

**Masculinity and Professional Identity: Exploring the Experiences of Male
Educational Psychologists**

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Abstract

Educational Psychology in the United Kingdom (UK) continues to be characterised by a pronounced gender imbalance, with men representing a minority. Research has explored male experiences in related professions, but little is known about how male Educational Psychologists (EPs) experience the profession. This thesis addresses the gap by exploring how male EPs make sense of, construct, and experience their professional identity and masculinity when in role, and how these identity processes intersect with the wider sociocultural landscape and discourse around masculinity and gendered expectations. Three online focus groups were conducted with 14 male EPs across the UK. Reflexive Thematic Analysis was used to analyse the data, generating four main themes: “Can You See Me?": The Situational Visibility of Masculinity; “Am I Too Much?": Regulating Masculinity for Relational Safety; “How Far Can I Go?": The Paradox of Minority Status and Male Advantage; “What is Masculinity?": Plurality, Contestation and Reflexive Deconstruction. Masculinity was constructed by participants as dynamic, relational, and reflexively negotiated rather than fixed, shifting between visibility and invisibility within professional practice, and becoming situationally salient within certain contexts. Once visible, it was often actively regulated to maintain relational safety and alignment with the collaborative ethos of Educational Psychology. Participants also described a paradoxical position of experiencing minority status while recognising wider structural male advantage linked to authority, legitimacy, and leadership. Finally, masculinity became the subject of reflexive questioning, with participants challenging dominant masculine norms and constructing alternative understandings grounded in care, emotional attunement, and relational practice. The findings highlight the ongoing importance of creating reflective professional spaces in which gender and masculinity

can be meaningfully explored within supervision, training, and workforce development. Findings have been considered in relation to existing literature and implications for the profession have been highlighted. Considerations have also been made to limitations and potential further research.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgments	4
List of Tables	10
List of Figures	10
Abbreviations	11
Chapter One: Introduction	12
1.1 Thesis Overview	12
1.2 Chapter Overview	12
1.3 Practitioner Researcher Reflexivity	13
1.4 Terminology and Theoretical Framing	14
1.4.1 Masculinity	14
1.4.2 Gender	15
1.4.3 Professional Identity	16
1.5 Contextualising Educational Psychology	17
1.6 Gender Imbalance in Educational Psychology	18
1.7 Caring and Relational Professions	20
1.8 Sociocultural Landscape Surrounding Masculinity and Gender	21
1.8.1 Lost Boys Report	21
1.8.2 Gender Pay Gap	22
1.8.3 Intersectionality	22
1.8.4 Public Media Discourse	23
1.8.5 Relation to Educational Psychology	25
1.9 Rationale for the Current Research	27
1.10 Chapter Summary and Thesis Roadmap	29
Chapter Two: Literature Review	30
2.1 Chapter Overview	30
2.2 Literature Review Approach	30
2.2.1 Search Strategy	31
2.2.2 Selection Process	36
2.2.3 Overview of Selected Studies	38
2.3 Critical Appraisal	38

2.4 Thematic Synthesis and Review	40
2.4.1 Gendered Pathways into Female Dominated Professions	41
2.4.2 Managing Masculinity in Practice	45
2.4.3 Minority Status within Gendered Power Structures	49
2.4.4 Conceptualising Masculinity: Ambiguity, Contestation, and Tension ..	53
2.5 Critical Evaluation of the Literature and Rationale for the Present Study	56
Chapter Three: Methodology	59
3.1 Chapter Overview	59
3.2 Research Aims and Questions	59
3.3 Philosophical Positioning	60
3.3.1 Ontology: Relativism	61
3.3.2 Epistemology: Social Constructionism	62
3.3.3 Overview of Positions	63
3.4 Methodological Approach	64
3.4.1 Qualitative Design and Big Q	64
3.4.2 Rationale for Reflexive Thematic Analysis	65
3.4.3 Alternative Methodological Approaches	66
3.5 Data Collection	67
3.5.1 Rationale for Focus Groups	67
3.5.2 Limitations of Focus Groups	69
3.6 Research Participants	69
3.6.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria	70
3.6.2 Recruitment Process	72
3.6.3 Demographic Information	74
3.7 Study Procedure	75
3.8 Data Management and Transcription	79
3.9 Data Analysis	79
3.9.1 Aims of Analytic Process	80
3.9.2 Stage 1: Familiarisation	81
3.9.3 Stage 2: Coding	81
3.9.4 Stage 3: Generating Initial Themes	83
3.9.5 Stage 4: Reviewing and Refining Themes	85

3.9.6 Stage 5: Defining and Naming Themes.....	87
3.9.7 Stage 6: Write Up.....	89
3.10 Researcher Reflexivity	89
3.11 Quality Considerations	92
3.11.1 Sensitivity to Context.....	93
3.11.2 Commitment and Rigour.....	94
3.11.3 Transparency and Coherence	95
3.11.4 Impact and Importance.....	96
3.12 Ethics	97
3.12.1 Informed Consent	97
3.12.2 Right to Withdraw.....	97
3.12.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity	98
3.12.4 Duty of Care and Managing Distress.....	99
3.12.5 Dual Relationships and Power Considerations.....	100
3.13 Chapter Summary	101
Chapter Four: Findings & Analysis	103
4.1 Chapter Overview	103
4.2 Themes Overview	103
4.3 Thematic Map	105
4.4 Interactional Construction of Meaning Across the Focus Groups	106
4.5 Main Theme:	
“Can You See Me?”: The Situational Visibility of Masculinity	107
4.5.1 Subtheme:	
Ambient Minority Awareness	108
4.5.2 Subtheme:	
Embodied and Institutional Visibility	110
4.5.3 Subtheme:	
Relational Mirroring and Gendered Positioning	113
4.6 Main Theme:	
“Am I Too Much?”: Regulating Masculinity for Relational Safety.....	116
4.6.1 Subtheme:	
Intentional Softening and Authority Regulation.....	117

4.6.2 Subtheme:	
The Social Chameleon: Adaptive Identity in Relational Systems	121
4.6.3 Subtheme:	
Seeking Safety: Affinity and Emotional Containment	125
4.7 Main Theme:	
“How Far Can I Go?": The Paradox of Minority Status and Male Advantage	128
4.7.1 Subtheme:	
Assumed Authority and Accelerated Legitimacy	129
4.7.2 Subtheme:	
Money, Status, and the Breadwinner Script.....	133
4.7.3 Subtheme:	
The Moral Risk of Being Misread	137
4.7.4 Subtheme:	
Symbolic Value and the Role Model Discourse	141
4.8 Main Theme:	
“What is Masculinity?": Plurality, Contestation and Reflexive Deconstruction ...	145
4.8.1 Subtheme:	
Not One Thing: Masculinity as Fluid and Contextual	146
4.8.2 Subtheme:	
Not That Kind of Man: Resisting the Toxic Script.....	149
4.8.3 Subtheme:	
More Than Male: Intersectional Entanglements of Identity	152
4.9 Summary of Findings	156
Chapter Five: Discussion	157
5.1 Chapter Overview	157
5.2 Developing the Analytic Argument.....	157
5.3 Reconstructing Masculinity as Situational and Relational in EP Practice	158
5.4 Regulating Masculinity Within Relational Practice	161
5.5 The Paradox of Minority Status and Structural Male Advantage	166
5.6 Reflexive and Reconstructed Masculinities	170
5.7 Methodological Contribution	172
5.8 Implications for the EP Profession	175

5.9 Dissemination Strategy	179
5.10 Reflexive Commentary	180
5.11 Strengths and Limitations	183
5.12 Future Research	186
5.13 Conclusion	188
References	191
Appendices	202
Appendix A: Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Checklist Table	203
Appendix B: CASP - Further Study Information	206
Appendix C: Study Mapping Table	213
Appendix D: Recruitment - EPNET Email.....	231
Appendix E: Recruitment - Email to Current and Previous LA.....	232
Appendix F: Recruitment - Email to Cohort	233
Appendix G: Recruitment - Facebook Group Post.....	234
Appendix H: Recruitment Poster	235
Appendix I: Participant Consent Form.....	236
Appendix J: Participant Demographic Information	238
Appendix K: Participant Information Sheet	241
Appendix L: Focus Group Format and Questions	244
Appendix M: Participant Debrief Leaflet	246
Appendix N: Focus Group Transcript Openings	247
Appendix O: Research Diary Extracts	259
Appendix P: Reflexive Coding Memos	260
Appendix Q: Codes - Group 1	261
Appendix R: Codes - Group 2	273
Appendix S: Codes - Group 3	281
Appendix T: Codes - Group 4	295
Appendix U: Reflexive Theme Development Memos	307
Appendix V: Ethics Approval Letter	308
Appendix W: Artificial Intelligence (AI) Declaration	309

List of Tables

Table 1: Search Terms for Literature Review	32
Table 2: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Literature Review	35
Table 3: Participant Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria	71
Table 4: Focus Group Allocation	73

List of Figures

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process	37
Figure 2: Six phases of RTA, adapted from Braun and Clarke (2020).....	80
Figure 3: Thematic Map of the Overall Analysis	104
Figure 4: Thematic Map of Subtheme - Ambient Minority Awareness	108
Figure 5: Thematic Map of Subtheme - Embodied and Institutional Visibility	110
Figure 6: Thematic Map of Subtheme - Relational Mirroring and Gendered Positioning.....	113
Figure 7: Thematic Map of Subtheme - Intentional Softening and Authority Regulation	117
Figure 8: Thematic Map of Subtheme - The Social Chameleon: Adaptive Identity in Relational Systems.....	121
Figure 9: Thematic Map of Subtheme - Seeking Safety: Affinity and Emotional Containment.....	125
Figure 10: Thematic Map of Subtheme - Assumed Authority and Accelerated Legitimacy	129
Figure 11: Thematic Map of Subtheme - Money, Status, and the Breadwinner Script.....	133
Figure 12: Thematic Map of Subtheme - The Moral Risk of Being Misread	137
Figure 13: Thematic Map of Subtheme - Symbolic Value and the Role Model Discourse	141
Figure 14: Thematic Map of Subtheme - Not One Thing: Masculinity as Fluid and Contextual	146
Figure 15: Thematic Map of Subtheme - Not That Kind of Man: Resisting the Toxic Script.....	149
Figure 16: Thematic Map of Subtheme - More Than Male: Intersectional Entanglements of Identity	152

Abbreviations

AEP - Association of Educational Psychologists

APA - American Psychological Association

BPS - British Psychological Society

CASP - Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

CINAHL - Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature

CSJ - Centre for Social Justice

DfE - Department for Education

EPNET - Educational Psychology Network

EPs - Educational Psychologists

EP - Educational Psychology

EDI - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

ERIC - Education Resources Information Centre

FG1 - Focus Group 1

FG2 - Focus Group 2

FG3 - Focus Group 3

GDPR - General Data Protection Regulation

HCPC - Health and Care Professions Council

IPA - Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

LA - Local Authority

LAs - Local Authorities

MEDLINE - Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online

MoJ - Ministry of Justice

NEET - Not in Education, Employment or Training

PEP - Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing

PRISMA - Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses

RTA - Reflexive Thematic Analysis

SENCOs - Special Educational Needs Coordinators

SEND - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

TEP - Trainee Educational Psychologist

UK - United Kingdom

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Thesis Overview

Educational Psychology in the United Kingdom (UK) remains a predominantly female profession, with men representing a small minority of the workforce (Association of Educational Psychologists [AEP], 2021). Despite this longstanding gender imbalance, there has been limited empirical attention to how male Educational Psychologists (EPs) experience and make sense of their gendered positioning within professional practice. This absence presents a key gap, particularly within a profession grounded in relational, systemic, and socially attuned work with children, families, and educational communities (Fomicheva, 2025). Questions of gender are therefore not peripheral but embedded within the everyday interactions, expectations, and identities that shape Educational Psychology (EP) practice. This thesis addresses the gap by exploring how male EPs construct, experience, and negotiate their professional identity and masculinity, generating a nuanced, interpretative understanding of how masculinity is experienced within the profession, and how this may inform workforce diversity and relational practice in Educational Psychology.

1.2 Chapter Overview

This chapter begins with a reflexive account of the practitioner-researcher's position, followed by an outline of key concepts relating to masculinity, gender, and professional identity. A discussion around the gender imbalance within Educational Psychology and related professions comes next, followed by an exploration of how the topic is situated within the wider sociocultural, professional, and demographic landscape. The chapter concludes with specific implications for EP practice and a

rationale for the current study both stated, along with an overview of the general thesis structure.

1.3 Practitioner Researcher Reflexivity

This study emerges from my own lived experience as a male Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) in a profession where men form a visible minority. Throughout my training, I have been the only male on my university cohort, and I have also experienced this minority in each placement team I have worked in. These experiences have prompted ongoing reflections around belonging, visibility, and the subtle gendered dynamics embedded into EP practice. At times, I have encountered assumptions around being a 'male influence' or 'positive male role model', and at other times I have noticed my presence being interpreted through lenses of authority, physicality, emotional restraint, or perceived confidence. These experiences were not always comfortable, nor were they uniformly negative. Rather, they prompted a deeper curiosity about how male EPs navigate identity, expectation, and relational practice in a caring profession which is mostly made up of women (AEP, 2021).

These personal observations constitute the felt difficulty that inspired this study. They alerted me to a lack of space in which male EPs can articulate how gender shapes their work, their relationships, and their understandings of themselves. This study therefore adopts a reflexive stance, acknowledging the influence of my own identity and experiences while highlighting the diverse voices of the male EPs who have participated in the research.

1.4 Terminology and Theoretical Framing

1.4.1 Masculinity

Masculinity is widely understood not as a singular or fixed entity, but as a socially constructed, plural, and context-dependent phenomenon. Connell (1995) conceptualises masculinity as a configuration of practices positioned within gender relations, through which men and boys engage with socially structured expectations. Within this framework, hegemonic masculinity refers to culturally dominant ideals associated with authority, control, and normative gender expectations, with other masculinities positioned in relation to this ideal.

Contemporary developments in masculinities theory emphasise the fluid, relational, and contextually contingent nature of masculinity. Anderson's (2009) theory of inclusive masculinity highlights the emergence of more emotionally expressive and flexible forms of masculinity in certain sociocultural conditions, while Messerschmidt (2018) reconceptualises hegemonic masculinity as dynamic and institutionally embedded, shaped through interaction within specific social and organisational contexts. These perspectives position masculinity as actively accomplished through social practices, rather than as fixed traits.

Within public discourse, terms such as 'toxic masculinity' are often used to describe restrictive or harmful gender norms (Elliott, 2018). From a social constructionist perspective, such terms can be understood as discursive framings rather than inherent qualities of men, reflecting culturally situated interpretations of behaviour (Burr, 2015). Masculinity can therefore be understood as something that is performed, negotiated, and continually reconstructed through social interaction, institutional practices, and broader cultural narratives.

While these theoretical perspectives offer conceptual grounding, it is important to acknowledge that masculinity is interpreted differently across individuals and contexts. There is no singular or authoritative definition; rather, meanings of masculinity are shaped through lived experience, relational positioning, and wider sociocultural discourse. Together, these theoretical lenses provide a conceptual scaffold for examining how masculinities are constructed and negotiated within professional practice.

1.4.2 Gender

Gender refers to the socially constructed meanings, expectations, roles, and norms associated with being understood as male, female, or another gender within a particular cultural and historical context. Burr (2015) conceptualises gender as produced through language, relationships, and social interaction, rather than as a fixed or biologically determined attribute. Similarly, West and Zimmerman (1987) describe gender as something that is 'done' in interaction, emphasising its ongoing, performative nature in everyday life.

Within this framing, masculinity can be understood as one way of 'doing' gender, specifically the set of practices, meanings, and expectations culturally associated with being positioned as male. Gender therefore operates as a broader organising framework, within which multiple masculinities, and femininities, are produced, negotiated, and contested. This distinction is important, as it allows for an analysis of masculinity not as synonymous with men, but as a socially situated performance shaped by wider gendered structures and relations.

Within educational and psychological professions, gendered expectations influence how roles are perceived, valued, and enacted. Research on masculinities

illustrate how gender intersects with power, emotion, care, and authority within institutional life (Anderson, 2009; Connell, 1995; Messerschmidt, 2018). These insights extend to the broader construct of gender. Professional contexts may reward or constrain particular gendered performances, shaping how individuals present themselves and how their expertise is interpreted. Previous work on gender variance and the role of EPs demonstrates how gender norms influence interactions, sense-making, and professional responses within educational systems (Court, 2019).

As with masculinity, understandings of gender are multiple and contextually shaped. In the current study, gender is approached as an interpretive, socially constructed phenomenon that both shapes and is shaped by the professional environment in which male EPs work.

1.4.3 Professional Identity

Professional identity is understood as dynamic, relational, and continually renegotiated, rather than a fixed or internal attribute. From a social constructionist perspective, identity is conceptualised as a narrative produced through discourse and situated within broader sociocultural contexts (Burr, 2015). In this sense, professional identity is not something individuals possess, but something that is constructed, performed, and made meaningful through interaction.

This perspective is further developed through identity performance and positioning theory, which conceptualises identity as actively produced within social encounters. Positioning theory also suggests that individuals locate themselves and others within discourse, shaping what can be said, by whom, and with what authority (Davies & Harré, 1990). Identity is therefore not simply expressed, but is co-

constructed through dialogue, negotiation, and relational positioning, particularly within professional and group-based contexts.

Within Educational Psychology, evidence of how this conceptualisation applies in practice can be seen in doctoral research suggesting that EPs draw on personal histories, relational experiences, and moral commitments to construct an evolving sense of themselves as practitioners (Stringer, 2001). Professional identity in this context is therefore dialogic and autobiographical, shaped through ongoing engagement with others and the relational demands of the role.

For male EPs, this process of identity construction may involve navigating multiple and, at times, competing expectations. These may include gendered assumptions relating to emotional expression, relational practice, authority, and risk, alongside experiences of minority visibility within a predominantly female profession. Such dynamics may emerge across consultation, casework, multi-agency working, and team relationships, where identity is continually shaped in relation to others. Understanding professional identity in this way foregrounds its contextual, relational, and co-constructed nature, providing a conceptual foundation for exploring how male EPs negotiate their identity and masculinity within professional practice.

1.5 Contextualising Educational Psychology

Educational Psychology in the UK occupies a distinctive and continually evolving position within the wider landscape of education, psychology, and caring professions. This evolution is reflected in ongoing shifts in policy, service delivery, and professional expectations, including increasing emphasis on traded models of service delivery, early intervention, and whole-system approaches to mental health and inclusion (Department for Education [DfE], 2023; Lyonette et al., 2019). EPs work

across Local Authorities (LAs), schools, and community settings, contributing to systemic understanding, consultation, psychological formulation, and the promotion of children's learning, wellbeing, and inclusion (MacKay, 2013). The profession is deeply grounded in relational practice, reflective engagement, and collaborative problem-solving, with EPs increasingly positioned as key figures in supporting schools to navigate the complexities of mental health, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), trauma, and wider socio-emotional challenges (DfE, 2023; Health and Care Professions Council [HCPC], 2024).

Against this backdrop, questions concerning the composition, identity, and sustainability of the EP workforce have taken on renewed significance. National shortages, recruitment challenges, and the expanding expectations placed upon EP services continue to contribute to a dynamic and evolving professional environment (Jackson, 2026). Questions of workforce sustainability and diversity have therefore become increasingly central to professional discourse. Yet within this broader landscape, one characteristic of the profession remains strikingly consistent: the significant underrepresentation of men.

1.6 Gender Imbalance in Educational Psychology

The persistent underrepresentation of men in Educational Psychology has been highlighted across multiple national reports. The DfE's EP Workforce Survey in 2013 identified low male participation in both training and qualified roles, raising concerns about the attractiveness of the profession to men and about the sustainability of recruitment pathways (DfE, 2013). Six years later, further research on the EP workforce confirmed that these patterns had not substantially shifted (Lyonette et al, 2019). Training cohorts remained overwhelmingly female, and the demographic

composition of Local Authority (LA) EP services showed similar trends. Most recently, the AEP's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) survey reported that approximately 86% of EPs currently identify as female, with only around 13% identifying as male (AEP, 2021).

The AEP's gender data also highlights clear differences in working patterns, with 65% of male respondents working full time compared to 48% of women (AEP, 2021). This aligns with wider traditional gendered divisions of labour, in which women more frequently balance caring responsibilities alongside professional commitments (Elhinnawy et al., 2025). This suggests that the female dominated EP professional workforce is shaped not only by who enters the profession, but also by how work is structured and sustained. The terms 'feminised' and 'female-dominated' are both used throughout this thesis to refer to contexts and professions that are both numerically dominated by women and culturally associated with values such as care, relationality, and emotional labour (Cross & Bagilhole, 2002; Simpson, 2004).

Although demographic information is often presented descriptively, it carries deeper cultural and symbolic implications. In Educational Psychology, there is a strong emphasis on emotional literacy, relational communication, reflective practice, and care (HCPC, 2024), which aligns with traits traditionally coded as feminine within Western discourse (Connell, 1995). These culturally embedded associations are likely to shape who is drawn to the EP role, how the role is perceived in educational settings, and how practitioners construct their professional identity when in role.

For male EPs, these dynamics can generate tensions between professional expectations and societal narratives around masculinity, where they navigate what is seen or expected to be a 'male' job role. Gendered assumptions around emotional

expression, rationality, authority, and care can also shape how male EPs may be perceived, and how they perceive themselves, within a role that consistently requires emotional containment, empathy, and relational depth.

It is also important to note here that the AEP survey also shows that men are disproportionately overrepresented in senior or management roles, including Principal EPs, senior specialists, and partly or fully self-employed roles, whereas women form the majority of main-grade and trainee EPs (AEP, 2021). This pattern resonates with the glass escalator effect identified in other female-dominated professions, where men may access leadership pathways more readily than women despite being numerically underrepresented (Williams, 1992). However, occupying leadership roles does not equate to proportional representation within everyday practice contexts, nor does it show how men experience the profession in day-to-day interactions, or how they construct their professional identity when in role.

1.7 Caring and Relational Professions

These demographic patterns are not just isolated to Educational Psychology; they also reflect a broader trend across caring and relational professions. Teaching, nursing, counselling, speech and language therapy, and early-years education all demonstrate similar gendered patterns. Research across these fields illustrates how gender shapes professional experiences, often positioning women as natural caregivers while men navigate heightened visibility, essentialist assumptions, or questions around emotional authenticity (Simpson, 2009; Williams, 2013).

These dynamics are also evident in applied psychology. Studies of male therapists and counsellors highlight tensions around emotional labour, relational expectations, and stereotypes linked to authority, discipline, or perceived therapeutic

style (Himerich, 2019). Although no empirical research to date has explored male EPs specifically, the gendered nature of caring professions generally provides a conceptual backdrop for understanding expectations surrounding masculinity, and how these expectations may shape how male EPs navigate their professional identity within the profession.

1.8 Sociocultural Landscape Surrounding Masculinity and Gender

1.8.1 Lost Boys Report

Gendered patterns within the wider sociocultural landscape form an important context for understanding the persistent underrepresentation of men in care-oriented professions such as Educational Psychology. Contemporary reports highlight enduring disparities in educational attainment and wellbeing between boys and girls in the UK. For example, the recent Lost Boys report identified that only 60% of boys are considered school ready at age five, compared with 75% of girls, with this gap persisting across key educational milestones (Centre for Social Justice [CSJ], 2025). Boys are also disproportionately represented in school exclusions and in later adverse outcomes, including higher rates of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET) and involvement with the criminal justice system (DfE, 2025; Ministry of Justice [MoJ], 2024).

These patterns are not reducible to individual deficits but can be understood as situated within broader sociocultural dynamics that shape how boys experience belonging, identity, and value. Accounts within the Lost Boys report suggest that some boys experience contemporary gender discourse as contradictory, simultaneously being positioned as both privileged and problematic (CSJ, 2025). From a social constructionist perspective, such positioning can be understood as part of wider

discursive frameworks through which masculinity is constructed, negotiated, and contested (Burr, 2015). These discourses may influence how boys come to understand what it means to be male, including which roles, behaviours, and futures are perceived as accessible or desirable.

1.8.2 Gender Pay Gap

At the same time, wider public and policy discourse on gender inequality in the UK continues to highlight enduring structural disparities affecting women, including the gender pay gap, occupational segregation, and unequal access to leadership positions (Office for National Statistics, 2023). While these issues remain critically important, some have suggested that this framing can make it more complex to raise questions about boy's and men's experiences without such discussions being interpreted as undermining progressive or feminist agendas (CSJ, 2025). As a result of this sociocultural context, conversations around male disadvantage or underrepresentation may become uncomfortable and politically sensitive for some.

1.8.3 Intersectionality

Importantly, experiences of masculinity are not uniform and are further shaped by other intersecting identities. For example, research on the adultification of black boys demonstrates how they may be perceived as older, less innocent, and more threatening than their peers, resulting in heightened surveillance and disciplinary responses within educational contexts (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021). Such processes illustrate how particular masculinities are problematised in specific ways, shaping both lived experience and institutional responses.

Masculinity is also shaped by sexuality, with research suggesting that gay and bisexual men may experience pressure to negotiate or distance themselves from

dominant heterosexual norms of masculinity (Harris & Mahalik, 2025). This can involve both the marginalisation of non-heteronormative masculinities and the strategic adaptation of identity within professional and social contexts (Anderson, 2009). Similarly, social class may influence how masculinity is expressed and interpreted, with classed expectations shaping which forms of masculinity are legitimised or devalued within educational and professional settings (Connell, 1995; Haywood & Mac an Ghail, 2012).

Attending to these intersections is important for avoiding overgeneralised accounts of the experiences of boys or men, and for recognising the plurality of masculinities operating within educational and professional contexts. From a social constructionist perspective, these intersecting identities do not simply add layers to masculinity, but actively shape how it is constructed, interpreted, and made meaningful within specific relational and institutional contexts.

1.8.4 Public Media Discourse

Alongside these structural patterns and intersectional considerations, masculinity has become an increasingly visible and contested topic within contemporary public discourse. Media representations have played a significant role in bringing debates around masculinity, misogyny, and young men's experiences into mainstream conversation. The 2025 Netflix series 'Adolescence' generated widespread discussion regarding the influence of online cultures, particularly the 'manosphere', on boys' understandings of gender, identity, and relationships. Analyses of public responses to the series suggest that it acted as a catalyst for conversations within families and communities on the dangers of online narratives, while also provoking polarised reactions, including concerns that boys are being positioned as

inherently problematic or threatening (Ribeiro, 2025). These debates also intersect with feminist discourses, which have played a central role in challenging gender inequality and critiquing harmful forms of masculinity. At the same time, feminist framings can shape how discussions of masculinity are interpreted, including whether attention to boys and men's experiences is understood as a legitimate area of concern or as potentially minimising structural inequalities affecting women (Hare-Mustin, 2004).

The 'manosphere' itself is typically described as a loose network of online communities that promote particular and often highly restrictive constructions of masculinity, frequently centred on dominance, self-reliance, and opposition to feminist perspectives (UN Women, 2025). These spaces include a range of subgroups, such as 'incel' (involuntary celibate) communities, which are often associated with expressions of misogyny, grievance, and perceived marginalisation in relation to gender and relationships (Ging, 2019). Emerging literature suggests that exposure to such content is widespread among adolescent boys, as one recent study found that 79% of 16–17-year-old boys had consumed content created by a certain 'manosphere' male influencer (Verney & Mignon, 2025). From a developmental perspective, teen years represent a period characterised by identity exploration, sensitivity to status, and a heightened need for belonging (Field et al., 2024). This may render some young men particularly receptive to these narratives, however, engagement with such content does not necessarily reflect endorsement of misogynistic beliefs; it may also indicate a search for direction, belonging, or identity within a rapidly shifting social landscape.

Louis Theroux's 2026 Netflix documentary 'Inside the Manosphere' further illustrated how online spaces construct masculinity in highly performative ways, with those enrolled within manosphere groups often linking male worth to wealth,

dominance, misogyny, homophobia, and emotional detachment (Bacon, 2026). At the same time, such portrayals reveal underlying tensions and vulnerabilities, suggesting that these forms of masculinity may function as responses to perceived uncertainty, dislocation, or loss of status. In this sense, the 'manosphere' can be understood not only as a source of particular gendered narratives, but also as part of a broader cultural conversation in which masculinity is being actively negotiated and contested.

Contrasting representations of masculinity are also evident within wider cultural discourse. Recent public commentary has highlighted moments of emotional openness and relational connection between men, such as the widely discussed live television exchange between Thierry Henry and Micah Richards when discussing early retirement from football, and the associated mental health struggles. Such examples have been highlighted as alternative masculinities grounded in vulnerability, care, and mutual recognition (Adams, 2026). These contrasting narratives illustrate the multiplicity of meanings attached to masculinity in contemporary society and the tensions between dominant, restrictive ideals and more relational, emotionally expressive forms.

1.8.5 Relation to Educational Psychology

Taken together, the current sociocultural landscape points to a context in which masculinity is both highly visible and deeply contested. Narratives of a 'crisis' in masculinity have gained traction in public discourse, however, from a social constructionist perspective, such claims can be understood as part of ongoing debates around gender, power, and social change rather than as objective descriptions of a singular phenomenon (Burr, 2015). What is evident, however, is that boys and young

men are navigating increasingly complex and, at times, contradictory messages about identity, belonging, and value.

This broader landscape provides important context for understanding the gendered composition of the Educational Psychology profession. If masculinity continues to be associated, in some contexts, with independence, emotional restraint, and distance from care-oriented roles, this may shape how such professions are perceived and who feels able to enter them. At the same time, professional psychology appears to be undergoing shifts in how it engages with masculinity as a topic of inquiry and practice. For example, the establishment of the British Psychological Society (BPS) Male Psychology Section in 2018 reflects a growing professional interest in understanding the experiences, wellbeing, and diverse identities of men and boys within psychological research and practice. The section's focus on issues such as mental health, educational outcomes, identity, and social context, alongside its annual conference, suggests an increasing recognition of masculinity as a legitimate and complex area of psychological concern within the profession.

These developments align with a broader emphasis on more relational, emotionally literate, and reflexive forms of male identity (Wendt et al., 2024). Such emerging constructions of masculinity may align productively with aspects of EP practice, particularly its focus on relational work, consultation, and systemic thinking. However, they may also sit in tension with more traditional cultural expectations surrounding men and emotional labour. Understanding how male EPs navigate, interpret, and define these shifting constructions of masculinity is therefore both relevant and timely.

1.9 Rationale for the Current Research

Despite repeated references to gender imbalance in EP workforce reports, there is a marked absence of empirical research exploring the experiences of male EPs. This gap persists even as the profession continues to expand, diversify, and respond to increasing societal demand. This research therefore aims to explore how male EPs construct, experience, and navigate their professional identity and masculinity when in role.

