's more than that; it's intimacy. I don't know why I'm like that, and I am, I'm a bit of a pain about it because I can go on about it and say, "No, we've got to keep this going." ... I'm very conscious of the fact that I'm quite high maintenance, but I think of it as being emotionally intelligent.

Jack relates this emotional intelligence to him being feminine:

I am probably ... it's funny, my wife and I think it's quite interesting that probably I have more of the personality traits that you might usually ascribe to a woman! And my wife is probably more like the man, in that she just kind of lets things go.

Jack considers himself to be emotionally intelligent – he knows he values emotional openness and this is unusual as a man. In relation to the therapeutic discourse, Jack is an example of a man who not only *wants* to emotionally participate in his relationship, but rather he *does* emotionally participate and values this highly. Jack then appears to not need to perform emotion work on himself as he finds emotional disclosure easy, even necessary in his intimate relationship. It could be argued that Jack has embraced the values of the therapeutic discourse and is the only man presented in this paper who is not constrained by the 'boys don't cry' discourse.

Conclusions

The central argument throughout this paper is that men now value emotional disclosure and emotional participation in their intimate relationships more than previous sociological research found (Duncombe and Marsden, 1993, 1998; Mansfield and Collard, 1988). A focus on how men experience and understand their emotional disclosure has led to the results presented here, an area of research that has not had sufficient focus within sociology to date (de Boise and Hearn, 2017). The traditional discourse of male emotionality, related to values of hegemonic masculinities, has been described as 'boys don't cry' and directly related to a feeling of vulnerability associated to disclosing emotion in intimate relationships. The men in this research (predominantly white, heterosexual and western) widely described a desire to be emotionally fluent in their relationships, but some found this difficult due to a fear of feeling exposed or being hurt through sharing their vulnerability.

The context of intimate relationships is central to this discussion as it is arguably a private space in which we can most 'be ourselves' and yet is has been highly influenced by the therapeutic discourse (Illouz, 2008). Evidence of this influence can be found in the acknowledgement by several participants that intimate relationships require emotional disclosure. A wide acceptance that disclosing emotion is healthy was also found again supporting the central aspects of the therapeutic discourse. Yet the male voices represented here demonstrate the 'messy uncertainty' of cultural change in regards to feeling rules. Despite a wide acceptance of the value of emotional intimacy, a sense of vulnerability remains pervasive for most men interviewed, making it difficult to know how they 'should' feel (Hochschild, 1979). The boundaries of masculine emotionality within intimate relationships could be seen to be blurring here; social change is happening in an uneven way so that different men have embraced the values of the therapeutic discourse to a different extent than others (McNay, 1999).

What appears to have changed since the main body of sociological research into emotion within intimate relationships was conducted (Duncombe and Marsden, 1993 and 1998; Hochschild, 1990; Mansfield and Collard, 1988) is that men now value emotional closeness. An important caveat relates to the self-selection of the men presented here, a continual concern in qualitative research, which could have led to a higher level of emotional openness from than from a wider sample. I am not arguing that men have 'become more emotional' (de Boise and Hearn, 2017) but rather that within intimate relationships the men interviewed consistently *want* to be more emotionally expressive, to *talk* about their emotions more in this context. This change facilitates a new form of emotion work of *admission* rather than *suppression* which requires a high level of emotional reflexivity in order to overcome a pervasive sense of vulnerability.

The impact of the social change being suggested in this paper must be considered in relation to gendered power in the private sphere. Duncombe and Marsden (1993) famously suggested that intimacy and emotion work are a key site of gender inequality due to gender asymmetry in emotional participation in couple relationships. The argument being presented here is that there has been a shift in accepted discourse within this context; men value emotional disclosure more despite often finding this difficult to achieve. Whether this shift in cultural values changes the structural inequalities masculinity benefits from is hard to say definitively, however it is possible to consider the ways being emotional is valued in and of itself. As Illouz (2008, p. 150) observes the therapeutic discourse has served to rationalize emotions, to suggest a 'mastery over one's emotions' and 'reflexive monitoring of the self' are central to the 'romantic bond'. There is an accepted value in disclosing emotion within intimate relationships that is recognised culturally, as has been shown in this paper, I argue therefore that the social profit from emotionally participating in intimate

relationships offsets the cost of potentially being perceived as weak. In this way men do not threaten their patriarchal dividend, or their privileged social position by emotionally disclosing in intimate relationships, rather they maintain their gendered power by showing mastery of the skills required within the therapeutic discourse. Several avenues of research within this area are required to explore the ways in which social change in this context is taking place, including looking at a far more diverse sample than has been presented here.

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Age Range	Working Class	Transitional	Middle Class
30s	2	1	2
40s	1	3	1
50s	2	1	1
60s			1
70s		1	
Totals	5	6	5

Table 1 – Age and Class of Participants