The research is important for several reasons, with the first concerning workforce development. Recruitment and retention challenges are well documented, and demographic patterns play a crucial role in shaping the sustainability of the profession by influencing entry into training pathways, retention within LA services, and the diversity of perspectives available to meet the needs of children, families, and schools (AEP, 2021). As previously mentioned, the demographic imbalance is also evident at the entry point to the profession. Within the AEP survey, female respondents were more represented among trainee and assistant EPs, indicating that the profession's gendered composition is reproduced within training pathways as well as qualified practice (AEP, 2021). If men continue to represent a small minority of EPs, it is important to understand the factors that influence their entry into, and experiences within, the profession. Such understanding may contribute to more inclusive recruitment practices and professional cultures.

A second reason concerns professional identity and reflective practice. The EP profession places a strong emphasis on reflexivity, systemic understanding, and the interpretation of identity within professional contexts (Fomicheva, 2025). The voices of

male EPs are important for expanding existing understandings of how identity is constructed within EP practice and how gender shapes professional experiences.

A third reason relates to the wider educational and social landscape. As evidenced throughout this introduction section, gendered narratives around care, emotional expression, relational work, and what masculinity or being a man actually means, continue to influence perceptions of educational and psychological roles. Understanding how male EPs articulate and navigate these narratives offers insight into how gender operates as a dynamic and negotiated process within professional practice.

Importantly, this also connects to broader concerns regarding how boys and young men experience and make sense of masculinity within educational contexts. While this study does not assume that male EPs hold a unique or essential role in supporting boys, their presence within the profession may become symbolically and relationally significant within wider gendered discourse. Encounters with male professionals who engage in reflective, emotionally attuned, and relational practice may contribute to expanding the range of masculinities that are visible and legitimised within educational systems. Therefore, exploring how male EPs construct and negotiate their identity offers not only insight into professional experience, but also into how masculinity is represented, encountered, and potentially reconfigured within the contexts in which EPs work.

Finally, there is a broader ethical and professional argument for attending to underrepresented perspectives within the field. Inclusion should involve addressing the underrepresentation of all minoritised groups, including those that may be privileged in other areas. Given the profession's commitment to reflexivity, inclusive

practice, and workforce development, understanding the experiences of male EPs is therefore both timely and professionally significant.

1.10 Chapter Summary and Thesis Roadmap

This chapter has outlined the sociocultural, professional, and conceptual context underpinning the current study. It has defined masculinity, gender, and professional identity, situated gender imbalance within EP practice, and presented the theoretical framing of the research. The chapter has also highlighted the researcher's reflexive positionality, and given an overview of the current context surrounding masculinity in the media.

The following chapter presents a critical review of the literature on how men experience, construct, and negotiate their professional identity and masculinity within caring, relational, and educational professions, identifying conceptual gaps that this study seeks to address. The methodology chapter follows, outlining the philosophical assumptions, recruitment process, and ethical considerations underpinning the research. The findings chapter then presents themes developed through analysis of the data collected, followed by a discussion chapter that interprets these findings in relation to existing literature. The thesis concludes with reflections on implications for EP practice, training, workforce development, and areas for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter is structured to provide both transparency in search approach and a critical synthesis of the literature surrounding the experiences of men in caring, relational and educational professions. Following this introductory section, the literature review questions will be stated and the process through which the literature was identified and selected will be outlined. This includes the search strategy, rationale for key terms, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and critical appraisal of selected studies. The chapter then presents a thematic synthesis that draws together patterns, tensions, and areas of convergence and divergence across studies, and finally concludes with a critical evaluation of the existing literature and the identification of key gaps which inform the aims of the current study.

2.2 Literature Review Approach

The chapter presents a critical and interpretive review of literature related to the questions:

- a) What does existing research suggest about how men experience, construct, and negotiate their professional identity and masculinity within caring, relational, and educational professions?
- b) How has masculinity been theorised and conceptualised within this research?

A structured literature search and review process was undertaken to identify, synthesise, and critically evaluate research relevant to these questions (Grant & Booth, 2009). Alongside addressing the above questions, the review also considers the implications of existing knowledge in relation to the development of the current study. Throughout the chapter, literature is engaged with as an interpretive body of

knowledge, in which meaning is constructed through critical reading, comparison, and synthesis.

2.2.1 Search Strategy

A structured literature search was conducted in March 2026 using a range of EBSCO electronic databases, including APA PsycINFO, APA PsycArticles, APA PsycExtra, Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection, PEP Archive, Education Source, ERIC, SocINDEX, CINAHL, and MEDLINE. A broad range of databases was selected to reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the research topic, as initial scoping searches indicated that masculinity within professional contexts is examined across psychological, educational, and health-related fields.

Following an initial scoping review, key search terms were developed to reflect three central conceptual domains: masculinity, professional identity, and female-dominated or caring professions. An additional category relating to specific relevant professional fields was included to support contextual narrowing. The full set of search terms and Boolean operators is presented in Table 1. Within each conceptual domain, synonymous terms were combined using the Boolean operator *OR* to maximise the breadth of the search, while the domains themselves were combined using *AND* to ensure relevance to the literature review questions.

Table 1*Search Terms for Literature Review*

Subject Area	Search Terms and Boolean Operators	Rationale
Masculinity	“masculin*” OR “male identity” OR “male gender identity” OR “male role” OR “male role model*” OR “hegemonic masculinity” OR “inclusive masculinity”	This set of terms captures both traditional and contemporary conceptualisations of masculinity. The inclusion of terms such as hegemonic masculinity and inclusive masculinity reflects dominant theoretical frameworks within masculinity research, while broader terms (e.g., masculin*, male identity) allow for the identification of studies adopting more fluid, socially constructed understandings. Truncation (masculin*) ensures coverage of variations such as masculinity, masculinities, and masculine.
Professional Identity / Work Context	“professional identity” OR “occupational identity” OR “workplace identity” OR “professional*” OR “career*” OR “occupation*”	These terms capture the ways in which identity is constructed in relation to professional roles and work contexts. Including both specific phrases (e.g. professional identity) and broader terms (e.g. career, occupation) allows for the

		inclusion of studies that may not explicitly use identity-focused terminology but do explore professional positioning and role-based meaning-making.
Female-Dominated / Caring Professions	“female dominated profession*” OR “feminised profession*” OR “gendered profession*” OR “caring profession*” OR “helping profession*”	This set of terms focuses the search on professions which are similar to the EP profession in relation to role and demographic. The inclusion of both female-dominated and feminised reflects variation in terminology across the literature, while broader terms such as caring and helping professions ensure that relevant studies are captured even where gendered language is less explicit.
Relevant Professional Fields	“teach*” OR “nurs*” OR “psycholog*” OR “educational psycholog*” OR “counsell*” OR “social work*” OR “therap*”	These terms were used to refine the search towards professions most comparable to Educational Psychology. Truncation (e.g. teach*, psycholog*) allows for inclusion of multiple forms (e.g., teacher, teaching, psychology, psychologist). This category supports contextual relevance while maintaining flexibility to

		include a range of relational professions.
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Initial searches were conducted using broader search strings to identify the scope and nature of the literature. These searches were subsequently refined through the adjustment of search terms and the inclusion of more specific professional fields (e.g., teaching, psychology, social work). This iterative process enabled the identification of literature that was both conceptually relevant and contextually aligned with the focus of the current study.

Titles and abstracts were initially screened against the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 2), followed by a full-text review of selected papers. Studies were included where they examined masculinity, professional identity, or men's experiences within professional contexts, particularly those characterised as caring, relational, or educational. Studies that did not engage with these concepts, or were unrelated to occupational contexts, were excluded.

In addition to database searches, supplementary search strategies were used to ensure that relevant literature was not missed. This included the use of Google Scholar and snowballing from relevant papers, whereby the reference lists of included studies were reviewed to identify further relevant papers. This generated further studies which were included in the final set of papers.

Table 2*Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Literature Review*

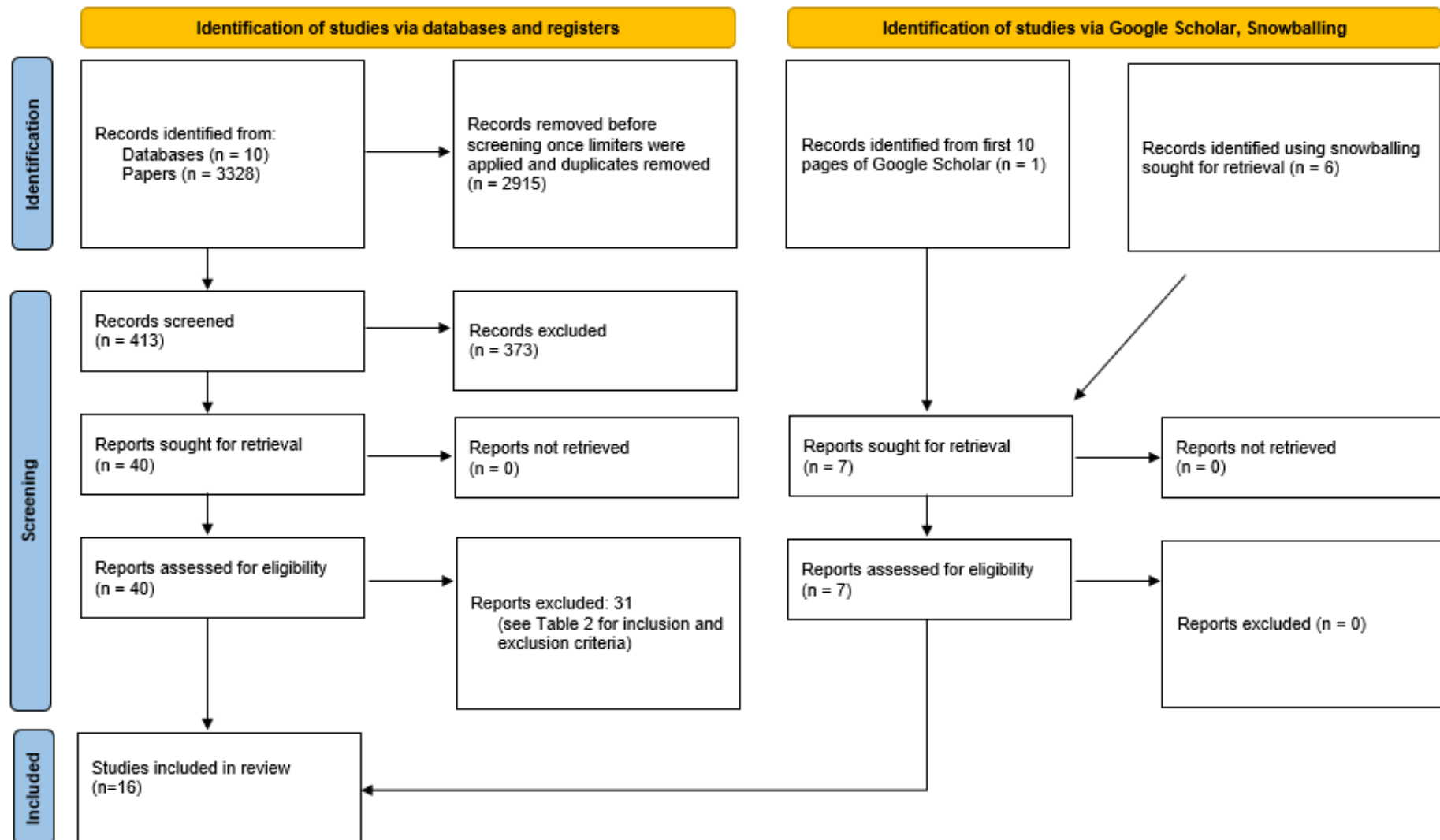
Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Rationale
Study Focus	Studies examining masculinity, professional identity, or men's experiences in professional contexts.	Studies not addressing masculinity, professional identity, or male experiences.	Ensures alignment with the study and literature review questions.
Professional Context	Studies involving caring, relational, or educational professions (e.g., psychology, teaching, social work, nursing).	Studies unrelated to professional or occupational contexts.	Ensures relevance to Educational Psychology as a relational profession.
Type of Literature	Empirical (qualitative or mixed method) OR theoretical/conceptual studies.	Studies with no conceptual or empirical relevance to masculinity or professional identity.	Allows for studies that provide both conceptual grounding and exploration of lived male experience.
Availability	Studies were included only if the full-text paper could be accessed.	Studies were excluded if a full-text paper was not available.	Synthesis and appraisal of a study is not possible without reading the full-text original paper.

Date	2000 onwards.	Pre 2000.	To capture literature reflecting contemporary, socially constructed understandings of professional identity and masculinity within more recent professional contexts.
Language	English.	Non-English publications.	Practical constraint to ensure accurate interpretation.

2.2.2 Selection Process

A Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) informed approach (Moher et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021) was used to document the stages of identification, screening, and selection of studies, providing transparency regarding how the final body of literature was established (see Figure 1). In total, 16 studies were selected for inclusion within the review.

Figure 1

PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process

2.2.3 Overview of Selected Studies

A total of 16 studies were included in the review, comprising 13 empirical studies and 3 conceptual or theoretical papers. All empirical studies adopted qualitative designs ($n = 13$), with data most commonly generated through semi-structured interviews ($n = 9$), alongside focus groups ($n = 1$), ethnographic observations ($n = 1$), and naturally occurring interactional data such as audio or video recordings ($n = 2$). In terms of analytic approach, 9 studies used thematic or interpretative analytic methods, while others drew on discourse analysis ($n = 2$), narrative approaches ($n = 1$), interactional sociolinguistics ($n = 2$), or broader conceptual synthesis ($n = 2$). The studies spanned a range of female dominated professional contexts, including teaching ($n = 5$), social work ($n = 3$), psychology ($n = 2$), nursing ($n = 1$), and mixed occupational samples ($n = 5$), with most conducted in the UK ($n = 9$), alongside international contexts including Australia, Europe, and cross-national comparisons. Across the dataset, participants were predominantly male qualified professionals or trainees working within female-dominated fields, with sample sizes ranging from small-scale case studies ($n = 1$, $n = 3$) to larger qualitative interview samples (up to $n = 107$).

2.3 Critical Appraisal

A structured critical appraisal of the selected studies was undertaken using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Qualitative Checklist (CASP, 2025). The CASP framework was used to support a systematic and transparent evaluation of each study's methodological coherence, including clarity of aims, appropriateness of design, recruitment strategy, data collection, analytic approach, ethical considerations,

and overall contribution to knowledge. The appraisal also highlights the importance of reflexivity and researcher-participant relationships.

In applying the CASP tool, appraisal was not treated as a process of scoring or ranking studies in terms of quality, but rather as a means of engaging critically with how knowledge has been produced within the field. The focus was on examining the assumptions, methodological choices, and analytic practices that shaped each study's findings, rather than evaluating them against positivist criteria of validity or reliability. Studies were therefore considered in relation to their conceptual contribution, methodological transparency, and relevance to the review questions.

It is acknowledged that not all included studies conformed to a traditional qualitative empirical design. In these cases, the CASP framework was applied flexibly. Criteria relating to participant recruitment or primary data collection was considered not directly applicable, and greater emphasis was placed on theoretical coherence, clarity of argument, and relevance to the research focus. Where information was not explicitly reported within a study, this was recorded as 'can't tell', reflecting either limited transparency or absence of detail, in line with CASP guidance.

Across the body of literature, several methodological patterns were identified. As previously mentioned, all empirical studies relied on qualitative interviews which provided rich, reflective accounts of participants' experiences, but tended to privilege retrospective sense-making. Fewer studies utilised interactional or observational methods which offered insight into how masculinity is constructed within situated practice. Whilst many studies demonstrated conceptual and analytic depth, explicit reflexive engagement with researcher positioning was often limited, and ethical procedures were not always comprehensively detailed. A full CASP table can be found

in Appendix A, with CASP questions ranked for each study as either yes (green tick), no (red cross), or can't tell (yellow line). Further qualitative details relating to each study follow, and can be found in Appendix B.

2.4 Thematic Synthesis and Review

Following study selection and critical appraisal, a thematic synthesis was undertaken to integrate insights across the literature. Rather than presenting studies individually, this approach involved identifying patterns of meaning, points of convergence and divergence, and areas of conceptual tension within and between studies. Consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2022) approach to RTA, this process was undertaken actively and interpretively, shaped by my own engagement with the literature rather than as a process of objective categorisation. Themes were developed from cross referencing and observing similarities and differences across the key findings from each study, as shown in the study mapping table (Appendix C). This process was iterative rather than linear. As provisional themes emerged, I repeatedly returned to the findings sections of each included paper to examine whether they remained conceptually coherent, adequately represented theme names, and accounted for findings that appeared to diverge from the developing interpretations. Where codes did not align with an emerging theme, the thematic structure was reconsidered and refined until it provided the most coherent and analytically meaningful account of the literature as a whole. Attention was paid not only to reported findings, but also to methodological approaches, underlying assumptions, and the extent to which studies engaged with issues of context, interaction, and power in relation to masculinity. This enabled a more critical evaluation of the literature, highlighting contributions and limitations.

As previously outlined, the review is organised around two interrelated questions: what existing research suggests about how men experience, construct, and negotiate their professional identity and masculinity within caring, relational, and educational professions, and how masculinity has been theorised and conceptualised within this research area. Addressing these questions requires moving beyond descriptive summaries towards an interpretive synthesis that considers not only what is known, but how knowledge in this field has been produced and the assumptions that underpin it. The themes that follow first examine how men enter, experience, and negotiate masculinity within caring, relational, and educational professions, before turning to how masculinity itself is conceptualised across this literature. The following themes will be explored in subsequent sections of this review:

- Gendered Pathways into Female Dominated Professions
- Managing Masculinity in Practice
- Minority Status within Gendered Power Structures
- Conceptualising Masculinity: Ambiguity, Contestation, and Tension

2.4.1 Gendered Pathways into Female Dominated Professions

The review first considers how men come to enter female dominated professions, highlighting the structural, discursive, and classed conditions within which occupational pathways are formed. While conceptualisations of masculinity have increasingly shifted toward socially constructed and plural understandings, patterns of occupational segregation suggest that gender continues to shape who enters particular professions.

A prominent area within this literature has examined the role of gender essentialism in shaping occupational trajectories. Drawing on a large-scale qualitative

study involving 107 interviews with workers, managers, and service users across female-dominated occupations, Moskos (2020) demonstrated how beliefs about men's and women's natural suitability for different types of work continue to influence both entry into, and experiences within, these professions. The study moves beyond individual-level explanations by incorporating both supply-side and demand-side perspectives. Men were found to self-select out of caring professions due to perceived incongruence with masculine identity, while employers and clients simultaneously reproduced these patterns by viewing women as inherently more suited to relational and care-based roles. This dual emphasis on supply and demand represents a significant conceptual contribution, as it challenges accounts that locate occupational segregation solely within individual choice. However, while the breadth of the sample strengthens the credibility of these findings, the focus on just a few predominant occupations necessitates careful consideration when extending these insights to professional contexts such as Educational Psychology, where training pathways, status, and role expectations differ.

Complementing this structural perspective, Lupton (2006) offered a more nuanced account of men's entry into female dominated professions by highlighting the role of social class and labour market positioning. Based on qualitative interviews with 27 men working across a range of occupations, including teaching and human resources, Lupton (2006) challenged explanations that attribute men's occupational choices primarily to differences in masculine identity. Instead, the findings suggested that many men, particularly those from working-class backgrounds, do not actively choose feminised professions but rather end up in them due to constrained opportunities and limited access to higher-status, traditionally masculine career pathways. Despite this, participants continued to report tensions between their

occupational roles and dominant constructions of masculinity, indicating that entry into these professions does not resolve gendered identity conflict. While the relatively small and context-specific sample limits the transferability of these findings, the study makes an important contribution by situating masculinity within broader socio-economic structures, thus extending beyond more individualised accounts of gendered experience.

Within the specific context of Educational Psychology, Murphy and Monsen (2008) provide one of the few papers to directly address gender imbalance within the profession. Drawing on a review of existing literature and workforce data, the authors highlighted a sustained decline in the proportion of male EPs and argue that this issue has received relatively limited empirical attention. In evaluating potential explanations, including differences in pay, communication styles, and career preferences, the authors concluded that no single factor adequately accounts for the observed disparity. Instead, they suggest that gender stereotyping may play a significant role in shaping both perceptions of the profession and men's engagement within it.

Further insight into men's pathways into female dominated professions is provided by Simpson (2004), whose qualitative study of 40 men across occupations such as nursing, teaching, and librarianship, developed a typology of career entry, categorising participants as seekers, finders, or settlers. Drawing on semi-structured interviews, Simpson (2004) illustrated how men's motivations for entering these professions are varied and often shaped by a combination of intrinsic interests, pragmatic considerations, and prior career experiences. The identification of settlers, men who transition from traditionally masculine occupations into feminised roles, highlights the fluidity of career trajectories and the potential for masculinity to be reconfigured over time. At the same time, the study introduced the concept of role

strain, capturing the tension experienced by men whose occupational roles conflict with dominant gender norms. While this typological framework provides a useful heuristic for understanding entry pathways, its broad categorisation risks simplifying the complexity and fluidity of individual experiences.

The studies explored across this theme illustrate that men's entry into female dominated professions is not reducible to individual preference or identity, but is shaped through the interplay of structural constraints, gendered expectations, and labour market positioning. Across studies by Lupton (2006), Moskos (2020), and Simpson (2004), participants' accounts construct occupational trajectories as both socially patterned and contingently navigated, with masculinity operating as a resource, constraint, and interpretive lens through which work is understood. However, it is notable that these insights are derived predominantly from interview-based methodologies, which privilege retrospective accounts of decision-making. As a result, masculinity is often constructed as something participants explain or justify, rather than something observed as it is enacted within interaction. This raises important questions regarding how occupational entry is subsequently negotiated in practice, and highlights a broader methodological tendency within the literature to foreground narrative coherence over interactional complexity.

In summary, the literature explored suggests that men's movement into female dominated professions is shaped not simply by individual preference, but by a complex interplay of gendered expectations, labour market processes, and social positioning, raising the further question of how masculinity is subsequently negotiated once men are located within these professional spaces.

2.4.2 Managing Masculinity in Practice

Building on structural explanations of men's entry into female dominated professions, research has also examined how masculinity is subsequently negotiated, performed, and regulated within professional contexts. A key contribution to this field is the previously mentioned qualitative study of men working in female-dominated occupations, including nursing, teaching, and librarianship (Simpson, 2004). Drawing on semi-structured interviews, the concept of 'gender work' is introduced, capturing the processes through which men actively manage their identity to maintain a sense of masculinity within feminised roles. Participants described strategies such as re-labelling job titles, emphasising masculine aspects of their work, and distancing themselves from tasks perceived as feminine. These strategies illustrate how masculinity is not abandoned within such contexts but is instead actively reconfigured in ways that preserve alignment with dominant gender norms. While the interview-based design provides rich insight into participants' accounts, it also presents masculinity as retrospectively narrated, rather than observed in interaction. This highlights a broader methodological limitation across the literature.

A similar focus on identity work is evident in Cross and Bagilhole's (2002) study of men in non-traditional occupations (nursing, teaching, social work, cleaner). Based on qualitative interviews with men across these caring professions, the authors identify two dominant patterns: the maintenance of traditional masculinity and the reconstruction of masculinity in more relational forms. Importantly, even where participants appeared to adopt softer or more emotionally expressive masculinities, these were often framed in ways that preserved distinction or superiority, for example, positioning themselves as uniquely able to combine care with authority. This suggests that masculinity is not simply diminished within feminised contexts but is reworked in

ways that continue to reproduce gendered hierarchies. As with Simpson's (2004) study, however, the reliance on interview data limits insight into how such processes unfold in real-time interactions.

Studies have extended these individual accounts to consider how masculinity is regulated through institutional expectations and professional discourse. Mills et al. (2008), in an in-depth qualitative case study of a male primary teacher, illustrated how schools construct an imaginary male teacher associated with discipline, authority, and behavioural control. Drawing on interview and observational data, the study demonstrates how such expectations constrain professional identity, with the participant experiencing pressure to enact certain forms of masculinity regardless of personal inclination. While the single-case design limits the breadth of the findings, it offers a nuanced account of how institutional discourses shape the boundaries of acceptable masculinity within teaching practice.

Similarly, Schaub (2022) employed a theoretically informed qualitative design with male social work students, highlighting how masculinity is constructed as both visible and potentially problematic within caring and relational professions. Through semi-structured interviews, participants described the need to carefully regulate their communication, emotional expression, and physical presence to avoid being perceived as dominant, inappropriate, or threatening. Masculinity therefore emerged as something that required ongoing monitoring in relation to power, vulnerability, and professional expectation. Schaub's (2022) explicit engagement with feminist theory strengthens the study's analytic focus on power relations, however, the strong theoretical framing may also have shaped how participants' accounts were interpreted.

In contrast to studies emphasising tension and regulation, Himerich (2019) offers a more nuanced perspective, suggesting that masculinity may, at times, be constructed as peripheral or backgrounded within professional identity. Drawing on narrative interviews with male trainee clinical psychologists, the study found that participants often positioned gender as a side role, prioritising professional identity over gender identity. However, closer analysis indicates that masculinity remained implicitly present, particularly in relation to assumptions of authority and competence. This apparent minimisation of gender can therefore be understood as a form of discursive positioning, allowing participants to align with the relational values of the profession while distancing themselves from more problematic or dominant constructions of masculinity. As with other interview-based studies, the reliance on narrative accounts may privilege coherent and socially desirable identity constructions so the findings should be treated with caution.

A further strand within the literature examines masculinity as it is constructed within interactional and discursive contexts. Francis and Skelton (2001), drawing on ethnographic observations and classroom interactions of teachers, demonstrate how masculinity is actively produced through language, humour, and everyday practice. Their analysis highlights how masculinity is frequently constructed in opposition to femininity and regulated through peer interactions, including the use of humour and at times homophobic discourse. By focusing on naturally occurring interaction, this study provides a more dynamic account of masculinity as something co-constructed in context, rather than retrospectively described.

Similarly, McDowell (2015) utilised audio-recorded workplace interactions to examine how male nurses constructed their professional identity through discourse. Using an interactional sociolinguistic approach, the study showed that participants

drew on collaborative and relational communication styles typically associated with feminine discourse to construct a shared sense of professional identity and group belonging. Rather than orienting towards hegemonic norms of masculinity, participants' linguistic practices appeared to align more closely with the communicative expectations of the workplace context. This suggests that identity construction within interaction may be shaped by the norms and practice of the professional environment, highlighting the importance of context in shaping how masculinity is enacted. The use of naturally occurring data represents a significant methodological strength, offering insight into how masculinity is enacted in practice. However, the small sample size and focus on a single professional context limit the broader applicability of the findings.

Across these studies, a consistent theme is the situational and context-dependent nature of masculinity. McDowell and Klattenberg (2019) challenged essentialist assumptions through an analysis of classroom interactions across UK and German contexts. Findings demonstrated that both male and female teachers drew on a range of communicative styles traditionally associated with masculinity and femininity. Male teachers frequently used feminine-coded practices (e.g., mitigation, indirectness, relational talk), and female teachers used masculine-coded authority (e.g., direct commands, sanctions). This suggests that professional roles and interactional contexts may shape behaviour more strongly than gender identity alone.

Throughout this theme, masculinity is consistently constructed as requiring ongoing negotiation in relation to professional expectations, relational demands, and institutional discourse. Interview-based studies (Cross & Bagilhole, 2002; Himerich, 2019; Simpson, 2004) tend to highlight deliberate identity work, with participants positioning themselves as actively managing or reconfiguring masculinity. In contrast, studies drawing on observational or interactional data (Francis & Skelton, 2001;

McDowell, 2015; McDowell & Klattenberg, 2019) illustrate how masculinity is experienced more implicitly through discourse, humour, and everyday practice. This methodological divergence is analytically significant, as it suggests that masculinity may appear more coherent when retrospectively narrated, but more fluid, contingent, and relational when examined naturally in the moment.

Taken together, the literature suggests that masculinity within female dominated professions is characterised by an ongoing process of negotiation, regulation, and positioning. Men are positioned as engaging in forms of identity work that align with professional expectations while managing tension with dominant gender norms. Masculinity is therefore constructed as an evolving concept rather than a stable identity, yet studies also suggest that these processes of regulation and adaptation do not occur in conditions of straightforward marginalisation. Instead, men's positioning within feminised professions appears marked by a persistent tension, in which experiences of vulnerability, scrutiny, and identity work coexist alongside forms of gendered advantage and structural privilege. This points toward a more complex and ambivalent configuration of minority status, which is explored in the following theme.

2.4.3 Minority Status within Gendered Power Structures

A further layer of complexity emerges in relation to the previous themes when considering men's simultaneous positioning as both minority and advantaged. Across studies, participants' accounts construct masculinity as operating through a form of ambivalent positioning, in which experiences of marginalisation, scrutiny, and identity tension coexist with enduring structural and symbolic advantage. This dual positioning complicates binary accounts of either disadvantage or dominance, instead pointing

towards the enduring and adaptive nature of gendered power relations within female dominated professions.

Across the reviewed literature, 10 of the 16 papers documented how men experience forms of marginalisation within caring and relational professions, including heightened scrutiny, identity tension, and positioning as incongruent within feminised contexts. Schaub (2022), drawing on semi-structured interviews with male social work students, illustrated how participants described experiencing heightened scrutiny from others, alongside increased self-monitoring, particularly in relation to physical contact, emotional expression, and discussions of gender-based violence. Masculinity was constructed within participants' accounts as potentially problematic or risky, requiring careful regulation to avoid being perceived as inappropriate or threatening.

Similarly, Cross and Bagilhole (2002) examined men working in occupations the authors define as non-traditional, referring to roles historically and culturally constructed as 'women's work', including nursing, primary teaching, social work, and care-related roles. Drawing on qualitative interviews with 10 men, the study illustrated that participants encountered challenges to their masculine identity from multiple sources, including male peers, female colleagues, and wider social networks such as friends and family. These challenges were often expressed through the questioning of sexuality, competence, and suitability for caring work, reflecting broader cultural assumptions that position such roles as incompatible with dominant forms of masculinity. Findings therefore suggested that within feminised professional spaces, masculinity can become particularly visible and open to scrutiny, generating ongoing identity tension and the need for active negotiation.

However, these experiences of marginalisation coexist with evidence of continued male advantage. Simpson's (2004) qualitative study highlights how men working in female-dominated professions often benefit from what has been described as glass escalator effects, including assumptions of leadership potential, increased visibility, and accelerated career progression. Drawing on interviews with men in occupations such as primary teaching, nursing, cabin crew, and librarianship, Simpson (2004) demonstrates that these assumptions were actively produced within workplace interactions. Participants' accounts suggested that they were frequently positioned as authoritative or competent by colleagues, managers, and, in some cases, service-users. For example, male teachers were perceived by staff and pupils as better able to manage behaviour, while male nurses and cabin crew were associated with authority and decision-making in high-pressure situations. These constructions reflect broader societal associations between masculinity and leadership, which appeared to operate within organisational contexts to advantage men despite their minority status. Likewise, Schaub (2022), drawing on a combination of empirical insights from male social workers and critical feminist analysis, suggested that even when men express discomfort or uncertainty, they may still be afforded credibility and status within professional contexts. This indicates that structural and symbolic advantages associated with masculinity can persist.

Importantly, this ambivalence is not merely contradictory but reflects the adaptive capacity of masculinity within changing social and professional contexts. Continuing with Cross and Bagilhole's (2002) work, they argue that men's presence within feminised professions does not necessarily disrupt existing gender hierarchies. Instead, masculinity may be reconfigured in ways that allow men to align with relational or caring aspects of the role while maintaining distinction from female colleagues. For

example, participants who adopted more emotionally expressive or softer masculinities often framed these as enhancing their professional effectiveness or positioning them as uniquely skilled. In this sense, masculinity is not abandoned but selectively reworked, enabling men to navigate feminised contexts without fully relinquishing gendered advantage.

This dynamic is further reflected in studies that emphasise the situational visibility of masculinity. Wright (2024) interviewed 3 male teachers and found that participants described their gender as becoming more or less salient depending on context, and their masculinity as being shaped by gendered expectations. This suggests that masculinity is not a constant presence but is activated in response to particular interactions, expectations, or challenges. Similarly, McDowell and Klattenberg (2019), through analysis of classroom interactions, demonstrated that both male and female practitioners draw on a range of communicative styles, challenging essentialist assumptions around gendered behaviour. However, the persistence of gendered expectations, formed and reproduced through broader societal discourse, indicates that masculinity continues to carry symbolic weight, particularly in relation to authority and competence even when not explicitly emphasised.

Taken together, these studies suggest that men's experiences within female dominated professions are characterised by a form of ambivalent advantage, in which marginalisation and privilege are not mutually exclusive but coexist within complex and context-dependent configurations. Masculinity may be subject to scrutiny, regulation, and negotiation, yet it also remains embedded within broader structures of gendered power that continue to shape professional interactions and opportunities. This highlights the importance of moving beyond binary understandings of dominance and

disadvantage, instead recognising the fluid, relational, and contextually contingent nature of gendered positioning. Having considered how men enter, manage, and are positioned within feminised professions, the review now turns to how masculinity itself is conceptualised across this area of research.

2.4.4 Conceptualising Masculinity: Ambiguity, Contestation, and Tension

Building on the preceding themes, this section synthesises how masculinity is conceptualised across the reviewed literature. While earlier sections have examined how masculinity is experienced and negotiated within professional contexts, this section focuses on how masculinity itself is constructed, understood, and theorised. Whilst the studies across this theme do not always explicitly foreground masculinity as a central analytic focus, they engage with it either through participants' accounts within findings (Brownhill et al., 2020; Roulston & Mills, 2000) or through theoretical framing in the introduction and discussion sections (Francis, 2008; Murphy & Monsen (2008)). The synthesis therefore draws primarily on participants' constructions, while also attending to how these are interpreted within the broader literature. This shift reflects wider developments within masculinity scholarship, where the conceptual stability of masculinity itself has been increasingly questioned, with greater emphasis placed on plurality, fragmentation, and the limits of singular explanatory frameworks (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2012).

The empirical work of Brownhill et al. (2020) highlights how masculinity is actively negotiated within professional communities. The authors used a focus group approach with male primary school teachers in England to explore how the notion of the male role model and masculinity is constructed and contested. The use of focus groups is particularly significant, as it enabled the co-construction of meaning through

interaction, revealing how shared understandings of masculinity were negotiated, challenged, and reformulated in dialogue rather than simply reported retrospectively. Participants' accounts illustrated that this label was experienced as ambiguous, reductive, and at times professionally constraining, with some resisting its individualised and gender-essentialist assumptions. This ambiguity was not simply descriptive but functioned as a site of negotiation. Participants constructed masculinity as something requiring active interpretation, rather than something that could be passively inhabited, rearticulating masculinity through alternative professional identities such as facilitators of development or contributors to a collective role. However, while the study offers valuable insight into the contested nature of the role model discourse, its reliance on a relatively small and homogenous sample, alongside limited reflexive engagement within the analytic process, constrains the breadth and interpretive depth of its findings.

The emphasis on negotiation is consistent with wider research which challenges the assumption that gendered practice can be predicted on the basis of being male, instead highlighting the diversity and context-dependence of gendered subjectivities (Francis, 2008). Alongside this ambiguity, further research illustrates how masculinity was shaped and constrained by wider discursive expectations. Roulston and Mills (2000), in their study of male teachers working within feminised areas of the curriculum, demonstrated how participants' accounts were structured in relation to dominant constructions of masculinity. Men were often positioned in relation to expectations of authority, control, and behavioural management, with participants describing how these expectations influenced both their professional roles and how they were perceived by others. Masculinity therefore appeared to function as a socially regulated resource rather than an individual attribute, shaping both practice and

perception. In some instances, participants' practice was described as inadvertently reinforcing stereotypical constructions of masculinity, even within contexts that might otherwise be assumed to challenge them.

Within Educational Psychology, similar patterns are evident. Murphy and Monsen (2008) illustrated how gendered assumptions continue to shape understandings of professional roles, with masculinity implicitly linked to communication style, empathy, and professional suitability. Although not based on primary qualitative data, their analysis reflects broader discursive patterns evident across the reviewed studies, where masculinity is simultaneously questioned and reproduced through assumptions about male characteristics. This highlights the persistence of essentialist thinking within professional discourse, even where more constructionist understandings are theoretically recognised.

Across the reviewed studies, masculinity is constructed as plural, negotiated, and discursively shaped, emerging through the interplay between individual positioning and wider professional and cultural expectations. While participants' accounts frequently described masculinity as fluid, relational, and context-dependent, they also revealed an ongoing tension with more essentialist understandings. Discourses such as the male role model continue to anchor masculinity to assumptions about inherent male qualities. These tensions suggest that, although constructionist perspectives are increasingly adopted within the literature, they do not fully displace more traditional constructions. Instead, competing understandings of masculinity coexist, reflecting broader debates within the field regarding the conceptual limits and ongoing utility of masculinity as an analytic category (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2012), alongside empirical evidence that gendered practice remains difficult to disentangle from embodied assumptions despite constructionist framings

(Francis, 2008). This conceptual instability provides an important foundation for the critical evaluation that follows, particularly in relation to how masculinity is theorised, methodologically captured, and applied to Educational Psychology.

2.5 Critical Evaluation of the Literature and Rationale for the Present Study

The preceding review has illustrated that masculinity within caring, relational, and educational professions is increasingly conceptualised as socially constructed, contextually negotiated, and interactionally produced. Whilst this literature offers valuable insight into how men experience and manage masculinity within female dominated professional contexts, a number of conceptual, empirical, and methodological limitations remain. These limitations not only constrain the explanatory power of existing research but also provide a clear rationale for further research, particularly within the field of Educational Psychology.

A notable feature of the literature is the continued dominance of hegemonic masculinity as an organising framework, even within studies that explicitly adopt more constructionist perspectives. Whilst this framework has been instrumental in highlighting gendered power relations, it has also been critiqued for its tendency to privilege hierarchical and dominance-based understandings of masculinity, potentially obscuring more fluid, relational, and context-specific forms (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2012). This tension is evident across empirical studies, where accounts of flexibility and negotiation coexist with implicit assumptions about what constitutes normative masculinity. As a result, there is a risk that masculinity is re-stabilised within research, even where authors seek to emphasise its plurality. This suggests a need for approaches that attend more fully to the variability and contingency of masculinity as it is constructed.

The literature is also characterised by a strong focus on adjacent professions, particularly teaching, nursing, and social work, with comparatively limited attention paid to Educational Psychology specifically. Whilst these professions share important characteristics as caring and relational fields, they differ in terms of professional roles, training pathways, and the nature of practitioner-client relationships. Murphy and Monsen (2008) identify the gender imbalance within Educational Psychology but offer limited empirical insight into how masculinity and professional identity is experienced within this context. Consequently, much of the current understanding of men's experiences is inferred from neighbouring professions, raising questions about the transferability of findings. This gap is particularly significant given the distinctive positioning of EPs as both practitioners and consultants, working systemically across multiple contexts.

A further limitation concerns the methodological dominance of interview-based research. Most studies reviewed rely on individual, semi-structured interviews which provide rich accounts of participants' reflections but also privilege retrospective sense-making. Such approaches may encourage the construction of coherent, socially acceptable narratives, potentially obscuring contradiction, ambivalence, and interactional complexity. Therefore, masculinity is frequently examined as something participants articulate, rather than something that is co-constructed within relational contexts. Whilst a small number of studies have utilised observational or discourse-based methods, these remain limited. This methodological pattern is not merely technical but epistemologically significant, as it shapes how masculinity itself is conceptualised within the field.

In addition, there is a relative lack of sustained engagement with intersectionality within the literature. Some studies acknowledge the role of factors

such as sexuality or social class, most notably Lupton's (2006) analysis of class-based labour market positioning, but these intersections are often treated as secondary to gender, rather than as integral to the construction of identity. This limits the extent to which existing research can account for the diversity and complexity of men's experiences, and risks reproducing a homogenised understanding of masculinity that does not fully reflect lived realities.

The present study seeks to address these gaps by exploring how male EPs construct, experience, and negotiate masculinity within the Educational Psychology profession, utilising a focus group approach. In doing so, the study responds directly to the methodological limitations identified within the literature by capturing masculinity as it is articulated, challenged, and co-constructed in interaction, rather than solely retrospectively described. Furthermore, by focusing specifically on male EPs within the UK, the research contributes to an underdeveloped area of research, offering insight into how masculinity operates within a profession characterised by relational, consultative, and systemic practice. Through this approach, the study aims to extend existing understandings of men in female dominated professions, and provide a more nuanced account of how masculinity and professional identity intersect within the Educational Psychology profession.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter outlines the philosophical, methodological, and ethical foundations underpinning the current study. It begins by stating the research aims and questions, before presenting the study's relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemology. The chapter then outlines the research design, including participant recruitment and the use of online focus groups as the method of data collection. The process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) used to analyse the data is subsequently described, alongside considerations of reflexivity and the researcher's positionality. The chapter concludes by outlining the ethical procedures governing the study.

3.2 Research Aims and Questions

The overarching aim of this study was to explore how male EPs experience and construct their professional identity and masculinity when in role, with particular attention to how masculinity is understood, negotiated, and positioned. Although Educational Psychology in the United Kingdom has long been characterised by significant gender imbalance, with men representing a minority of the workforce (Lyonette et al., 2019), there remains limited research examining how male EPs make sense of their gendered positioning within the profession. This study therefore sought to generate an in-depth, contextually grounded understanding of male EPs' lived experiences. The study was guided by two research questions:

Research Question 1:

What are male Educational Psychologists' experiences of being a male in the profession?

Research Question 2:

How do male Educational Psychologists navigate their own professional identity and masculinity when in role?

The first question is concerned with experience: how masculinity is felt, noticed, or made salient within professional contexts. The second question shifts the focus towards process, examining how male EPs understand and make sense of how they negotiate, regulate, and construct their professional identity in relation to gendered expectations, institutional norms, and broader cultural discourse around masculinity.

A qualitative design was considered necessary to address these questions. The study does not seek to measure predefined variables or test hypotheses about gendered differences. Instead, it aims to explore how meaning is constructed, how identity is negotiated in interaction, and how participants articulate, contest, and reflect upon masculinity within the specific cultural and institutional context of Educational Psychology. Such aims require access to participants' accounts, language, and relational processes, which are best captured through qualitative methods that prioritise depth, nuance, and interpretative engagement (Burr, 2015).

3.3 Philosophical Positioning

This study is underpinned by a relativist ontological stance and a social constructionist epistemology. These positions shape how knowledge is understood, how masculinity and professional identity are conceptualised, and how data is interpreted. Rather than treating male EPs' experiences as reflections of a fixed or objective reality, this study approaches both masculinity and professional identity as socially produced, relationally negotiated, and contextually situated phenomena. The

following sections outline the ontological and epistemological foundations of the research and clarify their implications for design and analysis.

3.3.1 Ontology: Relativism

Ontology refers to assumptions about the nature of reality, what exists, and what can be said to be real (Effingham, 2013). This study adopts a relativist ontological position, which holds that reality is not singular, fixed, or universally accessible (Crotty, 1998). Instead, realities are multiple and constructed differently by individuals and groups depending on their social, cultural, and contextual circumstance.

From a relativist perspective, there is no single, objective male EP experience waiting to be discovered. Rather, there are diverse and potentially contradictory experiences shaped by institutional context, generational position, sexuality, class, race, and professional history. Masculinity itself may also hold different meanings for different participants. These different meanings are not evaluated in terms of accuracy against an objective standard but are understood as valid constructions of reality within particular contexts.

Importantly, relativism also acknowledges the interpretative role of the researcher (Oliver, 2014). Reality cannot be separated from the observer; the analysis presented in this thesis is itself a construction shaped by my own positioning as a male TEP, my theoretical commitments, and my engagement with the data. Within a relativist framework, the task of analysis is not to adjudicate between competing realities but to illuminate how meanings are constructed and why they matter (Crotty, 1998). This involves identifying recurring patterns, tensions, and contradictions, while recognising that alternative interpretations are possible. The findings presented later in this study therefore represent one theoretically informed and reflexively developed

account of the data, rather than definitive statements about male EPs as a homogenous group.

3.3.2 Epistemology: Social Constructionism

Epistemology relates to the nature of knowledge and how it is produced (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Social constructionism posits that knowledge is not discovered as objective fact but constructed through social processes, language, and interaction (Burr, 2015). From this perspective, meaning does not exist independently of people; rather, it is generated through discourse, shaped by cultural norms, institutional contexts, and relational dynamics.

In contrast to positivist epistemologies, which assume that reality can be observed, measured, and described independently of the observer, social constructionism rejects the notion of a neutral, detached knower (Burr, 2015). It assumes that what is taken to be true is contingent upon historical, cultural, and relational contexts (Willig, 2013). Power is also prominent throughout this epistemological positioning. Discourses of masculinity are embedded within broader gendered power structures that shape expectations of authority, care, leadership, and emotional expression (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Knowledge in relation to this study is therefore provisional, situated, and shaped by power relations.

Adopting a social constructionist epistemology means that masculinity is not conceptualised as a stable internal trait or biological essence. Instead, masculinity is understood as discursively produced and relationally constituted. It is constructed through everyday interactions, professional norms, cultural narratives, and institutional expectations. What counts as masculine is not fixed but negotiated within particular social settings.

In the context of Educational Psychology, a profession historically associated with relational, therapeutic, and caring practice (Murphy & Monsen, 2008), masculinity may be positioned, challenged, softened, or reconfigured in response to prevailing professional discourse. Similarly, professional identity is also approached as socially negotiated rather than individually experienced. EPs do not simply have professional identity, they construct and enact it through interactions with colleagues, service users, policy frameworks, and institutional cultures.

Social constructionism also aligns closely with relativism (Mosteller, 2008). If knowledge is constructed through interaction and discourse, then the realities being described are also context-dependent and situated. In this study, participants' accounts of masculinity and professional identity are understood as products of relational and institutional contexts, shaped by working within LAs, engaging with colleagues and families, and navigating broader societal discourse around gender.

3.3.3 Overview of Positions

A social constructionist epistemology and relativist ontology are therefore well suited to the study's research questions. The first question seeks to understand male EPs' experiences of being male within the profession. The second explores how they navigate their professional identity and masculinity when in role. Both questions assume that identity and experience are shaped by social context, institutional expectations, and relational positioning. A constructionist lens enables the study to move beyond describing experiences towards examining how those experiences are constructed, interpreted, and negotiated in conversation (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).

The philosophical positions outlined in this section allow the study to explore the multiplicity and contextuality of male EPs' experiences without privileging a

singular account. These philosophical commitments directly informed the following methodological choices made throughout the study. A qualitative research design was required in order to explore how masculinity and professional identity are constructed, interpreted, and negotiated during interactions rather than treated as stable psychological attributes. The following section outlines the qualitative design and analytic framework used.

3.4 Methodological Approach

This study adopted a qualitative research design informed by a Big Q approach and analysed data using RTA. The methodological approach was selected to ensure coherence with the study's social constructionist epistemology and relativist ontology, and to provide an analytic framework capable of capturing both experiential and interpretative dimensions of masculinity and professional identity.

3.4.1 Qualitative Design and Big Q

Qualitative research encompasses a broad range of epistemological positions and analytic strategies. Braun and Clarke (2022) distinguish between small q qualitative research, where qualitative methods are used within a broadly positivist framework, and Big Q qualitative research, which is rooted in interpretative, constructionist, or critical paradigms. This study adopts a Big Q orientation. It does not seek to measure pre-defined constructs or identify objective patterns in male EPs' experiences. Instead, it aims to interpret how meaning is constructed, negotiated, and articulated within specific social contexts.

The research questions are exploratory and inductive in nature. They ask not whether male EPs experience masculinity in particular ways, but how they understand, negotiate, and position masculinity within their professional roles. Such questions

require an approach capable of engaging with complexity, ambivalence, and contradiction. A qualitative design aligns with the study aims as it enables attention to nuance, context, and the layered meanings embedded within participants' accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The analysis was primarily data-driven, and this inductive stance was particularly important given the relative paucity of research examining male EPs specifically. The study therefore aimed to generate new interpretative insights rather than test established frameworks. At the same time, the analysis was both experiential and interpretative, attending to participants' individual accounts of their lived experiences.

A qualitative, Big Q design was therefore necessary to address the previously stated research questions. It allowed for an exploration of how masculinity and professional identity are constructed, how participants orient to cultural norms and institutional structures, and how meaning is negotiated rather than assumed.

3.4.2 Rationale for Reflexive Thematic Analysis

RTA was selected as the analytic method for this study as it is a theoretically flexible approach to identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning across a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022). It is particularly well suited to research grounded in social constructionism and relativism, as it does not assume that themes emerge from data in a purely objective sense. Instead, themes are understood as interpretative constructions developed through active engagement between researcher and data (Clarke et al., 2019).

Reflexivity is a core principle of RTA. Rather than striving for coder reliability or consensus, RTA emphasises the active, interpretative role of the researcher (Braun &

Clarke, 2022). Themes are shaped by theoretical commitments, analytic decisions, and reflexive awareness. RTA conceptualises themes not as topic summaries but as analytic arguments. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research questions and is unified by a central organising concept (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In this study, themes were developed to articulate patterned meanings across the data set and construct a coherent interpretative account of how masculinity is viewed and experienced by male EPs.

The flexibility of RTA across epistemological positions was central to its selection. Unlike methods tied to specific theoretical frameworks, RTA can be applied within realist, critical realist, or constructionist paradigms (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This flexibility allowed the method to be explicitly aligned with the study's social constructionist epistemology, foregrounding meaning-making, reflexivity, and contextual interpretation.

3.4.3 Alternative Methodological Approaches

The following alternative approaches were considered but deemed less appropriate for the study. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) prioritises in-depth exploration of individual lived experience and typically involves small, homogeneous samples analysed case-by-case (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). While valuable for idiographic insight, IPA would have limited the capacity to analyse interactional meaning-making across participants and to construct broader patterns across the dataset.

Grounded Theory, in its traditional form, aims to generate formal theory grounded systematically in data through constant comparison and theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This study did not seek to develop a substantive

theory of male EP identity, instead it aimed to construct an interpretative account of patterned meaning within a bounded dataset. The epistemological assumptions of grounded theory, particularly in more objectivist variants, were also less aligned with the study's constructionist stance.

Discourse analysis was also considered given its attention to language and power, however, discourse analytic approaches often focus on the fine-grained structure of talk, rhetorical devices, and discursive resources (Harper & Thompson, 2011). The present study sought to move beyond micro-level linguistic analysis to develop a broader thematic account of masculinity and professional identity across the dataset.

RTA therefore offered the flexibility, epistemological alignment, and interpretative depth required to address the study's research questions. Having outlined the methodological framework and rationale for using RTA, focus now turns to the data collection approach.

3.5 Data Collection

3.5.1 Rationale for Focus Groups

The study utilised online focus groups as the primary method of data collection. This approach was selected due to their capacity to generate interactional data and facilitate the co-construction of meaning among participants (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). The aim of the present study was not only to explore what male EPs say about masculinity, but also how understandings of masculinity are formulated through sharing experiences with others. From this perspective, masculinity is understood not as a fixed attribute located within individuals, but as a socially situated phenomenon shaped through interaction, discourse, and relational positioning (Kimmel, 2004).

Focus groups therefore provided a methodological approach capable of capturing these interactional processes.

The use of focus groups also aligns closely with the study's social constructionist epistemology. Focus groups generate dialogic data in which meanings are co-constructed rather than individually reported (Bryman, 2012). The interactional nature of the method allows an exploration not only of what participants say, but how meaning emerges through agreement, hesitation, and contestation. This is particularly relevant in a study involving masculinity, as gendered identities are often articulated in relation to others (Francis, 2002). RTA is also particularly appropriate for focus group data, as it enables analysis at both semantic and latent levels, capturing what participants explicitly say while also interpreting underlying assumptions, tensions, and patterns of shared meaning within interactional data.

Unlike individual interviews, which tend to focus on personal narratives and individual reflection, focus groups allow participants to respond to, build upon, challenge, and elaborate one another's contributions. The method therefore produces data not only at the level of individual accounts, but also at the level of group interaction and collective meaning-making. In this sense, focus groups are particularly suited to research informed by social constructionist epistemology, which conceptualises knowledge as emerging through dialogue, negotiation, and shared interpretation (Burr, 2015). Through discussion with peers who share a broadly similar professional context, the focus group format was selected to allow participants to reflect on their own experiences while also engaging with alternative perspectives. The hope was that this would create opportunities for participants to reconsider, refine, or extend their own accounts as the conversation unfolded.

3.5.2 Limitations of Focus Groups

Alongside these strengths, focus groups also present methodological challenges. Group discussions may inhibit disclosure of highly personal experiences or encourage participants to provide responses perceived as socially acceptable (Cyr, 2019). Additionally, conversational dynamics may be influenced by differences in confidence, professional seniority, or personality, potentially resulting in certain voices becoming more dominant than others (Hollander, 2004). Such dynamics can shape which perspectives become more visible within the discussion, and which remain in the background.

The online format of the focus groups introduced additional considerations. Conducting focus groups through video conferencing platforms can reduce geographical barriers to participation and increase accessibility for participants located across different regions (Liamputtong, 2011). However, virtual environments may also alter the flow of interaction, as non-verbal cues can be less visible and conversational turn-taking may be less spontaneous than in face-to-face settings (Ruiz, 2017). Despite these limitations, it was decided that the previously mentioned strengths aligned with the current study aims, and therefore focus groups were chosen as the method of data collection.

3.6 Research Participants

This section outlines the details of the participant sample and explains the recruitment procedures followed. Transparency regarding sampling decisions and recruitment process is central to qualitative research, particularly within relatively small professional communities such as Educational Psychology. The following sections describe participant demographics, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the strategies

used to recruit and organise focus groups while maintaining ethical integrity and confidentiality.

3.6.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Participants were required to be practising as an EP working across the UK, which provided a national scope. The sample included EPs at varying career stages, including recently qualified, mid-career, and senior EPs with extensive professional experience. Initially, male EPs working in private practice were excluded to focus on EPs working within larger LA teams. However, due to several private EPs expressing an interest in taking part, I widened the selection criteria to include those working in private practice. This enabled variation across different career trajectories and organisational structures. The inclusion and exclusion criteria, alongside the rationale for each, can be found in Table 3.

Table 3*Participant Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion	Rationale
Qualification and Context	Fully qualified main grade or senior EPs who are currently working in a LA or in private practice.	Professionals who are not currently qualified (e.g. trainee EPs, assistant EPs). Also, qualified EPs who are retired.	This study aimed to explore experiences within established and current professional roles. The research questions focus on professional identity and experiences in qualified practice rather than during training or post career.
Gender	EPs must self-identify as male.	Professionals who self-identify as female or any other gender.	The study aimed to explore the experiences of male EPs only. The study explicitly welcomed self-identified men, including trans men. No participants self-identified as trans in the sample, however, the inclusion criteria reflected an intentional commitment to inclusivity.

3.6.2 Recruitment Process

Recruitment was conducted between April 2025 and May 2025 using a purposive and self-selecting sampling strategy. Recruitment was intentionally concluded at the end of the planned recruitment period to maintain momentum within the time-bound doctoral study and to allow sufficient time for data collection, transcription, and the iterative process of RTA. The decision to close recruitment was therefore pragmatic and project-specific rather than based on any claim that no further meaningful insights could have been generated.

The study sought participants willing to engage reflexively in the topics of gender, masculinity, and professional identity. It is therefore recognised that individuals who chose to participate may have had particular interest in or reflections on these topics. Rather than viewing this as a limitation, it is consistent with the exploratory nature of the research. In qualitative research grounded in constructionism, self-selection is often appropriate when the aim is to generate in-depth discussion rather than measure prevalence (Levitt et al., 2017). Invitations to participate were disseminated through professional networks, including:

- The Educational Psychology Network (EPNET) mailing list (Appendix D).
- My current and previous LA placements (Appendix E).
- My current peer cohort who sent the information to their teams (Appendix F).
- A national EP Facebook group (Appendix G).

The recruitment advertisement poster that was sent outlined the study's focus on male EPs' experiences of masculinity and professional identity, emphasised voluntary participation, and provided information regarding the focus group format (see Appendix H). Interested participants were invited to contact me directly via email to

express an interest in taking part. They were then asked for their availability during June and July 2025 and sent a consent form which clearly stated what participation in the study would involve (see Appendix I). Participants were also given the opportunity to ask any questions. Once I received availability and signed consent forms from those interested, I confirmed three focus group dates in June and July 2025 which matched participant availability as best as I could.

In total, 22 potential participants reached out via email to express an interest in my study. One was a Year 3 TEP so could not take part, and another said they would have taken part in an individual interview, but not a focus group. Six could not make any of the dates work. This resulted in me having 14 participants to split over three focus groups, with each participant only joining one group. As the study involved a relatively small professional community, careful attention was given to managing potential dual relationships and confidentiality. Participants were allocated to focus groups to ensure they would not be placed in the same group as someone from their LA. Final groupings can be found in Table 4, along with pseudonyms for each participant.

Table 4

Focus Group Allocation

Participant Number	Focus Group Number	Pseudonym
1	1	Theo
2	1	Oliver
3	1	Ethan
4	1	Samuel
5	1	Ryan
<i>5 participants</i>		
6	2	Zachary
7	2	Reuben

8	2	Archie
9	2	Noah
10	2	Kai
<i>5 participants</i>		
11	3	Dylan
12	3	Isaac
13	3	Marcus
14	3	Leo
<i>4 participants</i>		

Focus groups of this size are consistent with qualitative research guidance suggesting 4–6 participants as optimal for depth and interactional flow (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

3.6.3 Demographic Information

During email correspondence confirming participation in a focus group, participants were sent a Microsoft Form which asked them demographic information relating to their age, ethnicity, sexuality, religion or beliefs, and also whether they worked in a LA, private practice, or both. 11 out of 14 participants filled out this form, and graphs detailing responses can be found in Appendix J.

Of the participants who filled out the form, (n = 11), the majority worked within LA services (n = 9), with representation also seen in private practice (n = 2). One of these participants also selected a combination of both (n = 1), and one of the participants also stated 'other' - locum work (n = 1).

Participants spanned a range of age groups, including 25 - 34 (n = 4), 35 - 44 (n = 5), and 65+ (n = 2), and they were predominantly White British (n = 5), with additional representation from Asian or Asian British backgrounds (n = 1), White

European (n = 2), and mixed or other ethnic identities (n = 3). This included one participant who identified as mixed White European and Asian, one as mixed Pakistani and White British, and one who did not state their ethnicity.

Most participants identified as heterosexual (n = 7), with some identifying as gay (n = 3) and one participant identifying as pansexual (n = 1). The majority reported no religious affiliation (n = 8), whilst others identified as Christian (n = 1), Sikh (n = 1), and spiritual (n = 1).

The demographic information was collected to describe the sample and support recruitment of participants from a range of backgrounds, rather than to examine demographic variables as explanatory or causal influences on participants' accounts. While qualitative research does not seek statistical representativeness, gathering this information enabled consideration of whether the sample reflected diversity across characteristics such as age, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, career stage, and employment context. This was considered important given the study's focus on masculinity and professional identity, as participants from varied backgrounds may bring different experiences and perspectives to the focus groups. However, these demographic characteristics were not used to compare participants or explain differences within the analysis. Instead, they provide contextual information about the breadth of perspectives represented within the dataset. The sample size was considered sufficient to generate rich, meaningful discussion across the three focus groups while maintaining analytic coherence.

3.7 Study Procedure

This section outlines procedures followed during data collection. The design of the focus groups was informed by the study's interest in relational meaning-making

and the socially negotiated nature of masculinity. Attention was given to creating a safe and reflexive environment within which participants could explore potentially sensitive aspects of professional and gendered identity.

Three focus groups were conducted online via Microsoft Teams, each lasting approximately 90 minutes. The online format enabled participation from EPs located across different regions of the UK and reduced logistical barriers associated with travel and scheduling. Prior to participation, individuals received an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study, expectations regarding confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any stage (see Appendix K). Participants were asked to join the session from a private location and to use headphones where possible to protect the confidentiality of the discussion.

At the beginning of each focus group, I introduced the purpose of the session and reiterated the boundaries of confidentiality. Ground rules were established to support a respectful and reflective discussion environment, and participants were asked to have their cameras and microphones switched on throughout. They were reminded that all perspectives were welcome provided they were expressed respectfully, and that they could participate as much or as little as they wished. Participants were informed that pauses in conversation were acceptable and that they could take time to reflect before contributing. This approach helped minimise pressure for immediate responses and reduced the likelihood that discussions would be dominated by more confident speakers. Allowing space for silence also supported a facilitative stance, enabling participants to reflect on different contributions and consider their own perspectives as meanings were negotiated collectively.

Participants were asked to avoid referencing identifiable colleagues, services, or LAs during the discussion. Given the relatively small number of male EPs nationally, there was an increased likelihood that participants may recognise each other. Therefore, a short five-minute screen break followed the initial introductions. During this period, participants were invited to switch off their cameras and microphones and were given the option to contact me privately via email if they recognised another participant and wished to be reallocated to a different group or withdraw from the session. No participants requested reallocation or withdrawal.

Following this introduction, participants were invited to briefly introduce themselves by sharing their name, and what had drawn them to participate in the research. I modelled this process first to establish the tone and structure of the introductions. This opening activity supported rapport building within the group and created an initial opportunity for participants to begin reflecting on the topic collectively.

The focus groups followed a semi-structured format guided by a small number of broad, open-ended questions designed to stimulate participant-led discussion (Appendix L). Each session began with a single open question intended to encourage participants to speak freely and shape the direction of the conversation. Core questions followed that explored participants' experiences of being a male within the EP profession, including how they understood masculinity in relation to their professional role, and whether other aspects of their identity influenced how they navigated being a male EP. These questions generated extended discussions relating to the three central areas of interest within the study: gender, professional identity, and masculinity. Prompts were used flexibly where needed to invite elaboration or clarify meaning, although the discussion was largely guided by participants responding to one another's contributions.

Consistent with a social constructionist approach, the aim was to allow participants to respond to one another and collectively develop ideas rather than directing discussion towards predetermined answers. My role was therefore primarily facilitative rather than directive, intervening occasionally to maintain focus, summarise conversations, or support conversational flow where necessary.

At the conclusion of each focus group, time was allocated for a debrief. Participants were thanked for their contributions, reminded again of the expectations of confidentiality, and invited to share a word or short phrase that captured how they had experienced the discussion. Given the potentially sensitive nature of discussing personal views and experiences of masculinity and professional identity, attention was paid to providing a containing end to the session. I remained available on the call for a further 30 minutes should any participant wish to speak privately after the group had concluded. One participant chose this option as they wanted to speak about their experience of the group with me. This conversation took place outside the formal focus group and was therefore understood as part of the post-session debrief rather than as research data. In keeping with ethical commitments to participant privacy and the boundaries of informed consent, the discussion was not recorded, transcribed, or incorporated into the analysis.

Following the session, participants received a follow-up email thanking them for their participation, with a debrief leaflet attached that contained information about relevant support services, including organisations supporting men's mental health (see Appendix M). This containing ending supported the aim of the wider procedural design, to create a research environment that supported reflective discussion while maintaining ethical safeguards and clear boundaries around confidentiality and participant wellbeing.

3.8 Data Management and Transcription

All focus groups were recorded using the built-in recording function on Microsoft Teams with participants' consent. Recordings were downloaded immediately following each session and stored on an encrypted, password-protected university approved device. Transcription was completed using a combination of the Microsoft Teams automated transcription software and manual verification. I watched back each video recording in full while cross referencing and amending the audio recording transcript developed by the software. The opening sections from each focus group transcript can be found in Appendix N.

All identifying information was removed during transcription. Pseudonyms were assigned, and seven references to specific LAs, settings, or colleagues were either removed or generalised. Pseudonyms were selected to ensure that names did not correspond with participants' real initials to further protect anonymity within the relatively small professional community of EPs.

Audio recordings were deleted following completion of transcription and verification. Transcripts were retained in accordance with university data retention policies and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements. Data management procedures were designed to ensure confidentiality, integrity, and compliance with ethical and legal standards.

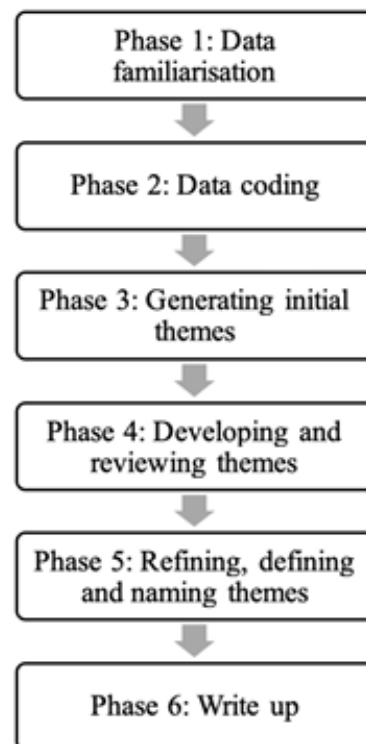
3.9 Data Analysis

The analysis for this study was informed by Braun and Clarke's (2022) six phase framework for RTA. While these phases are presented sequentially for clarity, the analytic process was recursive and iterative, involving movement back and forth between coding, theme development, and reflexive engagement with the data. A

flowchart showing an overview of each stage can be found in Figure 2. Following this, the procedure for each stage in relation to the current study is explained.

Figure 2

Six phases of RTA, adapted from Braun and Clarke (2022)



3.9.1 Aims of Analytic Process

The aim of the analytic process was not to discover themes hidden within the data, but to construct a coherent, theoretically informed interpretative account that addressed the research questions. Consistent with a RTA approach, themes were understood as patterns of shared meaning across the dataset, underpinned by central organising concepts that were actively developed through sustained analytic engagement with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

3.9.2 Stage 1: Familiarisation

Familiarisation began during the transcription process and continued through repeated, immersive engagement with the focus group transcripts. I read each transcript multiple times to develop a deep sense of the dataset as a whole. During this stage, I attended not only to the content of participants' accounts but also to the interactional quality of the discussions, including tone, humour, hesitation, and relational positioning between participants. I listened to the audio recordings alongside the transcripts, which enabled me to notice features such as emphasis, pauses, and moments of collective laughter or discomfort that were less visible in the written text. This was particularly important given the focus group format, where meaning was produced through interaction between participants rather than through isolated individual statements.

Reflexive engagement formed a central part of this stage. Throughout my research journey, I recorded initial reflections and analytic impressions within my research diary (Appendix O). These early memos documented emerging observations, questions, and tensions within the data. During this stage, I actively asked questions of the data, considering what appeared to be occurring within the discussions and how participants were positioning themselves in relation to one another. These reflexive notes did not constitute formal analysis but provided an important foundation for later coding and theme development by supporting sustained immersion in the dataset.

3.9.3 Stage 2: Coding

I conducted coding manually using Microsoft Word to remain closely engaged with the data. I adopted an inductive coding approach, generating codes from

participants' accounts rather than applying a pre-existing coding framework. This was particularly important given the exploratory nature of the research questions and the limited literature examining the experiences of male EPs specifically.

I coded across the dataset rather than treating each focus group as a separate analytic unit. After reading all three transcripts, I moved iteratively between them to identify patterns that appeared across groups. This cross-group approach supported analytic coherence and ensured that coding was informed by the dataset as a whole rather than by individual discussions in isolation.

Coding was conducted line by line and remained closely tied to the research questions. I paused whenever a phrase, interaction, or section of dialogue appeared relevant to participants' discussions of gender, masculinity, or professional identity. I initially collated all codes within a single word document to maintain visibility of the developing coding process. Although I quickly noticed similarities between some codes, I deliberately avoided collapsing or grouping them too early. Instead, I maintained an open and expansive coding process until I had coded the full dataset. I then revisited the transcripts in a different order, refining and adjusting code labels as my understanding of the dataset developed. In this sense, coding remained iterative and responsive rather than fixed.

Coding was conducted at both semantic and latent levels. Semantic coding involved attending to the explicit content of participants' accounts, capturing what was directly stated in the data. Latent coding involved engaging with the underlying meanings, assumptions, and discursive patterns that appeared to shape participants' accounts. My initial coding tended to be more semantic, however, as I became more

immersed in the dataset and more confident in my interpretations, I began to incorporate more latent coding.

I coded at a relatively granular level, often distinguishing between closely related but analytically separable ideas. This approach allowed nuance within participants' accounts to be retained and provided flexibility when later clustering codes into broader patterns of shared meaning. Throughout this stage, codes remained provisional and open to revision as the analysis progressed.

Consistent with RTA, I did not employ a codebook, inter-rater process, or reliability-checking procedure. I understood coding as an interpretative act shaped by my theoretical positioning and reflexive engagement with the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022). My aim was not to achieve consensus or reliability in a positivist sense, but to develop an analysis that was conceptually rich, coherent, and transparent. Throughout the process, I wrote reflexive memos documenting emerging ideas, analytic questions, and shifts in my thinking (Appendix P). These memos formed an important bridge between the coding process and later stages of theme development.

3.9.4 Stage 3: *Generating Initial Themes*

After completing the coding process, I shifted from focusing on individual codes to examining how these codes might cluster together to form broader patterns of shared meaning. This stage required me to zoom out from the more granular level of coding and engage with the dataset at a more interpretative and conceptual level. Whereas coding involved working closely with small fragments of data, this phase involved stepping back and critically considering how codes related to one another and what broader analytic patterns they might collectively represent.

To support this process, I created a series of working documents in which codes were grouped according to conceptual similarity, generating initial theme groupings. The coding tables presented in Appendices Q–T illustrate the development of each final theme. Text colour identifies the focus group from which each coded extract originated (Focus Group 1 = red; Focus Group 2 = blue; Focus Group 3 = green), enabling transparency regarding the distribution of codes across the dataset. Highlighted subtheme numbers under each named code indicate the provisional subtheme to which each code was assigned during Stage 3 of the analytic process. These colour-coded groupings represent working analytic constructions that were subsequently reviewed and refined during later stages of RTA. I moved each code from my main coding table into these documents, clustering them alongside other codes that appeared to relate to similar ideas or experiences. This allowed me to visualise how different codes might connect with one another and helped me begin to organise the dataset into broader analytic groupings. As I worked through this process, I repeatedly moved codes between clusters, refining and reconfiguring these groupings as my interpretation of the data developed.

During this stage, I treated codes as smaller analytic puzzle pieces that could be combined to form more comprehensive patterns of meaning. While individual codes tended to capture a single idea or facet of participants' accounts, themes required me to consider how multiple codes could collectively contribute to a broader central organising concept. My aim here was not to present themes as simple summaries of topics, but as interpretative constructions that captured meaningful patterns across the dataset. Developing the coding clusters therefore involved asking more interpretative questions of the data, considering how different codes related to one another, and what underlying story might be emerging across participants' quotes.

This stage involved a deliberate movement towards a deeper engagement with the latent level of the data. While earlier coding had captured both explicit and underlying meanings, theme construction required me to consider how the various coded fragments might connect to form broader conceptual insights relevant to the research questions. Throughout this process, I maintained flexibility and treated these groupings as provisional analytic constructions rather than fixed outcomes.

These early clusters functioned as provisional themes and analytic working hypotheses. They provided an initial sense of how the dataset might be organised, while remaining open to further refinement, reorganisation, or collapse in subsequent stages of the analysis.

3.9.5 Stage 4: Reviewing and Refining Themes

Phase four involved systematically reviewing and refining the provisional themes developed during the previous stage. At this point in the analysis, my focus shifted towards critically evaluating whether the emerging thematic structure provided a coherent and meaningful account of the dataset in relation to the research questions. This stage required sustained engagement with both the coded data and the wider dataset to ensure that themes were internally coherent while remaining analytically distinct from one another.

To support this process, I repeatedly returned to the original transcripts and coded extracts to test the boundaries of each provisional theme. I asked several guiding questions throughout this stage: whether the codes clustered within each theme shared a clear central organising concept; whether there were internal contradictions within a theme; whether themes overlapped substantially with one another; and whether each theme meaningfully addressed the research questions.

Where boundaries between themes appeared unclear, I revisited the original extracts to assess whether my groupings remained analytically defensible. This iterative movement between the developing thematic structure and the underlying data helped ensure that the themes remained grounded in the dataset while still operating at a conceptual level.

As part of this process, I reviewed my provisional theme names and assessed whether the emerging thematic structure conveyed a coherent narrative about the data. I considered whether I could clearly articulate the boundaries of each theme, what it included and excluded, and whether there was sufficient data to support the pattern of meaning it represented. Consistent with RTA, I did not seek uniformity across the dataset but instead aimed to identify patterns of shared meaning that addressed the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2022). While themes could capture tensions or contradictions between different patterns of meaning, each individual theme needed to remain internally coherent and organised around a clear central organising concept.

During this stage, I evaluated whether certain clusters of codes warranted development into themes. In some cases, codes appeared repeatedly within the accounts of individual participants but did not recur across the broader dataset. Where ideas did not represent patterns of shared meaning across participants, I chose not to include them in my themes. However, this data was not disregarded but instead remained analytically important in informing my understanding of the entire dataset, shaping alternative reflexive interpretations, and highlighting points of divergence or nuance. I also reviewed the developing themes across all three focus groups to ensure that they were not disproportionately shaped by a single discussion.

Reflexive questioning formed an important part of this stage. As a male TEP researching masculinity within the profession, I remained aware that my own positionality could shape how I interpreted participants' accounts. Therefore, I critically reflected on my interpretative tendencies, particularly my potential attraction toward narratives emphasising relational masculinity and reflexive positioning. Through memo writing, reflections in supervision, and repeated engagement with the dataset, I made sure that my analysis remained attentive to the complexity of participants' accounts, and that competing interpretations were considered rather than prematurely discarded.

By the end of this stage, the provisional concepts had been refined into a set of analytically distinct themes with clearer conceptual boundaries. These themes represented patterns of shared meaning across the dataset and formed the foundation for the subsequent stages of defining and developing the final thematic narrative.

3.9.6 Stage 5: Defining and Naming Themes

In Phase five, I moved from provisional thematic clusters towards clearly articulated analytic themes. The focus of this stage was to refine each theme around a central organising concept and to establish clear conceptual boundaries between them. This required returning to the collated data extracts for each theme and asking what unifying idea connected the grouped codes, what the theme included and excluded, and how it contributed to answering the research questions. Through this process, I refined the scope of each theme and ensured that it represented a coherent pattern of shared meaning rather than a loose collection of related codes.

I began to consider the internal structure of each theme by identifying potential subthemes. Subthemes were developed where clusters of codes captured distinct

facets of the broader thematic concept. In doing so, I ensured that each subtheme remained conceptually connected to the central organising concept of the overarching theme while providing analytic depth and nuance. Alongside this process, I wrote a concise definition for each theme, which functioned as a brief analytic summary outlining what each one represented, the boundaries of the concept, and how it contributed to the overall interpretation of the dataset.

During this stage, I refined the names of the themes. Rather than using single-word topic labels, I sought to develop names that were both analytically informative and conceptually engaging. Each theme was therefore given a two-part name consisting of a rhetorical hook question followed by an analytic explanation. The rhetorical questions were designed to reflect the relational and experiential tensions present within the data, while the accompanying analytic subtitles clarified the conceptual focus of the theme. This approach allowed the theme titles to capture the interpretative nature of the analysis while remaining closely aligned with the research questions.

Throughout this stage, I continually assessed whether the developing thematic structure conveyed a coherent analytic narrative rather than simply summarising topics discussed by participants. I considered how the themes related to one another and whether, when taken together, they provided a meaningful account of the patterns evident across the dataset. By the end of this phase, each theme had a clearly defined central organising concept, distinct conceptual boundaries, and a concise analytic description outlining its contribution to the overall interpretation of the data. These refined themes formed the foundation for the final stage of analysis, in which the themes were woven together into a coherent analytic narrative.

3.9.7 Stage 6: Write Up

The final phase of my RTA process involved producing the written analytic narrative. In this stage, I moved from the process of theme development to presenting the analysis in a structured and coherent form. Chapter four presents the findings of the study, detailing the final themes and subthemes developed through the analytic process. Each theme is illustrated with selected extracts across focus group discussions to demonstrate how the patterns of shared meaning were constructed within the dataset.

The process of writing also functioned as a further stage of analysis. As I developed the narrative account, I revisited theme boundaries, refined conceptual clarity, and considered how themes related to one another across the dataset. In some instances, this led to subtle refinements in theme definitions and the articulation of their central organising concepts, ensuring coherence and alignment with the study's theoretical framework.

The subsequent discussion section in Chapter five builds upon this analysis by situating the themes in relation to the wider literature, and interprets the findings to consider the implications for understanding masculinity and professional identity within Educational Psychology. In doing so, the discussion extends the analytic insights developed through RTA and connects them to broader theoretical and professional insights.

3.10 Researcher Reflexivity

Reflexivity was embedded throughout the research process rather than treated as a discrete methodological stage. Reflexive practice involved ongoing examination of how my positionality, theoretical commitments, and emotional responses shaped

both the research process and my analytic interpretations. Braun and Clarke (2022) define reflexivity as “the practice of critical reflection on your role as a researcher, and your research practice and process” (p5), noting that “who we are, and what we bring to the research, ranging from our own personal identities and values through to our disciplinary perspectives, is an integral part of the analysis” (p13). From this perspective, the identities, experiences, and assumptions that researchers bring to a study cannot be left out of the analytic process; rather, they form part of how qualitative knowledge is produced.

As a male TEP researching male EPs, I occupied a complex insider-outsider position. I shared aspects of identity and professional context with participants, including gender and training within the EP profession. At the same time, differences in career stage and institutional authority meant that I did not fully occupy the same professional position as participants. This positioning may have influenced both the relational dynamics of the focus groups and my interpretative engagement with the data. Participants may have felt more comfortable discussing certain aspects of masculinity with a male researcher who shared elements of their professional context. However, it is also possible that some experiences or perspectives remained unspoken because of who I was in relation to them.

At times, participants referenced shared professional experiences or used humour and informal language when discussing masculinity within the profession. While this appeared to support rapport and facilitate discussion, it is also possible that certain viewpoints were moderated or framed differently because I occupied a similar gender and professional context. Within a social constructionist framework, the focus groups were therefore understood not as neutral means of data collection but as relational spaces in which meaning was co-constructed between participants and

researcher. My role in facilitating the discussions, alongside the identity and experiences I brought to the research, inevitably formed part of the analytic context through which participants' accounts were produced.

My interest in this topic was also shaped by my own experiences within the profession. As mentioned in the introduction section, I am the only male within my cohort at the Tavistock, and across my placement contexts I have frequently been one of a small number of men within EP teams. Alongside this professional context, I have developed a broader interest in how masculinity is discussed within contemporary society, including how expectations surrounding masculinity shape the experiences of boys and young men. These experiences and interests formed part of the background that I brought to the research.

Throughout the analytic process, I maintained reflexive memos documenting emerging interpretations, analytic tensions, and moments of personal resonance with participants' accounts (see Appendix U). For example, I noticed an early attraction to narratives emphasising relational masculinity and reflexive awareness. Through memo-writing, I questioned why certain accounts felt particularly compelling and revisited the dataset to ensure that my analysis remained attentive to the complexity and ambivalence present within participants' discussions. This involved reflecting on my own emotional responses to the data and considering why particular moments within the focus groups drew my attention more strongly than others.

Engaging closely with the data also heightened my awareness of my own gender identity within professional contexts. During the analytic process, I occasionally found myself reflecting on aspects of my research during professional interactions with colleagues, parents, or school staff. These moments served as reminders that

research on identity-related topics can shape how researchers themselves think about their own positioning within professional and social environments.

Within a social constructionist framework, reflexivity is not about attempting to remove subjectivity from the analytic process. Rather, it involves making visible how interpretation is shaped by the researcher's standpoint and engagement with the data. The themes presented in this thesis therefore represent reflexively constructed interpretations developed through sustained analytic engagement with the dataset. They do not claim to reveal objective truths about male EPs but instead offer a theoretically informed account of patterned meaning produced through the interaction between participants' accounts, my interpretative work as a researcher, and the conceptual frameworks informing the study.

Given the relational nature of the research and my insider-outsider positioning, ethical and quality considerations were integral throughout the study. The following section outlines these considerations in detail.

3.11 Quality Considerations

Within qualitative research grounded in a relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemology, traditional positivist criteria such as validity, reliability, and generalisability are not considered appropriate markers of research quality. Such criteria assume the existence of a single objective reality that can be measured independently of the researcher. In contrast, the present study understands knowledge as socially constructed and produced through interaction between participants, researcher, and context (Burr, 2015). Nevertheless, qualitative research still requires transparent and thoughtful evaluation of methodological quality.

Considerations of research quality were informed by guidance for good practice in RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Within this approach, quality is understood in relation to the conceptual coherence of the research design, transparency of analytic procedures, depth of engagement with the dataset, and reflexive awareness of the researcher's role in knowledge production. Rather than aiming for objectivity or replicability, high-quality RTA involves producing a theoretically informed and analytically rigorous interpretation that is clearly grounded in the data. Accordingly, research quality is evaluated through the clarity, depth, and reflexive transparency of the analytic account produced.

I also drew upon Yardley's (2017) four principles for assessing my qualitative research. The following sections outline how considerations of sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance were addressed throughout the design, conduct, and analysis of the study.

3.11.1 Sensitivity to Context

Sensitivity to context refers to the extent to which research demonstrates awareness of the theoretical, relational, and socio-cultural contexts in which knowledge is produced (Yardley, 2017). In the present study, this involved situating participants' accounts within the professional context of Educational Psychology in the UK, where men remain a minority within the workforce. Participants' reflections on masculinity were therefore interpreted with attention to the relational and institutional environments in which EPs work.

Sensitivity to context was also reflected in the selection of focus groups as the method of data collection. Focus groups enabled participants to respond to and build upon one another's perspectives, allowing meanings around masculinity to be

negotiated collectively rather than produced solely through individual reflection (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). This approach aligned with the study's social constructionist framework, which conceptualises knowledge as emerging through dialogue and interaction (Burr, 2015).

Sensitivity to context also includes the reflexive engagement with my own positioning within the research process. As a male TEP, I shared aspects of identity and professional context with participants while also occupying a different position in terms of career stage and institutional authority. Reflexive awareness of this insider-outsider positioning supported ongoing consideration of how my presence within the focus groups, and my interpretative lens, shaped the analytic process.

3.11.2 Commitment and Rigour

Commitment refers to sustained engagement with both the research topic and the dataset (Yardley, 2017). My interest in exploring masculinity within Educational Psychology was shaped by my own experiences of being one of a small number of men within the profession during my doctoral training and placement contexts. This interest supported sustained engagement with the literature on masculinity, gender, and professional identity within caring professions, which informed the development of the research questions and analytic framework.

Rigour was demonstrated through a systematic and iterative analytic process using RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Data was collected through three online focus groups with practicing male EPs and analysed across the dataset as a whole. I engaged in repeated immersion in the transcripts, iterative coding, and multiple stages of theme development and refinement. Throughout this process I repeatedly returned

to the full transcripts when testing boundaries between emerging themes, ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in the dataset.

Cross-group comparison also supported analytic depth by ensuring that themes captured patterned meaning across all three focus groups rather than reflecting isolated accounts. This iterative movement between data and interpretation supported a deeper engagement with the complexity of participants' accounts.

3.11.3 Transparency and Coherence

Transparency and coherence relate to the clarity with which the research process is described and the extent to which the study demonstrates conceptual alignment between its theoretical framework, research questions, methodology, and analytic approach (Yardley, 2017). In the present study, epistemological and ontological positions are clearly articulated and linked to the methodological decisions made throughout the research.

Transparency was further supported through the maintenance of an audit trail documenting the analytic process. This included coding tables capturing initial codes across the dataset, subtheme groupings tracking how codes were grouped and reorganised during theme construction, and analytic memos documenting interpretative decisions. These materials helped to make visible the iterative process through which themes were developed and refined.

Reflexive memos and research diary extracts were particularly important in documenting shifts in interpretation throughout the analysis. This enabled me to reflect on my own interpretative responses to the data and to question emerging analytic patterns. The process helped ensure that the developing themes remained grounded

in patterns of shared meaning within the dataset rather than reflecting personal assumptions or preferences.

Coherence was achieved through ensuring alignment and a golden thread between the research aims, the literature review, the methodological design, and the analytic approach. The use of online focus groups and RTA also supported the study's aim of exploring how masculinity is constructed and negotiated within interactional professional contexts.

3.11.4 Impact and Importance

The final principle emphasises the extent to which qualitative research offers insights that are meaningful beyond the immediate study (Yardley, 2017). Despite the longstanding gender imbalance within Educational Psychology in the UK, there remains a lack of research exploring how male EPs experience and negotiate their professional identity and masculinity within the profession. This study therefore contributes to addressing an important gap within the literature by providing an interpretative account of how masculinity is constructed and experienced within professional practice. The implications of these findings for Educational Psychology practice, training, and wider professional discourse are considered in the discussion in chapter five.

Taken together, these considerations demonstrate that the study was conducted with careful attention to reflexivity, analytic transparency, and conceptual coherence. Within a social constructionist framework, research quality is understood not as the elimination of subjectivity but as the transparent and thoughtful development of an interpretative account grounded in sustained engagement with participants' accounts and the wider theoretical context (Burr, 2015).

3.12 Ethics

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust Research Ethics Committee in April 2025. The study was reviewed and approved in accordance with institutional ethical procedures, the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics, and GDPR requirements. The ethics approval letter is provided in Appendix V.

3.12.1 Informed Consent

Participants were provided with a detailed information sheet prior to participation (see Appendix K). This outlined the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, the focus group format, confidentiality arrangements, data storage procedures, and participants' right to withdraw. Participants were invited to contact me with any questions before consenting to take part. Written consent was also obtained electronically using a consent form prior to participation (see Appendix I).

At the beginning of each focus group session, I reiterated key information from the participant information sheet and consent form. This included outlining the nature of the discussion, reminding participants of confidentiality considerations, and reiterating their right to only answer the questions they felt comfortable responding to.

3.12.2 Right to Withdraw

Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study up until a specified date following the focus group, prior to the full anonymisation of transcripts and the integration of the data into the analysis. After this point, withdrawal would not be possible due to the collective nature of the analytic process.

Participants were also reminded at the start of each session that they were free to leave the focus group at any time. No participant chose to withdraw during or after the sessions. Emphasising the right to withdraw was particularly important given the relatively small and interconnected nature of the Educational Psychology community. Explicitly reiterating this right aimed to minimise any perceived obligation to remain involved due to shared professional identity or the recognition of a past or present colleague.

3.12.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality was a central ethical consideration in this study due to the relatively small number of male EPs working within the profession nationally. Even when anonymised, descriptions of professional experiences may carry a risk of recognition within professional networks. Several steps were taken to minimise this risk, including participants being referred to using pseudonyms in the findings. Participants were also reminded not to name specific organisations, locations, or individuals during the focus group discussions. Where such references arose, these were removed during the transcription process. Demographic information was optional and reported at a group level, rather than applying information to each participant specifically. All data was stored securely on an encrypted device in accordance with GDPR requirements. Audio recordings were deleted following transcription and verification, and only anonymised transcripts were retained for analysis.

Given the group-based nature of the research, I explicitly acknowledged the limits of confidentiality within each focus group. While I could ensure that all data would be anonymised in the write up, I could not guarantee that participants would not discuss the session outside the group. Ground rules regarding confidentiality and

respectful engagement were therefore collaboratively established and repeated at the beginning and end of each focus group to support collective responsibility for maintaining privacy.

3.12.4 Duty of Care and Managing Distress

Discussions relating to the study topic had the potential to evoke emotional responses in participants who were speaking to their own personal experiences. Several safeguarding procedures were therefore implemented to support participant wellbeing. Each focus group concluded with a structured debrief in which participants were invited to reflect briefly on how they had experienced the discussion. This provided space for participants to process the conversation and ensured that sessions did not end abruptly. I also remained on the call for approximately 30 minutes after each focus group to offer an optional individual debrief space. One participant made use of this opportunity.

Following each session, participants received a debrief email containing information about relevant support services, including men's mental health organisations and professional support resources (see Appendix M). While acute distress was not anticipated, the provision of support resources reflected a precautionary duty of care.

During the focus groups, I remained attentive to potential signs of discomfort or withdrawal, including changes in tone, hesitation, or reduced participation. When discussions touched on potentially sensitive areas, I aimed to maintain a containing stance by allowing space for reflection without pressing participants to elaborate on experiences they may not have wished to share.

Finally, I discussed aspects of the research process within academic supervision, including any ethical tensions or emotional dynamics arising during data collection and analysis. This provided an additional layer of oversight and supported reflective consideration of my researcher role throughout the process.

3.12.5 Dual Relationships and Power Considerations

Research conducted within one's own professional field raises ethical considerations relating to familiarity, professional proximity, and perceived power dynamics. As a TEP researching fully qualified EPs, I remained mindful of my positioning within the profession, particularly given that recruitment extended to my current and previous LA contexts. To mitigate potential concerns, I made explicit throughout all participant information materials that participation, or non-participation, would have no bearing on existing or future professional relationships. Where prior professional acquaintance existed, this was acknowledged transparently, and care was taken to ensure that no participant was related to me within a supervision or line management capacity. Despite these careful considerations, I remained reflexively attentive to the possibility that familiarity may shape how participants positioned their accounts within the group context.

Further steps were taken to minimise the influence of pre-existing professional relationships on group dynamics. Participants were allocated to focus groups in a way that avoided placing individuals from the same LA together, thereby reducing the likelihood of organisational dynamics constraining openness or shaping disclosure. Confidentiality was also emphasised throughout, with clear communication that all contributions would remain contained within the research context.

Although I did not hold formal authority over participants, I recognised that the researcher role carries a form of symbolic power, particularly through the responsibility of interpreting and representing participant's accounts. In response, I adopted a facilitative stance that prioritised collaboration, positioning the discussions as exploratory rather than evaluative. This approach also aligned with my broader epistemological commitment to co-constructed meaning-making within the focus group context.

These relational dynamics were not understood as methodological limitations to be controlled or eliminated, but as inherent features of practitioner research requiring ongoing reflexive engagement. This stance is consistent with the study's social constructionist orientation, which recognises that knowledge is produced through relational and contextual processes rather than existing independently of them (Burr, 2015).

3.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the philosophical, methodological, and ethical foundations of the study. Positioned within a relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemology, the research conceptualises masculinity and professional identity as relationally and contextually constructed. A qualitative design was used, with 14 practicing male EPs across England taking part in one of three online focus groups. The interactional nature of focus groups enabled an exploration of how meanings surrounding masculinity were negotiated and constructed within professional dialogue.

The method of RTA supported the development of themes that represent patterns of shared meaning across the dataset. The analytic process involved iterative

engagement with the data, supported by reflexive memo writing and ongoing consideration of my positionality as a TEP researching male EPs. Ethical considerations and research quality were addressed through careful attention to consent, confidentiality, reflexivity, and analytic transparency.

The following chapter presents the findings of the study, introducing the themes and associated subthemes that capture how professional identity and masculinity are experienced and negotiated by participants within their everyday Educational Psychology practice.

Chapter Four: Findings & Analysis

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the findings generated through the process of RTA, evidencing four main themes and thirteen subthemes across the data set. The analysis explored how male EPs experience, negotiate, and reflect upon their professional identity and masculinity within the Educational Psychology profession. Through an iterative and reflexive analytic process, themes were constructed to capture patterns of shared meaning across the views and experiences shared by participants, whilst also collectively addressing the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What are male Educational Psychologists' experiences of being a male in the profession?

Research Question 2: How do male Educational Psychologists navigate their own professional identity and masculinity when in role?

4.2 Themes Overview

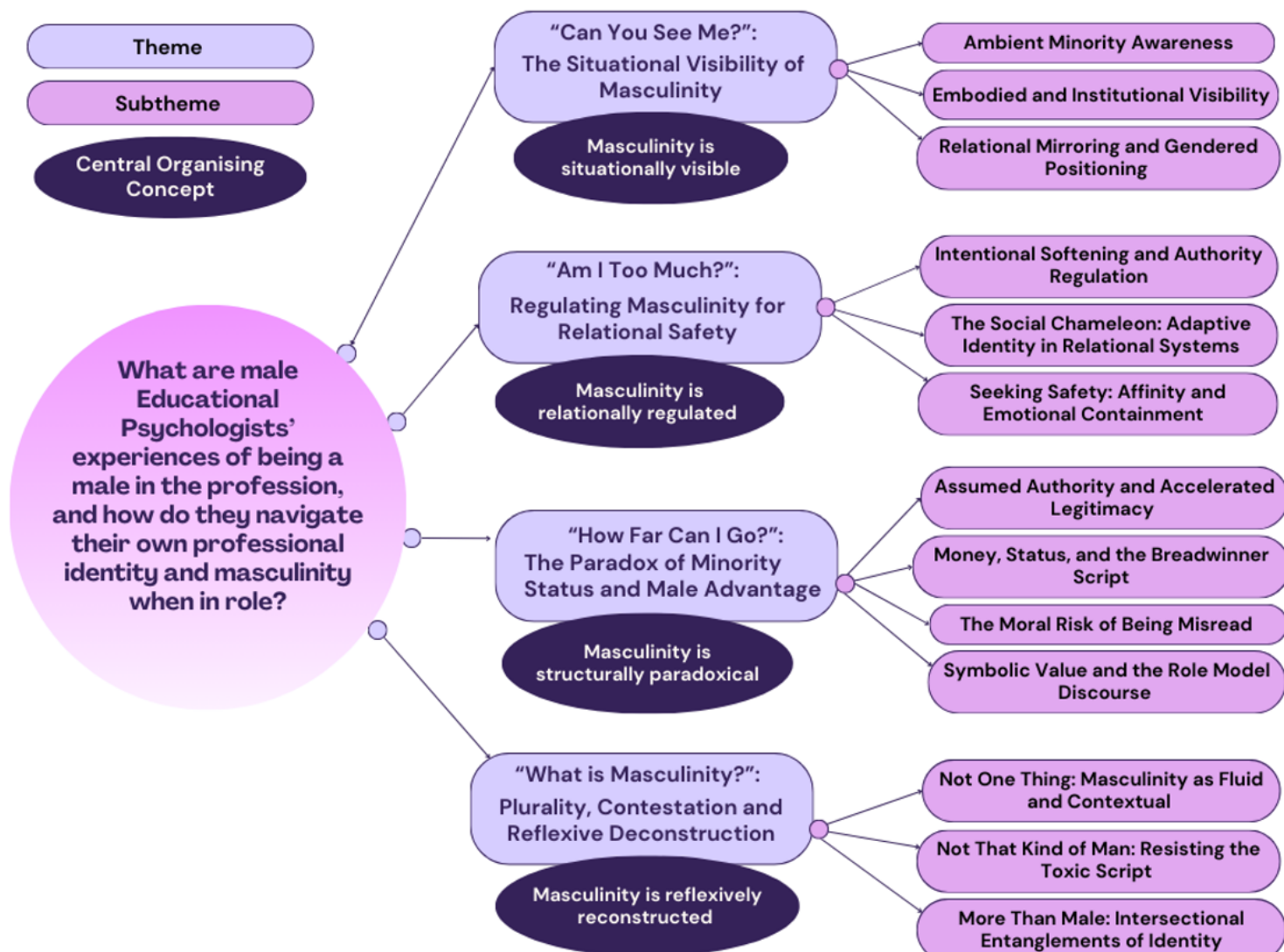
Themes follow the format of a rhetorical question hook followed by an analytic definition. This stylistic choice was intentional: the questions foreground the voices, tensions, and uncertainties expressed by participants while guiding the reader through the analytic narrative developed across the themes and subthemes. Themes are presented as a narrative progression rather than discrete categories, telling a story of the data, and reflecting how different layers of meaning progressed. The first theme explores how masculinity becomes situationally visible within professional contexts. The second examines how participants subsequently regulate and adapt their expression of masculinity to maintain relational safety. The third theme considers the structural paradox of occupying a minority position within the profession while

remaining situated within wider gendered systems that confer male advantage. Finally, the fourth theme moves to the most reflexive level of analysis, exploring how participants interrogated, contested, and redefined the meaning of masculinity itself.

4.3 Thematic Map

The overall structure of the analysis is illustrated in a thematic map which represents the relationships between themes and subthemes within the analytic framework (Figure 3). Individual thematic maps for each subtheme have also been included at the beginning of each subtheme section. All four main themes are evidenced with quotes from participants across the three focus groups. Pseudonyms have been assigned to all participants to protect anonymity, and names were selected to ensure they did not correspond with participants' real initials. Where extracts are presented, the pseudonym is followed by the focus group number (Focus Group 1 - FG1, Focus Group 2 - FG2, or Focus Group 3 - FG3). The use of focus group identifiers allows the reader to see how patterns of meaning were constructed across all three focus groups.

Figure 3

Thematic Map of the Overall Analysis

4.4 Interactional Construction of Meaning Across the Focus Groups

While the themes presented in this chapter capture patterns of shared meaning across the dataset, it is important to acknowledge that these meanings were not produced in isolation. Rather, they were co-constructed through the interactional dynamics of the focus groups. Participants responded to, built upon, and at times challenged one another's contributions, with understandings of masculinity emerging through processes of agreement, hesitation, and contestation.

At several points, participants collaboratively softened or reframed potentially sensitive or uncomfortable ideas. These moments created space for others to expand on or align with emerging perspectives, illustrating how meanings were negotiated collectively rather than asserted individually.

There were also instances where participants positioned themselves in relation to one another's accounts, subtly affirming, resisting, or complicating constructions of masculinity. In these exchanges, masculinity was not presented as a fixed or unified concept, but as something fluid and relational, shaped through the unfolding dialogue of the group.

Attending to these interactional processes is important for understanding how the themes in this chapter were developed. The analysis therefore reflects not only what participants said about masculinity and professional identity, but how these understandings were collaboratively constructed, negotiated, and refined within the focus group context. Quotes to support the interactional construction of meaning across focus groups are evidenced throughout the themes.

4.5 “Can You See Me?”: The Situational Visibility of Masculinity

The first theme explores how masculinity becomes visible within the professional practice of male EPs. Across the dataset, a recurring narrative was that gender and masculinity were not experienced as a constant or uniformly salient aspect of professional identity. Instead, masculinity appeared to move between background awareness and more explicit visibility depending on the institutional, embodied, and relational contexts in which participants were working.

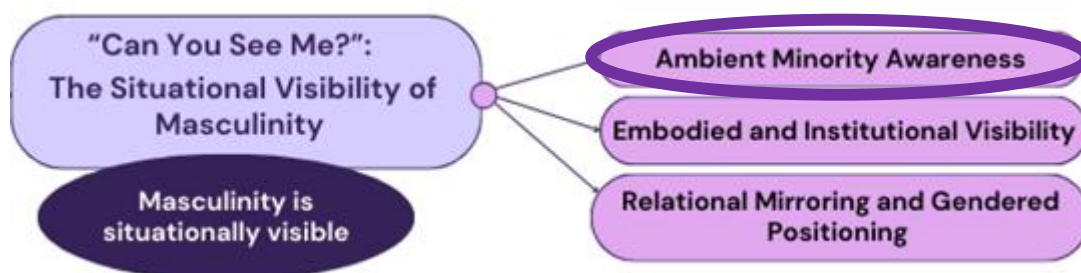
At times, masculinity remained peripheral to participants' understanding of themselves as practitioners, operating as an ambient awareness within the EP profession. In other moments, however, gender became more immediately noticeable through participants' physical presence within feminised professional spaces or through the ways in which others responded to them during professional interactions. Masculinity therefore became visible through specific contextual dynamics rather than functioning as a consistently prominent aspect of professional identity.

The subthemes illustrate how this visibility unfolds across professional contexts. Masculinity first appears as an ambient background awareness, then becomes embodied and institutionally visible within female dominated environments, before finally being constructed relationally through the responses and expectations of others.

4.5.1 Ambient Minority Awareness

Figure 4

Thematic Map of Subtheme – Ambient Minority Awareness



Masculinity was frequently constructed in relation to the gender imbalance within Educational Psychology, yet this imbalance was rarely positioned as something that strongly shaped everyday professional identity. Instead, participants described becoming accustomed to occupying a minority gender position within the profession, shown here by Isaac’s reflections: *“I think if you become a psychologist, you get used to being a minority, right. If you’re going to think about gender kind of spaces, even in undergrad or the doctorate”* (Isaac, FG3). Isaac’s reflections were also mirrored by other participants in the focus group:

I actually don’t think about it that much, I definitely echo what the other gent said around this, and it not necessarily being a surprise to find oneself in an EP service or an EP situation and be the only man or one of a handful of men (Leo, FG3).

This agreement between participants illustrates how the ambient view around being a male minority was not expressed in isolation, instead it was something that resonated within the interactional space. Minority status is acknowledged, yet simultaneously downplayed. The phrasing by Leo *“not necessarily being a surprise”*

suggests a process of normalisation in which gender imbalance is recognised but rarely prompts sustained reflection. Masculinity is therefore constructed less as a salient identity marker and more as an expected feature of professional life.

This normalisation was echoed across accounts, with participants describing gender as something that had become embedded within routine practice. Archie reflected that he was *“not conscious of... being a man being anything that relevant”* (Archie, FG2), Oliver described how he would *“just get on with it”* within predominantly female teams (Oliver, FG1), and Theo noted that he had *“gotten used to it”* and that it *“doesn’t make a huge amount of difference in day-to-day practice”* (Theo, FG1). Across these accounts, participants agree that their masculinity and maleness is present and acknowledged, without being actively highlighted in their professional everyday practice.

Participants also described masculinity as something that moved in and out of awareness rather than remaining consistently present. Ethan captured this fluidity, noting: *“Throughout my time training, it came in and out as an important factor”* (Ethan, FG1). The phrasing here constructs masculinity as situationally activated, surfacing in particular moments before receding again into the background. This reinforces the sense that masculinity operates as a shifting, context-dependent aspect of identity, rather than a stable organising framework for experience.

For some participants, awareness of masculinity appeared to emerge retrospectively through reflective conversations rather than through direct experiences of gendered difference. In these accounts, gender only became noticeable when participants were prompted to reflect upon it explicitly:

Actually, it's only been from like conversations I've had with other people ... maybe wonder like, oh God, I felt like a bit ignorant maybe. I don't know if I've been kind of blind.... but yeah, I don't really think about it, to be honest. But I do a little bit more now, but yes, that's something that's never really crossed my mind that much. I don't know whether that's a good or a bad thing, to be honest (Ryan, FG1).

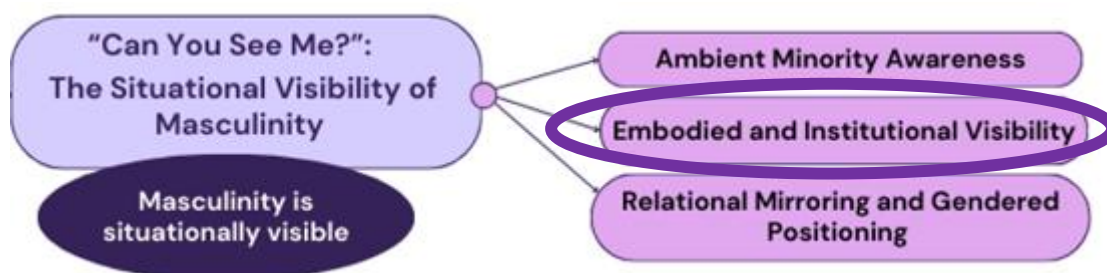
Here, Ryan is responding to another participant who shared that being a man is “*not something I think about day to day*” (Theo, FG1). These extracts illustrate how gender awareness may be constructed through reflection and dialogue. Ryan and Theo both describe masculinity as previously operating as an unexamined aspect of identity, present but largely unnoticed until brought into focus through conversation.

Across the dataset, masculinity occupies an ambient position within participants' professional identity. While the gender imbalance within Educational Psychology was recognised, minority status was largely normalised and rarely highlighted within everyday practice. Instead, masculinity functioned as a background awareness that only occasionally surfaced through reflection or interaction. Masculinity therefore appeared to remain quietly present within professional life, without consistently shaping how male EPs understood themselves as professionals.

4.5.2 Embodied and Institutional Visibility

Figure 5

Thematic Map of Subtheme - Embodied and Institutional Visibility



While the previous subtheme illustrated how masculinity often remained a background awareness within professional life, participants also described contexts in which gender became immediately visible through their physical presence within feminised professional environments. Early years settings appeared to amplify the visibility of masculinity within practice, and gender also became particularly noticeable within these contexts: *“I feel I probably notice my gender mostly in early years settings than secondary”* (Samuel, FG1). In some accounts, this heightened visibility became linked to sensitivity around embodied presence within professional interactions. Reflecting on an observation in a nursery setting, Ryan agreed with Samuel as he described feeling anxious about physical interactions with children in early years settings, and how this might be interpreted:

I mean, I was in a nursery this morning doing a statutory assessment and just generally, you're like, whenever the kids will come up to you and like they'll try and touch you and stuff. But I feel quite like anxious in those environments because I'm like, oh my God, I don't want anyone to think... I don't want it to be seen like, no, the kids like touching me and stuff because it just really makes me panic (Ryan, FG1).

Ryan illustrates here how masculinity can become visible through the embodied realities of practice. Physical proximity with children, typically a usual practice within early years settings, appeared to take on different meanings when enacted by a male practitioner. Ryan's concern about how such interactions might be perceived suggests an awareness of broader cultural discourses that position men as potentially suspect within caring roles involving children.

Across the dataset, gender was also positioned as attracting explicit attention from colleagues, reinforcing a sense of standing out within these environments. Theo, building on Samuel and Ryan's comments regarding early years settings, captured these dynamics through the metaphor of being treated as something unusual within the setting:

I almost feel it from the early years staff sometimes as well, like you're a bit of an exotic creature... like oh there's a man in the nursery... you get treated a bit like an exotic bird and it can get quite awkward (Theo, FG1).

The metaphor of an 'exotic creature' illustrates how masculinity could become symbolically amplified within feminised professional spaces. Theo's comments prompted laughter from the group, and although expressed humorously, the accompanying sense of awkwardness suggests that this visibility could also produce discomfort. A similar sense of standing out in early years settings was described across the focus groups, evidenced here by Marcus when reflecting on his experiences working in early years education:

I mean, I worked as a teacher in the early years before I became a psychologist, so I was definitely feeling an unusual kind of element... like, do I have two heads? That experience is certainly sometimes a feeling, and you're often the only man in a school setting as well (Marcus, FG3).

Here, masculinity once more becomes noticeable through contrast with the surrounding professional environment. Marcus' rhetorical question, "*do I have two heads?*", again led to laughter within the group and so can be understood as invoking humour, while also signalling the intensity of feeling marked as different within an early years space. Within the group context, this phrasing appeared to make the experience

more shareable, softening what may otherwise be a stark articulation of visibility and difference. Together, these accounts illustrate how male practitioners may become symbolically visible within early years settings, where the relative absence of men can heighten awareness of gender difference.

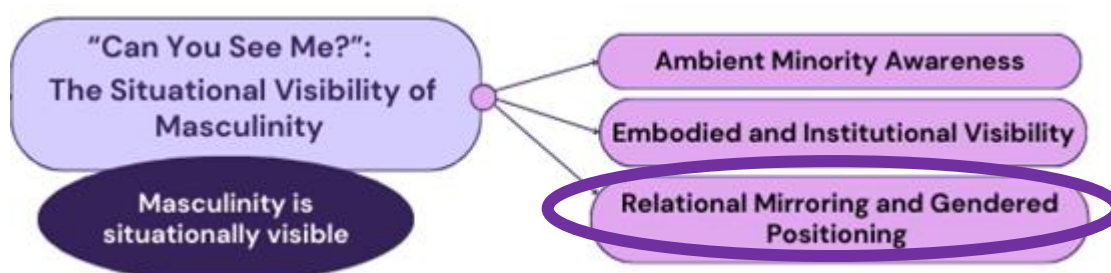
Children's responses were also positioned as reinforcing this visibility: *"I think often the young children are really excited to see a man, you know rush up to you and sort of crowd you"* (Samuel, FG1). Children's enthusiasm appeared here to reflect the relative novelty of encountering male adults within early years contexts, further reinforcing the highlighting of males by adult professionals too.

Across these examples, masculinity becomes more visible through the embodied realities of professional practice. In particular institutional contexts, especially early years settings which are typically characterised by a predominantly female workforce, male EPs described their gender becoming more noticeable and socially interpreted. In this way, masculinity shifts from the background awareness described in the previous subtheme to a more embodied and interactionally visible aspect of professional identity.

4.5.3 Relational Mirroring and Gendered Positioning

Figure 6

Thematic Map of Subtheme - Relational Mirroring and Gendered Positioning



Building on the ambient awareness and embodied visibility described in the previous subthemes, masculinity also became visible through the reactions, expectations, and positioning of others within professional interactions. In these instances, masculinity did not simply emerge through internal awareness or institutional contrast, but through relational dynamics within everyday professional encounters. Participants frequently reflected that their sense of themselves as male practitioners was shaped less by deliberate self-definition and more by how others responded to their presence.

Isaac articulated this relational process directly when reflecting on how masculinity becomes meaningful within professional interactions: *“I suppose I can only react to what it's like to be male by responses that other people might give me in response to seeing me... my identity will be shaped by someone else's responses”* (Isaac, FG3). This account highlights the interactional nature of gender visibility within professional practice. Rather than describing masculinity as a fixed attribute, Isaac frames it as something that acquires meaning through social response.

Participants described several ways in which such relational positioning occurred during their work with children, families, and school staff. In some instances, masculinity appeared to shape expectations about the kind of relationships male practitioners might form with young people: *“Sometimes it's like when I've walked into a school and found, ‘oh great, you're a man’. The young person prefers men”* (Reuben, FG2). Here, masculinity becomes visible through expectations placed upon Reuben by others within the setting. He shared that he is positioned as particularly suited to working with certain pupils based solely on gender, illustrating how masculinity can acquire relational significance within educational contexts.

Masculinity also appeared to shape interactions with parents and caregivers. Some described differences in how fathers engaged with them compared to their female colleagues:

Five years ago, I didn't seem to have a lot of consultations just with dads who are now the primary caregiver, but now I am.... We're talking about numbers of cars, money, these sorts of old masculine economic statements and my female colleagues aren't, that's not coming up (Reuben, FG2).

This extract suggests that shared gender identity may influence conversational dynamics within professional encounters. Reuben reflects that interactions with fathers sometimes involved forms of discourse associated with traditional masculine identity, illustrating how masculinity may be mirrored within relational exchanges.

Participants also described situations in which masculinity influenced professional positioning in more limiting ways. In some cases, gender shaped whether a male EP was considered appropriate for certain work: *"There was one time I was going to work on a case... she'd been sexually abused, and she didn't want to work with a man, so they took me off the case" (Samuel, FG1).* Gender here becomes the determining factor in professional allocation. The example illustrates how gender can carry different relational meanings depending on context, sometimes positioning male EPs as advantageous while in other cases limiting their involvement with young people.

Masculinity was further positioned as shaping feelings of belonging within professional environments: *"Sometimes it feels a little bit like I'm sort of an outsider... I shouldn't be there you know. Like oh I'm snooping around the school or something" (Samuel, FG1).* This account illustrates how gendered positioning may shape

participants' sense of belonging within educational settings. Rather than describing explicit exclusion, Samuel reflects a subtle awareness of difference associated with occupying a minority gender position within the professional space.

The quotes within this subtheme illustrate how masculinity and gender become visible through interaction rather than individual intention. Awareness of being male frequently emerged through the responses and expectations of others within professional encounters. In this way, masculinity is constructed relationally within everyday practice, reinforcing the broader pattern within this theme that gender becomes noticeable through specific institutional and relational contexts.

4.6 “Am I Too Much?”: Regulating Masculinity for Relational Safety

This next main theme builds on the situational visibility of masculinity described in the previous theme by exploring how male EPs regulate their expression of masculinity within professional relationships. Across the dataset, it was clear that once masculinity became noticeable within professional contexts, participants became attentive to how their behaviour, tone, and authority might be interpreted by others. Masculinity therefore appeared not only as something that becomes visible within practice, but also as something actively managed within relational work.

Participants described moderating aspects of their professional presence, including softening authority, adjusting communication style, and carefully managing how they presented themselves when working with colleagues, parents, and young people. These adjustments were often linked to an awareness that behaviours associated with masculinity could be interpreted as overly authoritative, dominant, or intimidating within the relational ethos of Educational Psychology practice. Rather than framing these adaptations as externally imposed expectations, participants frequently

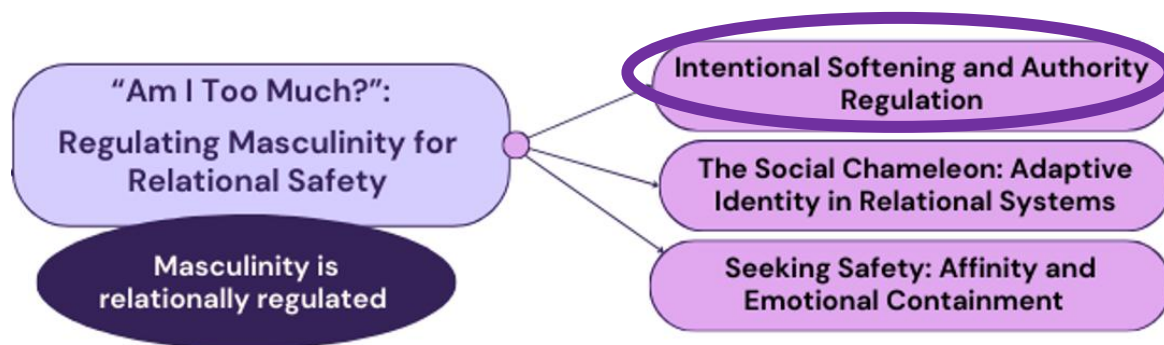
described them as forms of ongoing professional self-monitoring shaped through relational experience.

The subthemes illustrate how this relational regulation unfolded across professional contexts. The first subtheme explores how participants softened or moderated masculine authority within professional interactions. The second examines how participants flexibly adapted aspects of identity across relational systems, describing a ‘chameleon-like’ approach to professional positioning. The third highlights how informal spaces of affinity with other men provided opportunities for emotional expression and containment, offering a counterbalance to the regulatory work of everyday professional practice.

4.6.1 Intentional Softening and Authority Regulation

Figure 7

Thematic Map of Subtheme - Intentional Softening and Authority Regulation



A prominent pattern across the dataset involved the deliberate softening of masculine authority within professional interactions. Masculinity was frequently constructed as carrying the potential to be interpreted as dominant or intimidating within a profession that prioritises collaboration, emotional attunement, and relational safety. As a result, participants described moderating how qualities such as

assertiveness, confidence, or physical presence were expressed to maintain trust within professional relationships.

One commonly described strategy involved self-limiting contributions during professional discussions. Masculinity appeared to be associated with occupying disproportionate conversational space, leading some to consciously restrict how often they spoke within group settings: *“And I think because I’m a man, I maybe sometimes don’t always put forward what I am thinking because it feels like I don’t want to move into that space”* (Ethan, FG1). Ethan’s account can be understood as suggesting a degree of self-monitoring in relation to speaking, potentially reflecting an awareness of gendered dynamics in which male voices may be perceived as dominant. The phrase *“move into that space”* appears to signal sensitivity to the relational implications of contributing within professional dialogue.

Building on this, Oliver described a similar, but more structured approach to managing his contributions within group discussions: *“I only actually respond if I have a direct request... as a way of going around that”* (Oliver, FG1). Here, *“going around that”* appears to refer to the same underlying concern raised by Ethan, that contributing freely may risk occupying or dominating conversational space. Oliver’s account suggests a more rule-based form of conversational restraint, in which participation is deliberately limited to moments of explicit invitation. This can be understood as reflecting a heightened awareness of how male contributions may be perceived within professional dialogue, and an attempt to navigate these dynamics in a controlled and relationally attuned way.

Masculinity also appeared to be regulated through the reduction of symbolic markers of authority. In some cases, this involved avoiding professional titles that

might amplify perceptions of status or authority: *“I go by my first name exclusively... not even Mr or Doctor... is that a deliberate softening of a certain masculine authoritativeness?”* (Archie, FG2). Archie reflects here on whether the avoidance of formal titles represents a subtle form of authority regulation. Although framed tentatively, the comment suggests an awareness that professional status markers may interact with gendered expectations in ways that intensify perceptions of authority.

For some participants, this regulation extended beyond conversational and symbolic adjustments to include concealing aspects of their masculine identity. This appeared linked to concerns about how masculinity might be interpreted within professional environments that emphasise equality and inclusivity: *“Sometimes I also have to hide my masculinity... because I worry that if I didn’t, people say I’m sexist... people would say he doesn’t respect women”* (Noah, FG2).

Noah’s comments can be understood as reflecting a perceived risk of being prematurely categorised according to stereotyped or socially circulating constructions of masculinity, rather than being understood in terms of his self-defined values. Across his wider reflections, Noah positions himself as caring and in touch with his feelings, yet describes being *“put in a box”* and assigned beliefs that are not his own. In this context, ‘hiding masculinity’ does not appear to refer to suppressing a single set of behaviours for Noah. Instead, it seems to refer to managing how he presents aspects of himself that may be read by others as aligned with more dominant or problematic forms of masculinity.

This may also include moderating how Noah expresses views, interacts with others, or embodies certain gendered characteristics, to avoid being misinterpreted as holding sexist beliefs. Masculinity is therefore positioned as something that carries

potential risk within professional contexts, requiring ongoing negotiation to remain aligned with egalitarian values. Noah's experiences also highlight how these dynamics are shaped not only by gender, but by how masculinity is read through broader assumptions around identity and background, pointing towards the importance of intersectional considerations in how professional identity is constructed and interpreted.

Participants also described regulating their embodied presence within professional interactions, reflecting an awareness that male physical presence could be interpreted as intimidating within certain contexts. Building on Ethan's earlier comments regarding being aware of moving into spaces as a man, Theo reflected on the following: *"Being masculine comes with certain responsibilities... a certain awareness of your relative physical strength... how that can potentially be an intimidating thing, and mitigating that somewhat"* (Theo, FG1). Theo associates masculinity with an embodied awareness of physical power and the responsibility he feels to mitigate its potential impact on others. Masculinity therefore appears linked not only to behaviour or communication but also to the management of physical presence within relational encounters.

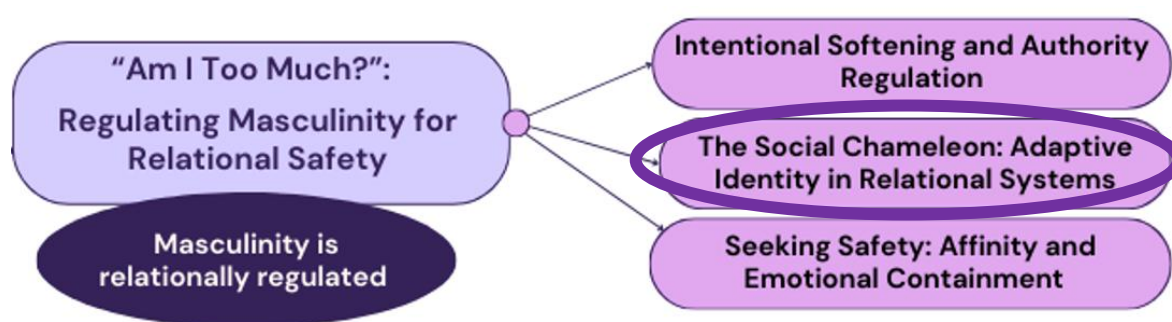
Taken together, these accounts illustrate how masculinity is actively softened within professional practice to maintain relational safety. Participants described moderating conversational participation, reducing symbolic markers of authority, concealing aspects of masculine identity, and carefully managing embodied presence within relational interactions. Rather than appearing as externally imposed expectations, these adjustments were framed as forms of professional self-monitoring developed through experience and reflection. Masculinity becomes something deliberately regulated to align with the relational ethos of educational psychology,

providing a foundation for the adaptive relational positioning explored in the following subtheme.

4.6.2 The Social Chameleon: Adaptive Identity in Relational Systems

Figure 8

Thematic Map of Subtheme - The Social Chameleon: Adaptive Identity in Relational Systems



While the previous subtheme illustrated how masculinity was softened to reduce perceptions of authority, participants also described flexibly adapting aspects of their identity across different relational contexts. Rather than simply suppressing aspects of masculinity, male EPs reflected on how elements of identity were adjusted depending on the individuals, families, or professionals involved in an interaction. These adaptations involved subtle shifts in communication style, tone, language, and relational positioning.

While such flexibility was often framed as a broader feature of psychological practice, masculinity appeared to be one element within this wider process of relational calibration. One participant captured this adaptive process explicitly, describing himself as a form of ‘social chameleon’ within professional interactions: *“But yeah, it certainly makes me reflect about should that social chameleon... being chameleon, if that’s a term, happen and does it always have the positive effect on me and groups*

that I think it does?" (Zachary, FG2). The metaphor of the 'social chameleon' illustrates the fluidity with which participants described adjusting their identity across contexts. Zachary reflects on whether this continual adaptability may carry both benefits and potential costs, suggesting an awareness that shifting relational positioning may require ongoing reflexive monitoring.

Similar ideas of adaptability were also evident in other groups. In FG1, this was introduced through discussions of how EPs camouflage themselves within different relational contexts, adapting communication styles in response to factors such as gender, age, and professional role: *"I think as EPs and that's one of the things I guess, not always but part of our role is trying to sort of be camouflaged and mould into these school systems and work with them" (Ethan, FG1).* Building on this, Samuel reflected more explicitly on the implications of this adaptability for professional identity:

It was interesting you saying about how we have to adapt a lot, almost camouflage ourselves as EPs to be attuned and to, you know, have unconditional positive regard. That can almost be a little bit counterproductive to forming an identity because your identity is necessarily contingent on, in that moment, on how the other person is presenting (Samuel, FG1).

Here, Samuel's account develops the earlier notion of camouflage by highlighting the potential impact on identity formation. Identity is constructed as relationally contingent rather than fixed, shaped in response to the dynamics of each interaction. The language of camouflage and chameleon across groups suggests a shared conceptualisation of professional practice as requiring ongoing adaptation, while also raising questions about the stability of identity within such processes. Within this broader adaptive framework, masculinity becomes one component of identity that

may be subtly recalibrated depending on the relational context. Gender dynamics were sometimes explicitly referenced as shaping these adjustments. Zachary reflected on adapting his approach when working with parents:

I think it's about being adaptive to different situations in that you might recognise that there are certain feelings amongst the room about how you are being positioned, dependent perhaps on your gender... and being adaptive in those moments that if you were to come across and you're working with a particularly masculine dad... how do we perhaps adapt to that situation to make ourselves, you know, not lose ourselves? (Zachary, FG2).

Responding to this, Noah added: *"I think part of it as well, perhaps it's... talking about masculinity and people think this is what a real man should be.... whereas what I probably would argue, as I said before is you know I'm caring ... I want to be in touch with my feelings, but also have other characteristics rather than to be boxed in with what people want me to be like". (Noah, FG2).*

Here, masculinity becomes one of several relational variables shaping professional interaction. Zachary suggests that adapting communication style may help establish rapport or mutual understanding within consultation. Noah speaks to his experiences more generally and explores what being a man actually means in any given context. Masculinity therefore appears to be strategically calibrated in response to the relational dynamics of particular environments.

Accounts also suggested that such adaptations often occurred intuitively rather than through deliberate decision-making. Reflecting on this process, Ethan noted: *"The way I'll approach that relationship [with females] might be different, but I guess a lot of that stuff happens unconsciously for us" (Ethan, FG1).* This highlights how

relational adaptation may operate at an implicit level. Rather than consciously determining how to present themselves in each interaction, male EPs may develop intuitive ways of adjusting their communication and interpersonal positioning depending on the context.

Adjustments in language and communication style were described across focus groups as part of this adaptive process. Dylan reflected on how his manner of speaking differed across contexts: *“I feel like I use particular language at work but not probably outside of work and I’m very aware of that”* (Dylan, FG3). Here, professional identity involves a form of linguistic code-switching in which communication style is modified depending on the relational environment. While such adjustments reflect broader professional norms, they also illustrate how elements of identity, including gendered presentation, may be subtly recalibrated within professional interactions.

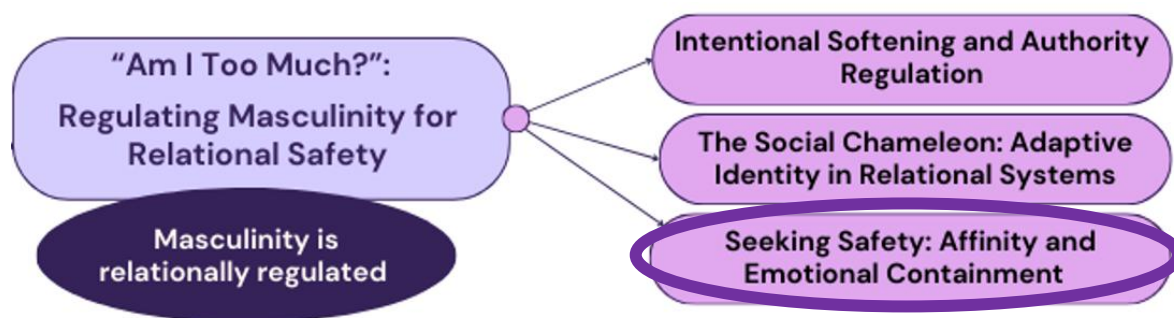
For some participants, these adaptive processes prompted moments of ongoing reflexive self-examination. Reflecting on the focus group discussion, Zachary commented: *“It made me reflect on the way that I present myself and how that might influence certain social situations”* (Zachary, FG2). This prompted other men in the group to agree with him: *“I’m just thinking I kind of need to keep thinking about this a bit more really”* (Reuben, FG2), *“My overall reflection is just how much there is to think about on this topic ... you could have weekly conversations and not run out of links between masculinity and your professional identity”* (Archie, FG2). These extracts highlight the reflexive awareness that can accompany relational adaptation, with participants in agreement that aspects of their identity may continually shape professional interactions.

The quotes across this subtheme illustrate how masculinity is not only softened but flexibly negotiated within a wider repertoire of relational practice. Participants described shifting communication styles, relational positioning, and elements of identity depending on the contexts in which they were working. The metaphor of the social chameleon captures how masculinity becomes part of a broader process of relational calibration in which professional identity is continually shaped through interaction.

4.6.3 Seeking Safety: Affinity and Emotional Containment

Figure 9

Thematic Map of Subtheme - Seeking Safety: Affinity and Emotional Containment



While the previous subthemes illustrated how masculinity was softened and adapted within professional interactions, participants also described relational spaces where masculine expression felt more relaxed, and communication could be more direct or humorous. These interactions were not framed as separate from professional practice but appeared to function as psychologically containing spaces in which male EPs could express frustration, humour, or vulnerability in ways that felt less constrained by professional expectations.

At times, participants described subtle shifts in communication style depending on the gender of the colleague they were interacting with. Reflecting on these

relational dynamics, Ethan explained: *“But I think with different relationships, different things are always kind of present, so I probably communicate in a slightly different way with some of the male SENCOs I’m working with compared to female ones”* (Ethan, FG1). Ethan frames these differences not as deliberate strategies but as relational dynamics that emerge within interactions. Masculinity therefore becomes one factor shaping how comfortably certain forms of communication unfold.

Experiences of connection with male colleagues were often described and characterised by humour, informality, and directness. Isaac reflected on a close relationship with another male colleague in which humour and candid language fostered a sense of mutual trust:

There was definitely a connection between us where we could get really close to the bone around our own ethnicities, and we could use language that, if it wasn’t in a private space, then I would have found that really difficult to use in other kind of forums. But actually, it gave me a sense of belonging (Isaac, FG3).

In this extract, humour and frankness function as relational mechanisms through which closeness and belonging are established. Although such language might appear confrontational or inappropriate outside this context, Isaac frames it as a marker of familiarity and trust within a shared relational space. Importantly, this interaction is also situated within the intersection of gender and ethnicity, with Isaac explicitly referencing *“our own ethnicities”* as part of what enables this form of communication. This suggests that the sense of belonging described here is not solely rooted in shared masculinity, but in a more complex, intersectional alignment that shapes what can be said, how it is interpreted, and where such exchanges feel permissible. Masculinity, in this context, appears intertwined with ethnic identity,

contributing to a communicative style that allows for both directness and mutual recognition within specific relational boundaries.

Isaac also reflected that this interactional style might not feel appropriate in mixed-gender professional environments: *“I just think I wouldn't be able to do that really close to the bone sense of humour, overly moaning about things and a little bit of gossiping, kind of directness of speech...”* (Isaac, FG3).

This reflection highlights how certain forms of humour and direct communication may feel more permissible within relational contexts. Rather than suggesting exclusion, Isaac recognises that different professional relationships carry different expectations around communication style. Other participants in FG3 agreed with him, similarly emphasising humour and informal interaction as ways of managing the emotional demands of professional work: *“I'm always looking for someone to have banter with. Someone like you feel like you can just swear when you want to and have a joke and they won't take it seriously”* (Dylan, FG3). Humour and banter seem to function here as relational tools that allow the release of tension within the demands of professional practice. These interactions appear to create moments of relaxation for participants in which frustrations can be expressed in ways that feel safe and mutually understood.

Isaac also reflected explicitly on the emotional significance of these informal exchanges, describing such interactions as offering a form of emotional containment: *“That kind of disclosure and venting is almost like emotional containment... like soft informal supervision without it being intense”* (Isaac, FG3). Informal conversation is therefore framed as providing a psychologically supportive function within professional relationships. Rather than replacing formal supervision, these exchanges appear to

offer a lighter relational space in which male EPs can process the emotional demands of their work.

Taken together, these accounts illustrate how masculinity may be expressed more comfortably within trusted relational spaces. Interactions are valued that include humour, informality, and a shared understanding where aspects of identity and emotion can be expressed more freely. Rather than reinforcing stereotypical masculine bonding, these interactions appeared to function as spaces of emotional containment and professional support. Moments of affinity provided a counterbalance to the regulatory work described earlier in the theme, supporting practitioners in managing the emotional demands of Educational Psychology practice.

4.7 “How Far Can I Go?”: The Paradox of Minority Status and Male Advantage

This next theme builds on the relational dynamics described in the previous themes by examining the structural paradox of male EPs occupying a numerical minority position while still benefiting from broader systems of gendered advantage. While the first two themes illustrated how masculinity becomes visible and subsequently regulated within professional interactions, the dataset also pointed to wider structural dynamics shaping how gender was interpreted within organisational and societal contexts.

Although it was acknowledged across the focus groups that men are underrepresented within the profession, masculinity continued to carry cultural and organisational meanings that shaped how participants were positioned within professional environments. Reflections centred on how gender could intersect with wider narratives surrounding authority, work, income, and professional status,

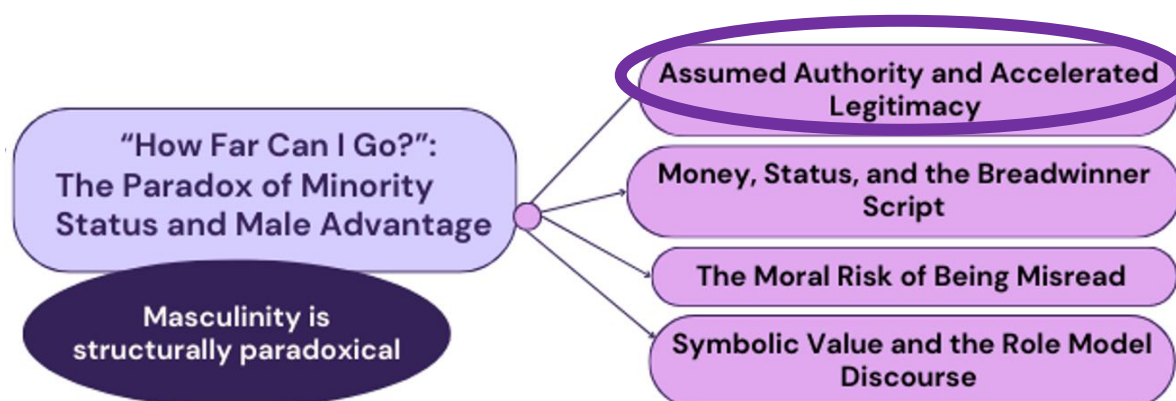
sometimes creating expectations or opportunities that extended beyond individual professional roles.

These dynamics were rarely described as a straightforward advantage. Instead, they were often approached with reflexive caution, and expressions of discomfort around benefiting from gendered assumptions that might disadvantage female colleagues or reproduce broader inequalities. Focus group extracts therefore illustrate a layered paradox: while male EPs described occupying a minority position within the profession, they also acknowledged that their maleness could still carry forms of organisational legitimacy, cultural expectation, and symbolic value. The following subthemes explore how this paradox unfolded across organisational structures, wider cultural narratives, professional discourse, and everyday practice.

4.7.1 Assumed Authority and Accelerated Legitimacy

Figure 10

Thematic Map of Subtheme - Assumed Authority and Accelerated Legitimacy



Across the focus groups, accounts suggested that masculinity could shape assumptions around authority and leadership within professional contexts. Although male EPs described being numerically underrepresented within the profession,

several extracts indicated that masculinity could still function as a symbolic marker of competence or legitimacy within organisational settings.

Minority status was therefore not experienced solely as a disadvantage. Instead, accounts illustrated how masculinity could carry forms of informal authority that facilitated credibility, influence, or access to leadership opportunities. These dynamics were often approached with reflexive ambivalence, as participants recognised both the advantages they could bring and the structural inequalities they might reproduce. One participant evidenced the above as they reflected explicitly on how masculinity appeared to accelerate access to leadership roles:

I was able to occupy positions of leadership and then of management potentially faster as a man than a woman, and I think that's partly because of the qualities that other people assume of you before you know there is (Leo, FG3).

This extract illustrates how gendered assumptions can shape perceptions of competence before individual qualities are fully demonstrated. Leo suggests that masculinity may carry implicit associations with leadership capability that influence how others interpret professional behaviour. In this sense, masculinity appears to operate as a form of symbolic capital that can support professional legitimacy and career progression within organisational structures. Reflections also included how similar behaviours might be interpreted differently depending on the gender of the practitioner, as Leo continued:

So for instance, my assertiveness maybe is always charitably taken as assertiveness because I'm a male, whereas it might come across as kind of bossiness if I were a female and so that helps you then get up into those

positions, I think, and people can more naturally see you as a leader and manager then (Leo, FG3).

Here, Leo highlights a gendered behavioural double standard within professional environments. Behaviours associated with leadership, such as confidence or assertiveness, may be interpreted as legitimate authority when enacted by men but framed negatively when expressed by women. Such differences in interpretation can subtly reinforce patterns in which masculinity becomes associated with leadership legitimacy.

Leo also reflected on the structural pattern in which men appeared to be overrepresented in leadership roles relative to their numbers within the profession: *“For all of the paucity of men in the profession, we are then overrepresented in positions of management relative to our numbers side of that, and that’s always kind of irked me somewhat”* (Leo, FG3). This captures the paradox at the centre of the theme. Although men constitute a minority within Educational Psychology, they may still occupy a disproportionate share of leadership roles. Masculinity therefore appears to retain symbolic authority even within a profession numerically dominated by women.

The dataset also included more subtle forms of interpersonal authority that could emerge within professional interactions. In some cases, this involved experiencing a degree of deference from colleagues or stakeholders that participants found difficult to fully explain:

Sometimes people are quite deferential to me personally and then I often thought teasing apart where that might come from can be difficult. I mean, for me being male, straight, white. You know, kind of ticking all of the majority

boxes. It's difficult to tease apart what aspects of my personal identity might be impacting on people's perception of me (Theo, FG1).

This extract highlights the complexity of interpreting professional authority. Theo recognises that the deference he experiences may be shaped not only by professional expertise but also by broader social identities such as gender, sexuality, and race. Rather than presenting this authority as deserved or intentional, he reflects on the possibility that structural privilege may influence how his contributions are received. His account also points towards the often subtle and taken-for-granted ways in which perceptions of authority may be shaped by social identities, even when these processes are not explicitly recognised or named.

Building on Theo's comments regarding others' perceptions, Ryan reflected on the possibility that masculinity might reduce the likelihood of professional challenge from others: *"When I'm working with stakeholders, maybe like being a man means that people feel less able to challenge me, which is interesting"* (Ryan, FG1). Here, authority appears to operate through subtle relational dynamics rather than formal hierarchy alone. If masculinity carries implicit associations with competence or authority, stakeholders may feel less comfortable questioning the opinions of male practitioners, potentially reinforcing gendered patterns of influence within professional interaction.

Participants also highlighted how broader structural conditions could indirectly facilitate men's access to leadership roles. Theo reflected on how gendered divisions of labour within families might shape career trajectories:

And I think there's a lot of females in our service that would probably quite like to be in senior roles, leadership roles, but practically they work two or three

days a week because of childcare... their husband probably earns more than them... and I've been advantaged by that in terms of taking on a leadership role (Theo, FG1).

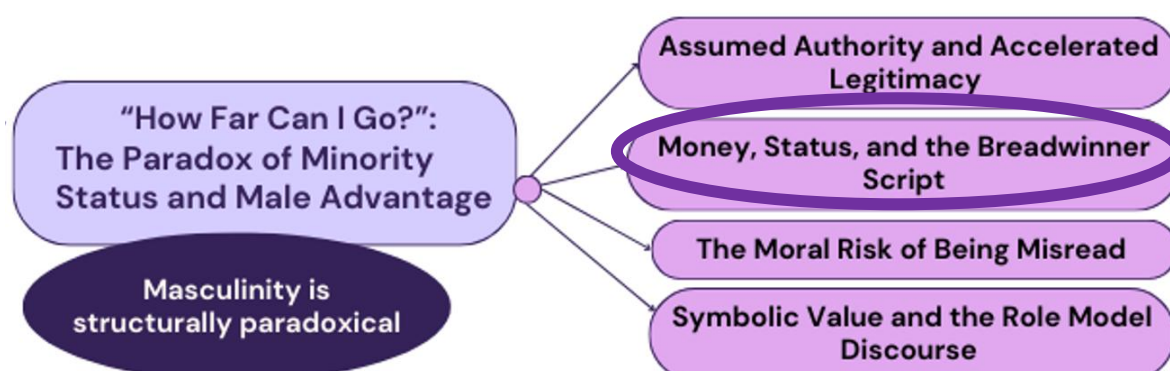
This quote situates professional opportunity within wider social structures. Theo suggests that societal expectations surrounding childcare and employment patterns may create conditions in which male EPs are more able to pursue leadership positions. Organisational outcomes therefore appear intertwined with broader gendered inequalities beyond the profession itself.

Across the subtheme, masculinity is shown to function as a subtle source of organisational legitimacy within Educational Psychology, shaping how male EPs are perceived and positioned within professional hierarchies. At the same time, these dynamics were rarely presented as unproblematic. Participants frequently reflected on the tension between benefiting from gendered privilege and working within a profession committed to equity and inclusion. This ambivalence reflects the central paradox of the theme: male EPs may experience themselves as a minority while still occupying positions shaped by wider systems of gendered power.

4.7.2 Money, Status, and the Breadwinner Script

Figure 11

Thematic Map of Subtheme - Money, Status, and the Breadwinner Script



While the previous subtheme explored how masculinity could confer organisational authority within Educational Psychology, masculinity was also frequently associated with societal narratives of economic success and the expectation that men should act as primary earners within families. These expectations appeared to shape how careers are evaluated within wider labour market hierarchies and suggestions were that this may influence the decisions men make about entering caring professions. Masculinity was positioned not only within professional interactions but also within broader cultural scripts connecting masculine identity to economic provision.

Several participants reflected on how the relatively modest financial rewards associated with caring professions may contribute to the underrepresentation of men within fields such as Educational Psychology, as Archie explained:

The caring professions in general are seen as not particularly well paying... typical masculinities are generally associated with looking for a high paying profession... you don't tend to look at teaching or psychology as a way to achieve that type of breadwinning masculinity that is fairly dominant in society (Archie, FG2).

Here, Archie explicitly links masculinity to cultural expectations surrounding financial success. The reference to breadwinning masculinity illustrates how dominant gender norms continue to associate masculine identity with the ability to secure well-paid employment. Within this framework, professions emphasising care, relational work, or public service may appear less aligned with traditional narratives of masculine success.

Compared with alternative career routes, the lengthy training pathway and relatively modest financial progression were sometimes contrasted with occupations that provide faster access to higher incomes. Building on Archie's previous comments, Zachary illustrated this comparison: *"I think about some of the people that went straight out of school and went and became an electrician and now they're on like eighty, ninety thousand and they didn't have to do all that extra work"* (Zachary, FG2).

This comparison highlights how different career pathways carry distinct forms of economic and symbolic value. While Educational Psychology requires extensive academic training and professional expertise, the financial returns may not match those available through alternative occupations. These comparisons suggest how the desirability of the profession may be evaluated within cultural contexts where masculine success remains closely tied to financial prosperity. The financial pressure men may experience within heterosexual relationships to earn higher incomes than their partners was also highlighted:

I've wondered about, particularly the past seven years as the relative wages go down and down, like what that does for men who still in society probably experience somewhat a greater pressure to earn more than their heterosexual partner (Archie, FG2).

This extract situates masculinity within the economic dynamics of family life. Archie suggests that even as gender roles evolve, cultural assumptions about men as primary earners may continue to influence how career choices are evaluated within households. Pursuing a profession that requires extensive training but does not necessarily lead to high financial rewards may therefore create additional tension for individuals who feel pressure to fulfil breadwinner expectations.

In response to Archie's comments, Reuben also reflected on this dynamic within heterosexual partnerships, and how expectations may influence how career decisions are negotiated within families:

If we are still in a quite traditional 'masculine is the male breadwinner', does that then free up what would be in the typical heterosexual couple? Would that be that the woman has the opportunity to go in and, you know, take a lesser paid role as well and maybe that supports the way through the course when you're dropping the salary. (Reuben, FG2).

This reflection illustrates how gendered economic expectations can shape professional pathways beyond the workplace itself. Decisions about entering or progressing within Educational Psychology may therefore be influenced not only by professional interests but also by wider household economic arrangements.

Some accounts also highlighted the financial sacrifices involved in entering the profession itself. Oliver reflected on taking a pay cut when moving from teaching into Educational Psychology: *"It was a question of how much teaching experience some of us had, some of us were senior or pastoral heads or so on and so forth, but we actually took a pay cut to come into the profession"* (Oliver, FG1). This illustrates how entering Educational Psychology may involve prioritising professional values or interests over financial gain. While Oliver does not necessarily frame this decision negatively, his comment highlights how choosing the profession may involve stepping away from more financially lucrative career trajectories.

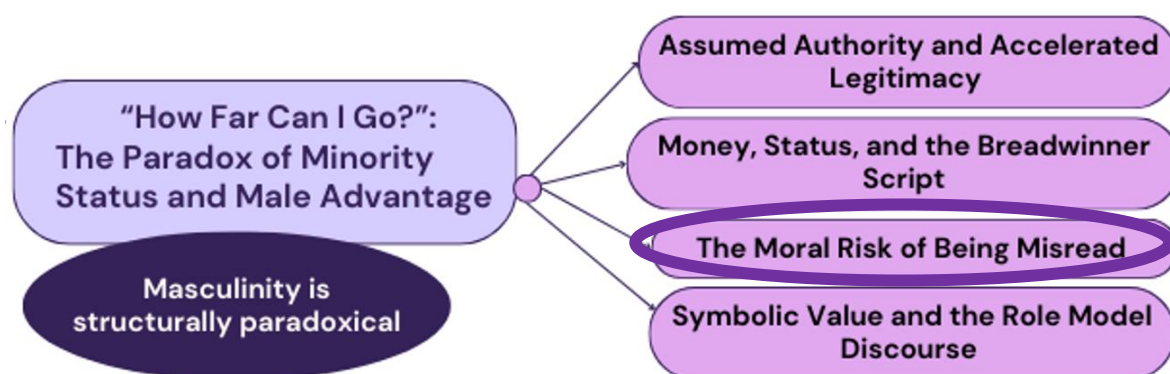
Across the subtheme, masculinity becomes closely linked to broader cultural narratives of financial provision and occupational status. The breadwinner script therefore highlights how masculinity is embedded within wider expectations of

economic responsibility, shaping how male EPs interpret the opportunities and constraints associated with their professional choices.

4.7.3 The Moral Risk of Being Misread

Figure 12

Thematic Map of Subtheme - The Moral Risk of Being Misread



Whilst patterns of male advantage within professional hierarchies were consistently acknowledged, discussions of masculinity and men more widely were often accompanied by notable reflexive caution. Across the focus groups, an underlying tension emerged when raising questions about gender representation or male disadvantage. Although participants were willing to explore these issues, they also recognised that discussing male disadvantage within a broader patriarchal context could carry moral and political risk. As a result, reflections were frequently framed carefully, anticipating how such comments might be interpreted by others. One participant articulated this tension explicitly:

I maybe occasionally feel if I'm making a point that indicates this might be a sphere in which men might be disadvantaged over women, it sometimes comes

across as if I'm just perpetuating the patriarchy or being incel or something (Samuel, FG1).

This extract illustrates the delicate discursive position described across the dataset. While Samuel acknowledges the possibility that men may experience disadvantage in particular contexts, he also anticipates that raising such points could be interpreted as aligning with regressive or anti-feminist positions. The reference to being perceived as “*incel*” or as “*perpetuating the patriarchy*” highlights the moral stakes attached to discussions of male experience. Masculinity therefore appeared to be a politically sensitive topic within professional discourse, requiring careful framing to avoid unintended interpretations.

Discomfort also emerged when encountering discussions about male disadvantage that appeared to echo narratives associated with men’s rights movements. As Archie reflected, “*Sometimes I've seen things come up in the past that seem a bit men's-rightsy about men in female dominated professions, and I've really felt uncomfortable with that tone*” (Archie, FG2). Here, Archie explicitly distances himself from narratives that position men as a marginalised or oppressed group. This distancing reflects a broader pattern across the dataset in which participants situated their reflections within an awareness of structural gender inequalities. Rather than framing their experiences through a grievance narrative, some participants emphasised that acknowledging male experience should not undermine feminist concerns. In doing so, they positioned themselves as reflexive and ethically aware contributors to discussions about gender.

Views across this focus group were not uniform, as participants also suggested that conversations about gender representation were rare and difficult to sustain within

professional contexts. In response to Archie's comments, the absence of structured opportunities within professional training to explore masculinity and male identity in depth was highlighted by Zachary:

I feel like considering it is something that is, you know, the entire population is impacted by gender and the way that they exist as a male or female or other gender, and how much of a limited opportunity there was to talk about that. It's quite a stark difference to other sort of intersectionality I suppose (Zachary, FG2).

Zachary's comments suggest that while gender is widely recognised as a significant social category, explicit discussion of masculinity and male identity may receive relatively limited attention within professional training contexts which perhaps links in with the apprehension male EPs have with discussing their gender and being a minority within the profession.

Noah went on to recall a discussion within a professional forum in which gender demographics favouring women were briefly raised:

I remember there was a discussion a few years ago on EPNET where somebody had looked at the names, and like 80% of the names that came up for the Principal EP at the time were female, but unfortunately the discussion was quickly shut off because people complained then that people started talking about how the world is designed against females, which it is as well (Noah, FG2).

Although the demographic observation was introduced, Noah describes how the discussion quickly closed. This suggests that conversations about gender representation may become difficult to sustain when they risk being interpreted as

challenging broader narratives around gender inequality. Noah continued to reflect on this subject: *“If you discuss why there are so few men, you're projected as being anti-progressive. But really, you might be progressive because you may still argue the same thing if it was the other way around”* (Noah, FG2). Discussions of gender representation appear entangled with wider political and social narratives around equality. Within professional environments that emphasise progressive values, raising questions about male representation may risk being interpreted as opposing those commitments. This possibility appeared to shape how openly such conversations were pursued.

Alongside these concerns about interpretation, reflections also included how attention to gendered disadvantage may vary depending on the group being discussed. Samuel cautiously noted that issues affecting boys sometimes receive less attention within professional discourse:

But I do sometimes get a sense of maybe those sorts of discussions look at, you know, youth offender populations, and how many of them are boys compared to girls. These are very real statistics which do show gender imbalance and disadvantage. It doesn't, maybe perhaps because our profession is mostly female, get as much attention as some of the other issues, but that might just be my projection (Samuel, FG1).

Samuel's careful framing reflects the broader sensitivity surrounding discussions of male experience. Even when referencing statistical patterns of disadvantage, his account is cautious and reflexive. At the same time, his reflection orients to a perceived gap in how certain gendered issues are attended to within

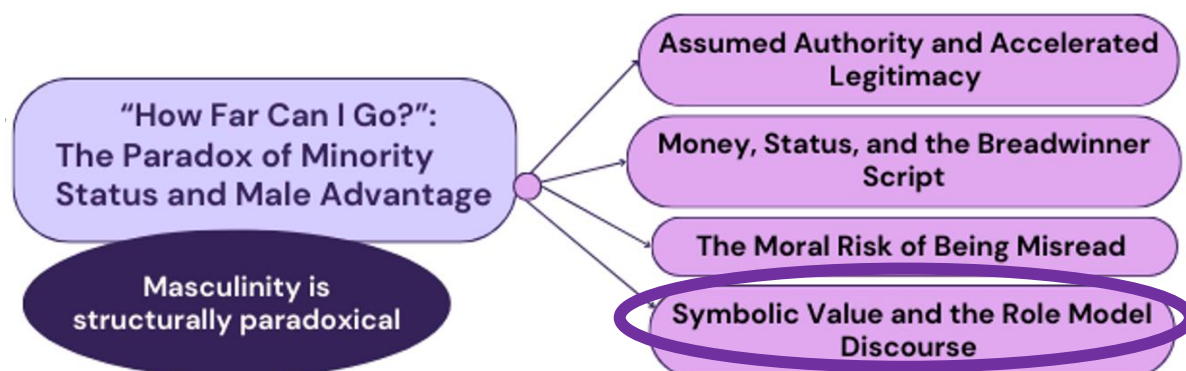
professional discourse, raising implicit questions about who can speak to or legitimise discussions of boys' experiences.

Taken together, these accounts illustrate how discussions of masculinity are navigated within a complex and, at times, contested moral landscape. While participants broadly expressed alignment with principles of gender equality, their reflections revealed an underlying tension in how male experience could be articulated without being misinterpreted as anti-feminist or regressive. For some, this resulted in careful qualification and distancing from dominant 'men's rights' narratives; for others, it was reflected in the relative absence or fragility of such discussions within professional spaces. These differing positions highlight that masculinity is not only a social identity but also a discursively sensitive topic, in which what can be said, and how it can be said, is shaped by anticipated interpretations and broader sociopolitical narratives. Within this context, engaging with masculinity appeared to require ongoing reflexive negotiation, as participants sought to balance acknowledging male experience with maintaining alignment with the profession's commitment to equality and inclusion.

4.7.4 Symbolic Value and the Role Model Discourse

Figure 13

Thematic Map of Subtheme - Symbolic Value and the Role Model Discourse



Alongside reflections on structural advantage and the moral sensitivities surrounding gender discussions, masculinity and maleness also became symbolically positioned within schools and professional contexts. For example, participants described how their presence as men was sometimes framed as beneficial for children, especially boys. This positioning often emerged through a broader role model discourse in which male professionals were assumed to offer something distinct or valuable simply by virtue of their gender. While such assumptions were often expressed with positive intentions, participants also reflected critically on the complexities and limitations of this framing.

Zachary reflected on his experiences in educational settings, where schools explicitly welcomed a male presence: *“I taught in both secondary and primary, but so frequently it was brought up. Oh, it's fantastic to have a male on board”* (Zachary, FG2). In response to Zachary's reflections, Noah commented on a different experience during a school visit:

I once went to a school, and they suddenly got shocked because they've obviously been sent some information and then they all said we expected a female. And so they've never seen a male EP ... and they started checking the DBS more carefully and all of that (Noah, FG2).

This exchange illustrates how masculinity can become symbolically meaningful within professional encounters, but not in a uniform or straightforward way. In Zachary's account, the presence of a male practitioner is explicitly welcomed and positioned as a valuable addition within school contexts where male role models are perceived to be limited. Such responses suggest that masculinity may, at times, be

positively marked, with male EPs valued not only for their professional expertise but also for what their gender is seen to represent within the school environment.

However, Noah's contrasting account complicates this interpretation. Rather than being welcomed, his presence appeared to generate surprise and heightened scrutiny, with expectations of a female EP shaping initial responses. The reference to additional DBS checking suggests that masculinity may also be constructed as requiring verification or reassurance within certain contexts. Read alongside Zachary's account, this contrast highlights the ambivalent nature of visibility: while male EPs may be symbolically valued in some interactions, their presence can also evoke uncertainty or suspicion in others. Masculinity, therefore, is not simply recognised but interpreted in multiple ways, shaped by the expectations, assumptions, and institutional norms of educational settings.

The topic of being a male role model also came up across the data set, frequently emerging in conversations with teachers or families. Ethan reflected on how this discourse often appeared within professional discussions:

I think one thing that we've probably all heard at different points is like that idea of you or someone, you know, being a positive male role model for a child. That's something we hear a lot and it's happened to me when I've been working with children before this role and also in it, and it can come from teachers or families. And I guess it often comes in response to, maybe them not having a father figure in their life or many men in their life (Ethan, FG1).

Here, masculinity is positioned within a familiar educational narrative emphasising the importance of male role models for boys, particularly those perceived to lack male figures in their lives. Within this discourse, male professionals may be

assumed to provide guidance, identification, or behavioural modelling. These expectations appeared widely embedded within school cultures and frequently surfaced within everyday professional interactions.

Reflections also centred on how gender might shape the way male EPs engage with boys during professional work. For example, Isaac described drawing on activity-based approaches when working with older boys:

I think there is a different perspective I can give in some cases particularly working with boys, slightly older key stage three boys, I think I am more likely to champion value interest-based activities at the expense of just talking. I think. And I don't know whether that's because I'm a male or not (Isaac, FG3).

This extract illustrates a moment of reflexive uncertainty. While Isaac considers whether gender might shape aspects of his professional style, this interpretation is immediately questioned. Masculinity was also connected to broader questions about representation within the profession. Noah reflected on the gender distribution within his caseload:

And the other thing is I'm independent. I don't know if anybody else is. And 90% of my caseload or people I see or I discuss are male, so it's the other aspect of it – why is there so few men who are EPs? (Noah, FG2).

Masculinity becomes linked to wider questions about representation within Educational Psychology. Noah's reflection implicitly raises questions about how the gender composition of the profession intersects with the demographic of young people that EPs work with, further reinforcing the symbolic significance that male EPs may carry within professional contexts.

Taken together, these accounts illustrate how masculinity can acquire symbolic significance within educational settings through narratives of representation and role modelling. Masculinity therefore appears to carry symbolic value within school contexts while remaining only one element within a broader professional identity grounded in relational practice.

4.8 “What is Masculinity?”: Plurality, Contestation and Reflexive Deconstruction

While the previous themes explored how masculinity became visible, regulated, and structurally positioned within professional life, the final theme examines how masculinity itself was discussed and interpreted within participants’ reflections.

Across the focus groups, masculinity frequently became the subject of explicit reflection rather than simply an implicit feature of professional experience. Participants questioned dominant cultural narratives about masculinity and reflected on how masculine identity was shaped through professional roles, social expectations, and personal experiences. In doing so, masculinity was not treated as a stable or self-evident category but as something open to interpretation and critique.

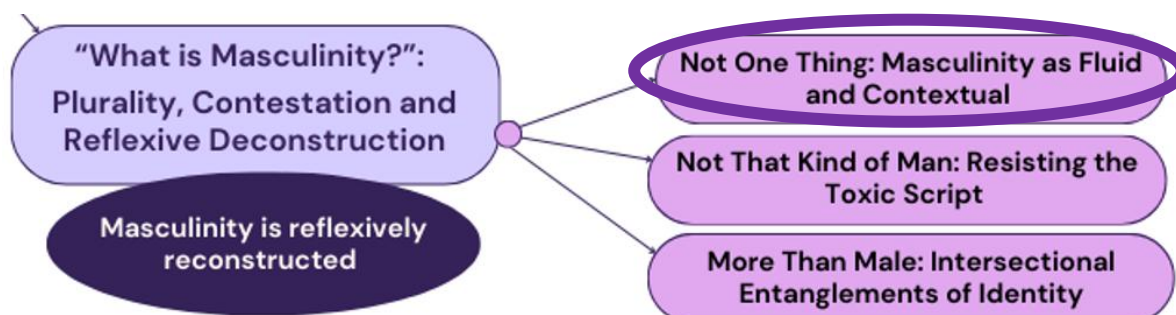
Through these discussions, masculinity appeared as something participants actively examined, reframed, and at times resisted. The theme therefore captures a reflexive layer of the data in which masculinity itself became the object of analysis across the focus groups.

The subthemes explore how participants conceptualised masculinity as fluid and contextually shaped, how dominant or ‘toxic’ masculine scripts were questioned or resisted, and how masculinity intersected with other aspects of identity within professional life.

4.8.1 Not One Thing: Masculinity as Fluid and Contextual

Figure 14

Thematic Map of Subtheme - Not One Thing: Masculinity as Fluid and Contextual



Across the focus groups, conversations frequently resisted attempts to define masculinity as a stable or singular identity category. Instead, masculinity was constructed as something that shifts across contexts, relationships, and cultural environments. In this way, masculinity appeared less as an inherent personal trait and more as a socially negotiated aspect of identity that takes shape through interaction and experience. Participants often reflected on how their sense of masculinity emerged through professional encounters and the social environments in which they worked. One participant illustrated this contextual nature of masculinity when reflecting on their experiences working in schools:

I reckon for me it depends on the context I'm in. So if I am in a secondary school... you might notice all the SENCOs I have are female of a certain age... you're just reflecting upon that which kind of brings it into question (Ethan, FG1).

Ethan's account suggests that masculinity is not experienced as a singular or stable identity, but as something that takes on different meanings depending on the relational and professional context. Rather than being consistently present, masculinity appears to shift in salience and significance as individuals move between

environments, shaped by the social composition and expectations of those spaces. In this sense, masculinity is constructed as fluid and contextually contingent, rather than fixed or internally defined. Masculinity was also constructed as plural rather than singular. Reflecting on how men might embody different masculine roles across situations, Zachary explained:

I think it's just being about responses to situations and recognising that we can take on so many different types of masculine roles, and then still be OK. And the fact that we can tend to recognise where masculinity can be somewhat problematic when it's taken to certain extremes. And making sure we don't end up on those avenues, I think that that's a key part of the sort of reflective nature of the role (Zachary, FG2).

Here masculinity is framed as plural and adaptive rather than prescriptive. Zachary suggests that individuals may inhabit different masculine roles across situations without these being contradictory. This perspective challenges rigid or stereotypical understandings of masculinity, instead positioning it as a flexible repertoire of identities that shifts depending on relational and situational demands.

Masculinity was also constructed through the negotiation of qualities that may appear contradictory within traditional gender binaries. Isaac reflected on this balancing process:

So how can you be strong, competitive and yet not be a sore loser? How can you be soft and gentle and yet be tough and hard when you need to be? In what context can you get the balance right? Because if we're constantly telling people that you cannot be this or you have to be this and you have to be that, then you are actually putting people up for a fall (Isaac, FG3).

This extract illustrates masculinity as a process of balancing different attributes rather than conforming to a fixed set of traits. Rather than rejecting traditional masculine qualities entirely, Isaac describes integrating different characteristics in ways that are responsive to context. Strength or competitiveness therefore appear not inherently problematic but become meaningful through how they are expressed and regulated within particular situations. Isaac also reflected on experiences of visiting Pakistan to illustrate how behaviours associated with masculinity vary across cultural settings:

In Pakistan you see a completely different arrangement... Like although people will be like they probably describe themselves as socially conservative Muslim, probably like homophobic kind of culturally and yet you see kind of a lot more hand holding like people sitting on their knees ... what is it to be a feminine male and like, how is that represented and what do you see when you see that, like it's really weird... how all these things are culturally defined (Isaac, FG3).

This reflection highlights the socially constructed nature of masculinity by illustrating how behaviours that may appear unusual in one cultural context can be normative in another. Isaac describes practices such as hand holding or sitting closely together, which challenge Western assumptions about masculine behaviour. Masculinity therefore appears shaped by cultural expectations and social meanings rather than universal or biologically determined traits.

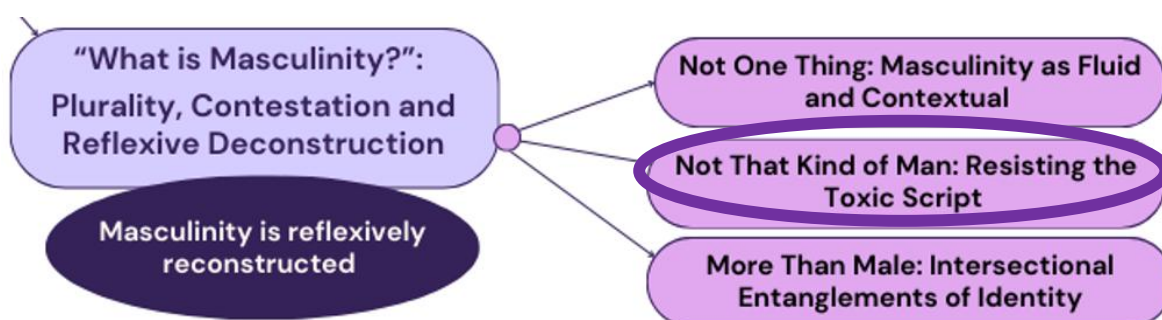
Across the subtheme, quotes construct masculinity as fluid, contextual, and socially negotiated rather than fixed or singular. Masculine identity appears to shift across professional environments, cultural contexts, and relational roles, highlighting the multiplicity of ways masculinity can be understood and expressed. Masculinity is

continually constructed and reinterpreted within everyday social and professional life, reinforcing the broader argument of this theme that masculinity represents a plural and socially negotiated set of meanings.

4.8.2 *Not That Kind of Man: Resisting the Toxic Script*

Figure 15

Thematic Map of Subtheme - Not That Kind of Man: Resisting the Toxic Script



While masculinity was frequently constructed as fluid and contextually shaped, accounts also illustrated how dominant cultural narratives around masculinity influenced how participants positioned themselves as men. Across the focus groups, masculinity was often associated with stereotypical traits such as dominance, arrogance, emotional restriction, and a tendency to take up space. Rather than identifying with these characteristics, participants actively distanced themselves. In doing so, masculinity was reworked in ways that aligned more closely with the relational, reflective, and caring values associated with Educational Psychology practice. For some participants, this distancing involved discomfort with the term masculinity itself as Ethan reflected: *“When I think of masculinity... my mind gets drawn to a lot of the negative aspects... being like dominant or arrogant, taking up space”* (Ethan, FG1). Samuel agreed:

I don't really sort of consider myself to be particularly masculine and almost moved away a little bit from the term. I think there is quite a lot in the media about toxic masculinity so some of those things kind of go rushing around I think in my head when I think about masculinity (Samuel, FG1).

Read together, these accounts suggest that masculinity is not approached as a neutral or readily adopted identity category, but as one that is already saturated with culturally loaded meanings. Ethan and Samuel both construct masculinity as linked to behaviours and values that sit in tension with their professional and personal self-understandings. Rather than embracing the term, both position themselves in relation to it through distancing, suggesting that aspects of their professional identity are partly formed through resisting or moderating what are perceived to be stereotypical or problematic masculine traits.

This interaction also illustrates how meanings of masculinity were co-constructed within the group. Samuel's agreement does not simply repeat Ethan's point, but develops it by locating these associations within broader sociocultural discourse. In doing so, masculinity is framed not as an inherent set of characteristics, but as a contested and externally shaped construct, which participants navigate reflexively. Accounts also illustrated how individuals may experience masculinity as something they do not fully embody in conventional ways. Reflecting on expectations placed upon him as a male teacher, Kai explained:

I think when I was a teacher there were lots of conversations around discipline being different because I'm a man, and I always found that quite interesting because I'm not someone I would say presents as traditionally masculine. I'm

quite a small man as well and quite a camp man, and I think like that has always been something that I always thought was a bit interesting (Kai, FG2).

Kai's reflection highlights how masculinity can be experienced as something individuals may or may not embody in culturally expected ways. Rather than attempting to conform to stereotypical masculine ideals, he acknowledges how his identity sits outside these expectations. Masculinity therefore appears as a category that individuals may negotiate, resist, or reinterpret in relation to dominant social norms.

Participants also questioned assumptions about which qualities are considered masculine within professional contexts. Relational and caring attributes were often discussed as being incorrectly framed as feminine: *"Being soft, caring I also see as part of me... does that mean I'm not masculine because I'm soft and caring?"* (Noah, FG2). This reflection highlights the tension between traditional gender norms and the relational demands of professional practice. Within Educational Psychology, qualities such as empathy, listening, and emotional attunement are central to effective work with children, families, and colleagues. By questioning whether these qualities should be seen as incompatible with masculinity, Noah challenges the gendered assumptions that underpin such distinctions.

Professional roles were also described as creating opportunities to model alternative forms of masculinity. Ethan reflected on the relational skills associated with Educational Psychology practice:

I suppose it's just demonstrating that men can, I suppose, possess a lot of the skills that are really part of the EP role anyway, and that makes it quite easy like

being a good listener or bringing lots of other people into the conversation yourself (Ethan, FG1).

Ethan also reflected on how his presence as a male professional might offer a contrast to problematic representations of masculinity circulating within popular media: *“Maybe kids don’t have to only see the kind of toxic influencers that are out there in the world, and just by not being that maybe it’s quite powerful” (Ethan, FG1).*

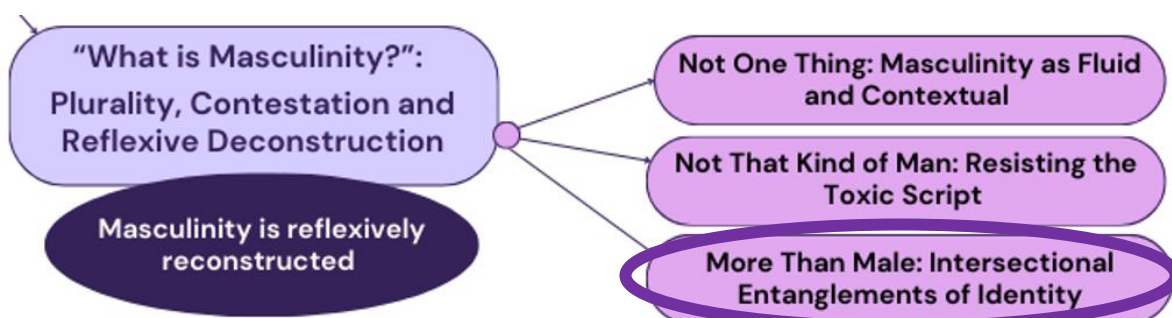
Here masculinity is not rejected outright but reworked through professional values where listening, collaboration, and openness to dialogue become incorporated into a redefined masculine identity aligned with relational professional practice.

Across the subtheme, masculinity was constructed through distancing from stereotypical or ‘toxic’ masculine scripts, while simultaneously articulating alternative forms of masculine identity. Rather than rejecting masculinity entirely, participants reworked it in ways aligned with relational engagement, empathy, and collaborative professional practice. Masculinity within Educational Psychology therefore appears not simply reproduced but actively negotiated and reinterpreted, illustrating how professional practice can provide space for reimagining masculine identities.

4.8.3 More Than Male: Intersectional Entanglements of Identity

Figure 16

Thematic Map of Subtheme - More Than Male: Intersectional Entanglements of Identity



Masculinity and maleness were widely discussed across the focus groups, however, being male represented only one aspect of participants' broader identities. Masculinity frequently intersected with other dimensions of identity, including sexuality, ethnicity, cultural background, and social class. These intersections shaped how participants were perceived by others and how they positioned themselves within professional interactions. Rather than functioning as a singular or dominant identity marker, masculinity appeared embedded within multiple identity categories that became more or less salient depending on context. Sexuality emerged as one important axis through which masculinity was negotiated. One participant described how his identity as a gay man shaped how he presented himself within professional contexts:

Often the dynamic a little bit, you know coming in as a man, I don't know how that's perceived, so kind of maybe like camping up a bit and like be a bit sassy. I do think it diffuses the tension. And I think you start leaning into like my northern-ness as well just, I like to kind of like soften being a man where I can, but I don't think that was ever really like that conscious anywhere (Ryan, FG1).

In response, Ethan reflected on how his own shared cultural experiences could facilitate relational engagement with young people:

When I'm working with young people, the race aspect might come up more and more because I'm often working with children from minority backgrounds. So that's sometimes seen as a more important thing or building relationships with them might involve sharing and talking about different stories. It can be quite a nice way into some of that life story work (Ethan, FG1).

Ryan's account illustrates how masculinity may be negotiated through other aspects of identity, particularly sexuality and regional background. By camping up his presentation and drawing on his northern identity, he describes reshaping how his masculinity is perceived, softening potential tensions associated with being a male professional. In this way, sexuality becomes a resource through which masculinity is reconfigured within interactions.

Ethan's response in the same discussion extends this negotiation to ethnicity and cultural experience. He describes how racial identity may become more salient when working with young people from minority backgrounds, functioning as a relational bridge through shared stories and experiences. Here, masculinity recedes, with ethnicity becoming a more meaningful point of connection. While Ethan commented positively on the impact of race on his work with young people, Isaac reflected on different experiences within school settings:

I know other EPs have said this as well, actually from a South Asian background, or who look South Asian, where people perceive that you should be like in the IT kind of support or like you've come to fix the computer and stuff like that (Isaac, FG3).

This extract illustrates how professional identity can be shaped not only by gender but also by racialised stereotypes around occupational roles and competence. Masculinity therefore becomes interpreted through broader social assumptions about race, highlighting the ways gender intersects with other systems of social categorisation. Class identity also shaped some participants' sense of belonging within professional spaces. Reflecting on experiences of upward social mobility, Kai reflected:

Now I earn more than you know, both my parents ever earned. And I guess, like in lots of ways economically, that would make me not working class. But I hang on to that as an identity thing and maybe do see being middle class as something that I see quite negatively, I think it's interesting (Kai, FG2).

Kai's comments highlight how class identity can remain an important aspect of self-understanding even when individuals occupy professional roles associated with middle-class status. Class therefore continues to shape how individuals interpret their social and professional positioning. Reflecting on his work with young black boys, Kai also commented on the complexities of adultification and some of the challenges with this:

When we think about some of the challenges in the schools that I work in, in particular around kind of like expectations around young black boys and adultification and a lot of the things that we know kind of are negative and are happening. I feel like actually in terms of me being a man, I would say there are things that much outweigh that around my understanding and how I would make sense of that experience, that actually, you know, that would trump that quite a lot (Kai, FG2).

Here racial dynamics are positioned as more significant than gender in shaping how particular experiences are understood within educational contexts. This reflection highlights how multiple systems of inequality intersect and shape professional interpretation.

This subtheme has highlighted the importance of viewing masculinity through an intersectional lens, as it is deeply entangled with many other aspects of identity for male EPs. Masculine identity is continually negotiated alongside other social identities

within the wider context of professional and social life, in ways that shape both understanding and professional interaction.

4.9 Summary of Findings

Across the four themes, masculinity emerged as a complex and contextually negotiated aspect of professional identity for male EPs. Focus group conversations illustrate how masculinity moved between visibility and invisibility within everyday practice, becoming situationally noticeable within institutional and relational contexts. Once visible, masculinity was frequently regulated and adapted to maintain relational safety and professional credibility. At the same time, participants described occupying a paradoxical position within the profession, experiencing numerical minority status while also recognising that masculinity could carry forms of organisational legitimacy, cultural expectation, and symbolic value. Finally, participants engaged in reflexive discussions about masculinity itself, questioning dominant scripts and constructing alternative understandings grounded in relational, ethical, and intersectional perspectives.

Taken together, these findings illuminate both how male EPs experience gender within the profession and how they navigate masculinity as part of their professional identity. Masculinity appears not as a fixed characteristic but as a dynamic and relationally negotiated aspect of professional life, shaped through everyday interactions, institutional contexts, and wider cultural discourses around gender. The following chapter considers these findings in relation to existing literature on masculinity, professional identity, and men in female dominated professions.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents an interpretative discussion of the study's findings in relation to the research questions: '*What are male Educational Psychologists' experiences of being male within the profession?*' and '*How do male Educational Psychologists navigate their own professional identity and masculinity when in role?*'. The chapter begins by drawing together the key findings to establish the central analytic direction of the discussion. A series of interconnected themes are then explored which are situated in relation to existing literature on masculinity, male experiences, and professional identity. Reflexive commentary is included in each theme, and particular attention is given to how this study extends current understandings through its focus on interactional, co-constructed data.

Subsequent sections consider the methodological contribution of the study, implications for Educational Psychology practice and the wider profession, and the reflexive, ethical, and practical considerations arising from the research are also explored. The chapter concludes by outlining the study's strengths and limitations, directions for future research, and its overall contribution to understanding gender, masculinity, and professional identity within the EP profession.

5.2 Developing the Analytic Argument

The previous chapter presented four themes that together gave an interpretative account of how male EPs experience and navigate their professional identity and masculinity within the profession. Rather than restating these themes, this final section draws them together to establish the central analytic argument informing

the discussion, that masculinity within Educational Psychology is best understood as dynamic, relational, and reflexively negotiated.

Across the findings, masculinity appeared to operate through a series of interrelated tensions. It was both backgrounded and made visible, individually experienced and socially constructed, a potential source of professional value, and a site of regulation or discomfort. These tensions resist a simplified account of male EPs as either marginalised within a female-dominated profession or advantaged by broader gendered structures. Instead, masculinity is constructed as ambivalent, shaped through the interaction between professional context, relational expectations, and wider socio-cultural discourse.

The discussion therefore moves beyond a descriptive account of themes to consider what these patterns of meaning contribute conceptually, methodologically, and professionally in relation to existing literature explored in the previous sections. In doing so, it addresses the research questions by exploring male EP's experiences, including how masculinity is constructed, managed, and made meaningful within professional interactions. This provides the foundation for situating the findings within existing literature and considering the implications for Educational Psychology practice and the wider profession.

5.3 Reconstructing Masculinity as Situational and Relational in EP Practice

The findings suggest that masculinity within Educational Psychology is not experienced as a stable or consistently salient aspect of identity, but as something that becomes visible and meaningful in specific relational and contextual moments. Participants' experiences illustrated how masculinity often receded into the background of everyday professional practice, operating as an ambient awareness

rather than a defining feature of identity. However, this relative invisibility was disrupted in certain contexts, such as early years settings or interactions shaped by heightened gendered expectations, where participant's maleness became more noticeable and open to interpretation. In this sense, masculinity appeared to be situationally activated rather than continuously present. This aligns with previous research which found gender visibility to be dependent on environment and context (Wright, 2024).

This interpretation aligns with broader conceptualisations of masculinity as plural, fluid, and context-dependent (Anderson, 2009; Connell, 1995; Messerschmidt, 2018). It also reflects further findings within the literature review, where masculinity was consistently constructed as contingent and negotiated rather than fixed (Francis, 2008; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2012). However, the present study extends this body of work by highlighting the interactional nature of this variability. Rather than masculinity simply shifting across contexts, participants' accounts suggested that masculinity was actively constructed through relational processes, including how others responded to them, the expectations embedded within settings, and the dynamics of professional interaction. Masculinity, therefore, was not only context-dependent but also co-constructed within the social and relational spaces of EP practice.

This relational construction is particularly salient within Educational Psychology as a profession characterised by interpersonal engagement, emotional attunement, and systemic collaboration (Fomicheva, 2025). Within such contexts, masculinity appeared to become meaningful not in isolation, but through interaction with colleagues, children, families, and wider professional systems. Participants' reflections suggested that being male could carry different meanings depending on who they were with, how they were perceived, and what was expected of them within that

interaction. This supports a social constructionist understanding of identity as produced through discourse where masculinity is continuously negotiated rather than fixed (Burr, 2015). This is particularly significant within Educational Psychology, where consultation, collaboration, and systemic engagement are central to practice. The findings therefore suggest that masculinity is not simply brought into EP work, but actively produced through the relational processes that are integral to the profession.

These interactional dynamics can be further understood through positioning theory, which conceptualises identity as co-constructed through discourse and relational exchange (Davies & Harré, 1990). Within this framework, participants are not simply expressing a pre-existing identity, but are actively positioned, and position themselves, within professional interactions. Accounts of anticipating how one might be perceived, adjusting behaviour accordingly, and responding to subtle cues from others suggest that masculinity is negotiated within the dynamic relational field of Educational Psychology, where meaning is continuously shaped through interaction rather than individually determined.

Importantly, the situational visibility of masculinity also appeared to be shaped by the gendered nature of the professional context itself. Within a predominantly female EP workforce, masculinity was not always immediately relevant, yet could become salient in moments where difference was highlighted. This reflects existing literature on men in female dominated professions, where gender is often constructed as both backgrounded and made visible depending on context (Cross & Bagilhole, 2002; Wright, 2024). However, the present findings suggest that this visibility is not merely a function of demographic difference, but is actively produced through interaction, expectation, and interpretation. In this sense, masculinity operates as a

relational phenomenon that emerges through how individuals are positioned by others and within broader professional discourse.

Reflexively, engaging with the focus groups prompted consideration of how my own positioning as a male TEP shaped my sensitivity to moments where masculinity became visible or relevant. As outlined in the introduction section, I have experienced similar fluctuations in the salience of my gender in professional practice, at times feeling it recede into the background, and other times becoming acutely aware of how I may be perceived within different professional contexts. This reflexive awareness does not suggest equivalence between my experience and those of participants, but highlights how my engagement with the data was shaped by a shared orientation to masculinity as something that is not always present, but becomes meaningful in specific relational moments.

To summarise, this first theme suggests that masculinity within Educational Psychology is best understood as a situationally activated and relationally constructed aspect of identity. Rather than being a fixed or stable characteristic, masculinity emerges through interaction, shaped by context, perception, and professional dynamics. In contrast to studies that conceptualise masculinity as shifting across contexts, the present findings suggest that masculinity is actively produced throughout interactions, rather than simply adapted to it. This highlights the importance of examining how gender is made meaningful within the everyday relational practice of the profession.

5.4 Regulating Masculinity Within Relational Practice

Within the relational context of Educational Psychology, masculinity is not only situationally activated but also actively regulated. Participants' experiences across the

focus groups illustrated how being male within a profession characterised by emotional attunement, collaboration, and relational sensitivity involved ongoing monitoring of how their masculinity was expressed. Rather than being enacted freely, masculinity appeared to be carefully managed in response to perceived expectations, relational dynamics, and the potential consequences of being misinterpreted.

This process of regulation is consistent with existing literature describing forms of 'gender work' within female dominated professions. Simpson (2004) conceptualises this as the active management of identity to maintain alignment with dominant constructions of masculinity, while Cross and Bagilhole (2002) highlight how men may reconstruct or soften masculinity in ways that remain professionally acceptable. Similarly, Schaub (2022) identifies how male practitioners regulate communication, emotional expression, and physical presence to avoid being perceived as dominant, inappropriate, or threatening. Harris and Mahalik (2025) also found that gay or bisexual men experience pressure to distance themselves from heterosexual norms of masculinity. The present findings resonate strongly with this literature, as some male EPs commented on softening their masculinity in relational contexts to avoid appearing dominant or overpowering. Others went further and said they would regularly 'camp it up' to appear less threatening. This suggests that masculinity is continually adjusted and reconfigured in response to contextual demands, in line with previous research.

Research has also shown that men in female dominated professions regularly conform to the communication expectations of the workplace (McDowell, 2015). The present study aligns with and extends this understanding by highlighting the anticipatory nature of the regulation of masculinity. Participants described adapting their behaviour in response to explicit feedback or past experience, and having more

conversations around 'banter' when they were with other men. They also reflected on regulating their masculinity in advance of interactions, based on assumptions about how they might be perceived. This aligns with findings from Schaub (2022), where masculinity is constructed as potentially risky, but also adds further nuance by suggesting that this risk is not only experienced but anticipated, shaping behaviour before interaction occurs. This represents a subtle but important extension of existing literature, suggesting that masculinity is not only regulated in response to experience, but proactively managed through anticipated positioning within relational contexts. Masculinity therefore appeared to function as an internalised regulatory framework, guiding how participants positioned themselves within professional encounters.

This anticipatory regulation can be further understood in relation to institutional and discursive expectations. Mills et al. (2008) describe how professional contexts can construct an imaginary male practitioner associated with authority and control, shaping expectations regardless of individual preference. Similarly, Roulston and Mills (2000) highlight how masculinity is often linked to behavioural management and authority within educational contexts, and Simpson (2004) found that male teachers in their study were regularly positioned as competent, and able to manage behaviour. Within the present study, participants' accounts resonated with these findings in the literature. They showed an awareness of these broader expectations, which informed how they managed their presence to avoid being positioned in ways that felt misaligned with the relational ethos of EP practice.

At the same time, the findings support literature suggesting that masculinity within professional contexts is not only regulated but flexibly enacted. McDowell and Klattenberg (2019) demonstrated that practitioners draw on a range of communicative styles that are not fixed by gender, while Himerich (2019) suggests that masculinity

may be positioned as peripheral to professional identity. However, the current findings complicate this by suggesting that even where masculinity is backgrounded, it remains implicitly present and subject to ongoing monitoring. Regulation, therefore, operates not only when masculinity is visible, but also in maintaining its relative invisibility.

Importantly, this regulatory process was not just constructed as constraining. In line with Cross and Bagilhole's (2002) findings, participants described forms of adaptability that enabled effective relational practice, suggesting that the capacity to regulate aspects of masculinity may function as a professional resource. However, the need for continuous monitoring also points to the additional layer of identity work required of male practitioners, reinforcing the argument that masculinity remains an active and effortful component of professional identity within feminised contexts.

This pattern of adaptive identity work can also be understood in relation to broader literature on identity performance and negotiation within professional contexts (Davies & Harré, 1990). Participants' accounts of modifying communication style, emotional expression, and relational stance in anticipation of how they might be perceived resonate with processes often described as identity work, in which individuals actively manage aspects of self-presentation to align with situational expectations. While not explicitly framed in these terms within the present study, such accounts also bear resemblance to concepts such as code-switching, whereby individuals adjust their behaviour in response to perceived social norms. From a social constructionist perspective, however, these shifts are understood not simply as strategic performances, but as relationally constituted processes emerging through interaction, expectation, and context (Burr, 2015).

The use of humour and informal interaction across the focus groups also resonates with existing literature on masculinity as constructed through everyday social practices. Research has highlighted how banter and humour can function as socially permissible ways for men to establish connection, negotiate identity, and express aspects of emotional experience within peer contexts (Francis & Skelton, 2001). Within the present study, such interactions appeared to provide a relational space in which masculinity could be engaged with more flexibly, suggesting that informal discourse may play a role in enabling alternative or less constrained expressions of masculine identity within professional environments.

Reflexively, this theme resonated strongly with my own experience of navigating masculinity within Educational Psychology. The underlying question reflected in participants' accounts '*Am I too much?*' captures a form of internal monitoring that I have recognised within my own professional development. As outlined in the introduction, I have experienced moments where my presence has been interpreted through assumptions of authority, confidence, or emotional restraint, prompting a similar process of adjustment and self-regulation. When engaging with the focus group data, I became increasingly aware of how my analytic attention may have been drawn towards moments of softening, adaptation, and restraint, shaped by a shared sensitivity to how masculinity is received within relational contexts. This reflexive positioning highlights how the analysis itself is embedded within the same processes of negotiation that it seeks to interpret.

The findings across this second theme suggest that masculinity for men within the field of Educational Psychology operates as an ongoing site of regulation, shaped by relational expectations, institutional norms, and anticipatory positioning. Rather than being a fixed identity to be expressed, masculinity is actively managed in ways

that both enable and constrain professional practice. This extends existing literature by highlighting the continuous, anticipatory, and relational nature of this regulation, highlighting masculinity as a dynamic and actively negotiated component of professional identity within EP practice.

5.5 The Paradox of Minority Status and Structural Male Advantage

Alongside masculinity being situationally activated and regulated, the findings also suggest that male EPs occupy a complex and, at times, contradictory position within the profession, characterised by both experiences of marginality and forms of structural advantage. Participants illustrated how being male within a predominantly female workforce could generate a heightened sense of visibility, difference, and, in some cases, scrutiny. At the same time, these experiences co-existed with perceptions that being male could afford authority, credibility, or symbolic value within professional contexts. Masculinity, therefore, appeared to function as both a marker of minority status and a resource associated with broader gendered structures of advantage.

This apparent paradox reflects existing literature on men in female dominated professions, where male practitioners are often described as occupying ambivalent positions. Research has highlighted how men may experience marginality in terms of representation and belonging, while simultaneously benefiting from forms of privilege linked to hegemonic constructions of masculinity (Cross & Bagilhole, 2002; Williams, 1992). As mentioned in the introduction section, within educational and caring professions, this has been conceptualised through notions such as the glass escalator where men are disproportionately positioned for progression or leadership (Williams, 1992). The present findings resonate with these accounts, with participants describing

ways in which their gender could be associated with authority or influence within professional systems.

However, this study also extends this existing research by demonstrating how experiences of marginality and advantage are not separate or sequential, but are instead co-constructed and experienced simultaneously within interaction. Participants frequently suggested that moments of visibility as a minority, such as being one of few men within a team, could occur alongside an awareness of how masculinity might carry implicit authority or expectation. This dual positioning highlights how masculinity operates not simply as a source of power or disadvantage, but as an ambivalent and contextually contingent phenomenon shaped by both relational dynamics and wider structural discourse.

This ambivalence can be further understood in relation to dominant constructions of masculinity within wider society. Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity highlights how certain forms of masculinity are culturally associated with authority, competence, and leadership, even when individuals do not actively identify with or seek to embody these traits. Focus group reflections suggested an awareness of these broader associations, which appeared to shape how participants were perceived by others and how they positioned themselves within professional interactions. In this sense, masculinity functioned not only as an individual identity, but as a socially embedded construct that carries meaning beyond the individual. It also functions as a form of latent professional power, which is both conferred and constrained within relational contexts. This suggests that hegemonic masculinity continues to operate within female dominated professions, not through overt dominance, but through subtle assumptions of authority and competence that shape how male practitioners are perceived.

At the same time, participants also described an awareness of the potential risks associated with this positioning. Masculinity was not uniformly experienced as advantageous, but could also be associated with concerns about being misinterpreted, particularly in relational or emotionally sensitive contexts. This aligns with literature suggesting that masculinity within caring professions may be constructed as potentially problematic or in need of regulation (Schaub, 2022; Simpson, 2004). The present findings extend this by illustrating how these perceptions intersect with structural advantage, creating a dynamic in which masculinity is simultaneously associated with authority yet subject to scrutiny.

This anticipatory regulation can also be understood in relation to broader discussions of implicit assumptions and interpretive frameworks within professional contexts. Participants' concern with how their contributions might be received suggests an awareness of the socially situated nature of interpretation, in which meanings are not fixed but shaped through a wider cultural and discursive lens. While the present study does not adopt an explicit framework of unconscious bias, these accounts highlight how taken-for-granted assumptions about gender and masculinity may shape what is heard, legitimised, or problematised within professional dialogue.

The paradoxical positioning explored in this theme was particularly evident in how participants described navigating expectations and assumptions within professional roles. Participants reflected on aspects of intersectionality, including assumptions made about them in relation to race, ethnicity, and social class. For some, this included recognising similar dynamics within educational contexts, particularly in relation to the adultification of black boys, aligning with previous research by Cooke and Halberstadt (2021). Participants also described implicit expectations linked to masculinity, such as being perceived as confident, authoritative, or occupying a higher

social class position than they identified with personally. In response, participants often reflected on the need to resist, soften, or distance themselves from these assumptions to align more closely with the relational ethos of EP practice and a sense of professional authenticity. This reflects broader tensions identified within the literature between dominant masculine norms and the values of caring professions (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2012). The present findings suggest that these tensions are not resolved, but actively negotiated within everyday professional interactions.

Reflexively, this theme prompted consideration of how I have also been positioned when in role as a TEP. As noted in the introduction, I have experienced being identified as a potential role model or authority figure within professional contexts, despite not always identifying with these expectations myself. At the same time, I have been aware of moments where my gender has felt more visible or uncertain, particularly in relational consultation work where sensitivity and attunement are key. Engaging with the focus group transcripts highlighted how such experiences are not contradictory, but reflective of the broader ambivalence through which masculinity operates within the profession for others too.

Taken together, these findings suggest that masculinity within Educational Psychology is characterised by a paradoxical interplay between minority status and structural advantage. Rather than being experienced as either marginalising or empowering, masculinity operates as an ambivalent and context-dependent resource that is shaped by both interpersonal interactions and wider gendered structures. This extends existing literature by focusing on the simultaneous and relational nature of this positioning, alongside the importance of understanding masculinity as both socially embedded and interactionally negotiated within professional practice.

5.6 Reflexive and Reconstructed Masculinities

The final theme presents masculinity within EP practice as not only enacted and regulated by participants, but also actively questioned and redefined. Focus group conversations demonstrated a high degree of reflexive engagement with masculinity, often involving reflection on dominant gendered expectations and the development of alternative ways of understanding and performing masculinity within professional contexts. Rather than positioning masculinity as a fixed or taken-for-granted identity, participants constructed it as open to interpretation, negotiation, and change.

This reflexive engagement aligns with masculinity research that emphasises plurality and the diversification of masculine identities (Anderson, 2009; Connell, 1995). Anderson's (2009) concept of inclusive masculinity highlights the emergence of more emotionally expressive and relationally oriented forms of masculinity, which move away from traditional associations with dominance and emotional restriction. Similarly, Messerschmidt (2018) conceptualises masculinity as something that is accomplished in interaction, allowing for variation and adaptation across contexts. The present findings resonate with these perspectives, with participants often articulating forms of masculinity that emphasised care, openness, and relational sensitivity.

Participants built on and extended these masculinity theories, as they did not simply embody alternative masculinities, instead they actively engaged in questioning what masculinity meant to them, how it should be expressed, and how it related to their professional identity. In this sense, masculinity was not only experienced, but also theorised by participants within the focus group discussions. This aligns with a social constructionist understanding of knowledge as produced through dialogue, where participants do not simply describe experience but actively construct meaning through

interaction (Burr, 2015). This reflexive engagement suggests that masculinity operates as an ongoing site of meaning-making, rather than a set of predefined roles or characteristics.

This process of reconstruction can also be understood in relation to tension identified within the literature between dominant masculine norms and the values of caring professions. Research has shown that men within relational fields often negotiate expectations to both conform to and resist traditional masculinities (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2012; Simpson, 2004). The present findings support this and further suggest that this negotiation is not only behavioural, but conceptual too. Participants appeared to engage in a form of identity work that involved redefining masculinity in ways that aligned with the relational, ethical, and collaborative demands of EP practice.

Importantly, this reconstruction did not result in a singular or unified understanding of masculinity. Instead, participants' accounts reflected plurality and, at times, uncertainty, with different interpretations co-existing within and across discussions. This supports social constructionist perspectives that position identity as multiple, fluid, and contextually situated (Burr, 2015). Therefore, masculinity emerged not as a coherent construct, but as something that is continuously reworked through interaction, shaped by individual experiences and wider socio-cultural discourse.

A particularly significant feature of this theme is reflected in the rhetorical structure of the overall findings themselves. The framing of themes as questions '*Can you see me?*', '*Am I too much?*', '*How far can I go?*', and '*What is masculinity?*' capture the uncertainty, negotiation, and reflexivity evident across the experiences shared. These questions do not simply represent thematic labels, rather they reflect an

underlying process of inquiry through which masculinity is explored and understood. In engaging with these themes, I became aware of how these questions also resonated with my own experiences of navigating masculinity, both personally and professionally. They are questions that I have found myself asking at different points in my own professional and personal development, particularly within relational and professional contexts.

This reflexive recognition highlights the co-constructed nature of the analytic process. Rather than suggesting that the findings reflect a shared or universal experience, it evidences how my positioning as a male TEP shaped my engagement with the data and the direction that the analysis took. The prominence of these questions within the themes can therefore be understood not only as reflective of participants' accounts, but also as shaped by an analytic sensitivity to masculinity as an ongoing internal dialogue for me as a reflexive researcher.

In summary, the findings suggest that masculinity within Educational Psychology is not simply enacted or regulated, but actively interrogated and re-conceptualised by male EPs. This extends existing literature by focusing on the reflexive dimension of masculinity, highlighting how individuals engage with, question, and reshape gendered identities in relation to their professional roles. Masculinity, therefore, emerges as a dynamic and evolving construct, characterised by plurality, uncertainty, and ongoing negotiation within both social interaction and personal reflection.

5.7 Methodological Contribution

The present study offers a methodological contribution to the existing literature on masculinity within professional contexts through its use of focus groups and RTA

within a social constructionist framework. As identified within the literature review, much of the existing research exploring masculinity in caring, relational, and educational professions has relied on interview-based methodologies. While such approaches have provided valuable insights, they are limited in their capacity to capture how masculinity is negotiated, contested, and co-constructed within interaction.

By contrast, the use of focus groups in this study enabled the generation of interactional data, through which participants responded to, built upon, and at times challenged each other's experiences. This created a space in which meanings were not only expressed but actively negotiated, allowing for the exploration of how masculinity was constructed in relation to others rather than articulated in isolation. The findings demonstrated how participants' understandings of masculinity shifted, developed, and, in some cases, became more tentative or reflexive through dialogue with the group. This highlights the value of focus groups for examining masculinity as a social and relational phenomenon, aligning with the study's epistemological position that knowledge is produced through interaction and shared meaning-making (Burr, 2015).

In addition, the use of RTA facilitated an interpretative and flexible engagement with the data, allowing for the identification of patterns of meaning that extended beyond surface-level description. As Braun and Clarke (2022) emphasise, RTA positions themes as actively constructed by the researcher, rather than discovered within the data. This was particularly important within the current study, where the aim was not to produce a singular account of masculinity, but to explore its complexity, ambiguity, and multiplicity. The analytic process therefore involved engaging with

tensions, contradictions, and uncertainties within the dataset, rather than seeking to resolve or reduce them.

A key methodological contribution of this study lies in the combination of these approaches, which enabled masculinity to be examined as both interactionally produced and reflexively interpreted. The focus group context revealed how masculinity was negotiated in real time, while RTA allowed for a deeper exploration of how these interactions could be understood within broader social and professional contexts. This dual focus moves beyond approaches that treat masculinity as either an individual psychological construct or a fixed social category, instead positioning it as something that is continuously constructed through both interaction and interpretation.

Furthermore, the practitioner-researcher positioning adopted within this study contributed to the depth and nuance of the analysis. My insider status facilitated rapport and openness within the focus groups, while also shaping the interpretative lens through which the data was understood. As discussed in previous sections, this positioning informed my sensitivity to particular patterns of meaning, including the reflexive questioning and regulation of masculinity. In line with social constructionist principles, this is not viewed as a source of bias to be minimised, but as an integral component of the knowledge production process (Burr, 2015).

The methodological approach adopted in this study therefore extends existing research by demonstrating the value of examining masculinity as an interactional, relational, and reflexively constructed phenomenon. By combining focus group methodology with RTA, the study offers a framework for exploring how masculinities are not only described, but actively negotiated and made meaningful within

professional contexts. This contributes to a more nuanced and dynamic understanding of masculinity, which is more aligned with contemporary social constructionist perspectives.

Overall, this study contributes to existing literature in five key ways. First, it extends conceptualisations of masculinity as context-dependent by demonstrating how masculinity is actively co-constructed within interaction. Second, it highlights the anticipatory nature of masculine regulation, whereby practitioners manage their identity in advance of interaction based on expected positioning. Third, it reconceptualises men's experiences in female dominated professions as a simultaneous and relational paradox of marginality and privilege. Fourth, it foregrounds masculinity as a discursively sensitive and morally negotiated topic within professional contexts. Finally, it demonstrates the methodological value of focus groups in capturing masculinity as a dialogic and interactional phenomenon.

These contributions also connect with broader literature on positioning, identity work, code-switching, and interactional constructions of masculinity (Davies & Harré, 1990), suggesting that the findings may be understood through multiple complementary theoretical lenses while remaining grounded in the study's social constructionist and reflexive analytic approach.

5.8 Implications for the EP Profession

The findings of this study have several implications for Educational Psychology practice and the wider profession, particularly in relation to how gender and masculinity are understood, reflected upon, and engaged with within relational work. Across the dataset, masculinity was constructed as a situational, regulated, and reflexively negotiated aspect of professional identity. This suggests that gender is not

simply a background characteristic of male EPs, but an active and dynamic component of how they position themselves within interactions. As such, there is value in creating spaces within the profession where gender, and masculinity in particular, can be openly considered as part of professional development and reflective practice.

One key implication relates to the role of reflexivity within the profession. The findings demonstrated that participants were already engaging in forms of self-reflexive questioning around masculinity, often navigating tensions around visibility, regulation, and expectation. This suggests that reflective group spaces, such as supervision, peer support spaces, or training contexts, could be used more explicitly to explore how gender shapes professional identity and relational dynamics. Integrating discussions of masculinity into these spaces may support EPs to develop a more conscious and articulated understanding of how identity is experienced within their work, aligning with the profession's emphasis on reflective and relational practice.

A further implication concerns the relational demands of the EP role and the way in which masculinity is regulated within different contexts. Experiences shared within the study suggested that being male within a predominantly female profession often involved adapting communication styles, emotional expression, and interpersonal presence to align with relational expectations. While this adaptability can be understood as a form of professional competence, the findings also indicate that it may involve an additional layer of identity work. Recognising this dynamic may be important for supervision and training, where attention can be given to how EPs manage aspects of identity within their work, rather than assuming a neutral or uniform professional stance.

These implications take on additional significance when situated within the wider sociocultural landscape outlined in the introduction section. Contemporary discourse suggests that boys and young men are navigating increasingly complex and, at times, contradictory messages around masculinity, identity, and belonging (CSJ, 2025). Public debates, including those surrounding the ‘manosphere’, highlight how masculinity is often constructed through polarised narratives, ranging from dominance and emotional restriction to more relational and emotionally expressive alternatives (Ribeiro, 2025). Within this context, Educational Psychology as a profession occupies a distinctive position. As a relational, reflective, and emotionally attuned field, the EP profession can offer an alternative space in which masculinity and what ‘being a man’ means can be experienced and understood differently.

Importantly, this does not position male EPs as inherently necessary or uniquely suited to working with boys or young men. Rather, the findings suggest that when men are present within the profession, they may become symbolically and relationally positioned in ways that are meaningful within broader gendered discourse. For some children and young people, encountering a male professional who engages in emotionally attuned, reflective, and collaborative work with them may expand the range of masculinities or job roles perceived as possible or legitimate. In this sense, male EPs may contribute to disrupting more restrictive constructions of masculinity and what it means to be a man, not through intentional role modelling, but through the everyday enactment of relational practice.

This has relevance considering the patterns highlighted in the Lost Boys report, where disparities in attainment, exclusion, and later outcomes are understood as connected to broader issues of belonging, identity, and value (CSJ, 2025). While such patterns cannot be reduced to the presence or absence of male professionals, they

do point to the importance of considering how gendered identities are constructed and encountered within educational systems. EPs, regardless of gender, play a role in shaping these systems through consultation, formulation, and relational work. Therefore, the presence of diverse masculinities within the profession may contribute to a broader cultural shift in how masculinity is understood within educational contexts.

The findings also have implications for how the profession understands and engages with gender diversity within the workforce. The paradoxical positioning of male EPs as both a minority and beneficiary of broader gendered structures highlights the complexity of gender within professional contexts. Efforts to increase diversity within the profession, including the recruitment and retention of male EPs, may therefore benefit from acknowledging this complexity rather than framing gender solely in terms of representation. This includes recognising both the potential challenges and the structural advantages associated with masculinity, and how these may shape professional experience and opportunity.

At a broader professional level, the findings suggest a need for increased dialogue around gender and masculinity within Educational Psychology. While issues of EDI are regularly considered in relation to other aspects of intersectionality, gender and masculinity often receive less explicit attention. The present study indicates that masculinity remains a relevant and active dimension of professional identity, even when it is not overtly discussed. Creating opportunities for professional conversations around masculinity, including how it intersects with other aspects of identity, will support a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of experiences in the profession.

Finally, the findings highlight the potential value of recognising masculinity as a resource within EP practice, rather than solely as something to be managed or

minimised. Participants suggested that aspects of masculinity, such as perceived authority or presence, could at times support engagement and influence within professional contexts. Facilitating opportunities for EPs to reflect on how different aspects of identity, including masculinity, can be used constructively within relational work will enhance both individual practice and systemic impact.

These implications suggest that masculinity should be understood as an active and reflexively negotiated component of Educational Psychology practice, with relevance for supervision, training, workforce development, and professional dialogue. By engaging more explicitly with gender as part of professional identity, the profession will be better positioned to respond to the relational and sociocultural complexities shaping both practitioners and the children and young people they support.

5.9 Dissemination Strategy

The findings of this study have relevance for multiple audiences, including current EPs, the wider EP profession, and related professional communities. In line with the applied and practitioner-focused nature of the research, dissemination will prioritise accessibility, relevance, and opportunities for reflection within professional contexts.

Firstly, a summary of the findings will be shared with participants who contributed to the focus groups. This will outline the key themes and conclusions from the study. Providing this feedback recognises participants' contributions and offers an opportunity for continued reflection on the topic explored, particularly in relation to masculinity, professional identity, and relational practice.

At a service level, I hope to disseminate my findings within my current LA service through a presentation or facilitated discussion. This will provide opportunities

to engage EP colleagues in dialogue around gender, masculinity, and professional identity, drawing on the study's findings to support reflective practice. Given the relational and systemic nature of EP work, such discussions will be particularly valuable within supervision groups, team meetings, or professional development sessions.

I will be presenting my research findings with the current Educational Psychology staff and students at the Tavistock in July 2026 as part of our end of year celebration day. I am also part of the BPS Male Psychology group, and hope to present my research in the future at their annual conference. Presenting the findings within these contexts will enable engagement with broader professional audiences and contribute to ongoing conversations around workforce diversity, professional identity, masculinity, and the role of gender within Educational Psychology.

Finally, I hope to disseminate my work through publication in a peer-reviewed journal relevant to Educational Psychology or applied qualitative research. This would support the wider dissemination of the study's findings beyond the immediate professional context, contributing to the academic literature on masculinity and professional identity within caring and relational professions.

5.10 Reflexive Commentary

This study has been shaped throughout by my positioning as a male TEP researching the experiences of male EPs currently practicing within the profession. As outlined throughout, my insider-outsider position influenced both the generation of the data and the interpretative process. In revisiting this positioning within the discussion, I recognise more explicitly how my own experiences of navigating masculinity have

not only informed my engagement with the topic, but also shaped the form and direction of the analytic outcomes.

A particularly significant reflexive insight emerged following the development of the themes, during reflection within supervision. I became aware that the rhetorical structure of the themes '*Can you see me?*', '*Am I too much?*', '*How far can I go?*', and '*What is masculinity?*' resonated strongly with my own personal and professional experiences of masculinity. These questions were not only reflective of participants' accounts, but also mirrored internal questions that I have found myself asking at different stages of my own development, both growing up and within my EP training. This recognition prompted a shift in my understanding of the analytic process, from viewing themes as solely derived from the data to understanding them as co-constructed through an interaction between participants' accounts and my own reflexive engagement.

I am not suggesting here that the findings represent a shared or universal experience of masculinity, nor that my experiences are equivalent to those of participants. Rather, it highlights how my analytic attention may have been drawn towards patterns of meaning that held both personal and professional significance. In line with RTA, this subjectivity is not positioned as a source of bias to be eliminated, but as an integral component of knowledge production (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The prominence of these questions within the themes can therefore be understood as reflecting both the data and my sensitivity to masculinity as an ongoing internal and relational negotiation.

Engaging in this research has also influenced my awareness of masculinity within my own professional practice. I have become increasingly aware of how my

gender is positioned within consultations and interactions with school staff and colleagues, and how this may shape both my own behaviour and the responses of others. This includes a heightened sensitivity to moments where my own masculinity becomes more visible, as well as an awareness of how I may regulate aspects of my communication, presence, or emotional expression within relational contexts. Therefore, the research process has not only generated knowledge about masculinity within Educational Psychology, it has also contributed to my own ongoing reflexive development as a relational practitioner.

At the same time, my positioning may also have influenced the dynamics of the focus groups themselves. As a male facilitator, I may have contributed to a sense of shared identity that enabled participants to speak more openly about their experiences, particularly in relation to gender. This shared positioning may have shaped the direction of discussions, including the type of examples shared and the ways in which masculinity was collectively constructed within the group. This highlights the inherently co-constructed nature of focus group data, where meaning emerges through interaction between participants and researcher, rather than existing independently.

In summary, this study has reinforced the importance of reflexivity as an ongoing and embedded practice, rather than a discrete stage within the research process. The insights generated, both analytic and personal, emerged through continual reflection on my own assumptions, experiences, and responses to the data, including moments of resonance, discomfort, and uncertainty that shaped both the analysis and the claims made. In this sense, the findings are not neutral or detached representations of masculinity, but situated, relational, and co-constructed. My positioning has enabled and shaped the knowledge produced, contributing to an

analysis that highlights masculinity as dynamic, negotiated, and reflexively experienced. The research process therefore mirrors the phenomenon it seeks to explore, with masculinity emerging not as a fixed construct, but as something continually questioned, interpreted, and redefined within professional practice and research.

5.11 Strengths and Limitations

This study offers several strengths, particularly in relation to its methodological alignment and the depth of insight generated into male experience and masculinity within Educational Psychology. At the same time, there are important limitations that shape how the findings should be understood and applied. In line with the study's relativist and social constructionist positioning, limitations are not framed in terms of validity or generalisability, but as contextual considerations that inform the scope and interpretation of the research.

A key strength of the study lies in its use of focus groups to generate interactional data. As discussed in the methodology, this approach enabled the exploration of how masculinity was constructed, negotiated, and contested in real time, rather than relying solely on retrospective accounts. The group-based format facilitated dialogue, comparison, and challenge between participants, allowing for the emergence of complexity, tension, and reflexivity within the data. This was particularly valuable given the study's focus on masculinity as a relational and socially constructed phenomenon, as it aligned closely with the epistemological stance underpinning the research.

A further strength is the use of RTA, which facilitated an in-depth and interpretative engagement with the data. The analytic process supported the

exploration of ambiguity, contradiction, and multiplicity across the experiences of participants, developing interesting and engaging themes rather than reducing the data to fixed or simplified topic summaries. This was evident in the development of themes that captured both relational and evolving dimensions of masculinity, as well as the reflexive consideration of how the analysis itself was shaped. The integration of a reflexive diary and ongoing supervisory discussions also supported transparency in how analytic decisions were made and developed over time, contributing to the study's commitment to rigour.

The practitioner-researcher positioning adopted within this study can also be understood as a strength. As a male TEP, my insider status facilitated rapport with participants and may have supported openness in discussions relating to masculinity. This positioning also enabled a nuanced and contextually grounded interpretation of the data, informed by an understanding of the relational and systemic nature of EP practice from personal experience. However, as discussed in the reflexive commentary, this positioning also shaped the analytic process, influencing both the focus of the analysis and the meanings constructed.

Alongside these strengths, limitations should also be acknowledged. The sample was relatively small ($n=14$) and included male EPs who had chosen to participate in a study explicitly focused on masculinity and professional identity. It is therefore possible that participants held a particular interest in, or willingness to engage with the study topics, which may not reflect the perspectives of all male EPs across the profession. In addition, while the sample included participants from different regions in the country, the absence of representation from certain ethnicities and age groups, particularly black men and those aged 45–64, may have limited the range of perspectives captured. This may reflect a form of self-selection or recruitment bias, as

individuals with different ethnic backgrounds or at different career stages may have engaged differently with research of this nature.

The use of focus groups, while a strength in many respects, also introduces considerations. The group context may have influenced how participants chose to present their experiences, including the possibility of aligning with or responding to dominant narratives within the discussion. While this interactional dynamic was central to the study's design and analytic focus, it also means that the data reflects co-constructed accounts rather than individual perspectives in isolation. Additionally, the presence of myself as facilitator may have shaped the direction and tone of participant discussion, particularly given the shared gender identity present.

The interpretative nature of RTA means that the findings represent one possible account of the data, shaped by my analytic perspective and positioning. Rather than aiming for objectivity or replication, the study offers a situated and reflexively constructed interpretation of masculinity within Educational Psychology. As such, the findings should be understood as contributing to, rather than definitively representing, knowledge in this area.

In summary, these strengths and limitations highlight the contextual and constructed nature of the study's findings. The research offers a detailed and interpretative exploration of masculinity and professional identity within Educational Psychology, while recognising the specific conditions under which this knowledge was produced. These considerations are important in informing how the findings are understood, applied, and developed within future research.

5.12 Future Research

The findings of this study highlight several areas for future research, reflecting the complexity and contextual nature of masculinity and professional identity within Educational Psychology. In line with the study's social constructionist positioning, these directions are not intended to produce definitive accounts, but to extend understanding of how masculinity is constructed, negotiated, and experienced within professional contexts.

At a national level, further research could explore how masculinity is experienced across a broader and more diverse EP workforce. This includes examining how masculinity intersects with other aspects of identity, such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, and social class, which were not a primary focus of the present study. Given the absence of certain age groups and ethnicities, future studies may also consider how experiences of masculinity vary across career stages, generational contexts, and different cultures. Such work could contribute to a more nuanced understanding of gender within the EP profession, and inform broader discussions around workforce diversity and inclusion.

At a service level, there is scope for research examining how masculinity is understood and engaged with within specific EP services or organisational contexts. The present study suggests that masculinity is shaped by relational and systemic dynamics; therefore, exploring how different service structures, cultures, or leadership approaches influence the construction and negotiation of masculinity may provide valuable insights. This could include examining how gender is discussed within supervision, team processes, or service-level initiatives, and how these spaces support or constrain reflexive engagement with professional identity.

At a community level, future research could extend the focus beyond EPs to consider how masculinity is constructed within wider educational and professional systems. For example, exploring how teachers, Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), or other professionals experience and negotiate masculinity within relational roles may offer comparative insights and highlight shared or divergent patterns across professions. This would contribute to a broader understanding of masculinity within caring and educational contexts, situating Educational Psychology within a wider professional landscape.

At an individual level, further research could examine in greater depth the reflexive dimensions of masculinity identified within this study. The findings suggest that masculinity operates not only as a social and relational construct, but also as an ongoing internal dialogue. Future research might therefore explore how practitioners make sense of masculinity over time, including how reflexive questioning, identity development, and professional experience shape these processes. Individual interviews or longitudinal style narrative approaches may be particularly useful in capturing the evolving nature of these experiences.

Taken together, these directions suggest that future research has the potential to deepen and extend understanding of masculinity within Educational Psychology and related professions. This is particularly relevant given the present findings that highlight the relational and context-dependent nature of masculinity, and the current social and political context. By continuing to explore masculinity as a dynamic, relational, and reflexively constructed phenomenon, further research can contribute to both theoretical development and professional practice within this area.

5.13 Conclusion

This research aimed to explore male EP's experiences of being male within the profession, and how they navigate their professional identity and masculinity when in role. A relativist ontological and social constructionist epistemological position was used, and 14 male EPs were recruited across three online focus groups. RTA was used to generate four main themes:

- “Can You See Me?": The Situational Visibility of Masculinity
- “Am I Too Much?": Regulating Masculinity for Relational Safety
- “How Far Can I Go?": The Paradox of Minority Status and Male Advantage
- “What is Masculinity?": Plurality, Contestation and Reflexive Deconstruction

Whilst there is limited research specifically examining male EPs, the findings resonate with and extend existing literature on men in female dominated professions. Consistent with previous research, masculinity was constructed as fluid, negotiated, and context dependent. However, this study contributes further by demonstrating how masculinity is actively co-constructed within interaction, rather than solely retrospectively described. Across the findings, masculinity was experienced as situationally activated, carefully regulated, and reflexively questioned, highlighting its dynamic and ambivalent nature within professional practice.

The findings were discussed in relation to broader theoretical frameworks of masculinity, including hegemonic and inclusive masculinities (Anderson, 2009; Connell, 1995; Messerschmidt, 2018), alongside social constructionist understandings of identity as relationally produced (Burr, 2015). In addition, the findings were situated within the wider sociocultural context outlined in the introduction, including contemporary discourse surrounding masculinity and the experiences of boys and

young men. This contextual framing highlighted how Educational Psychology operates within a broader landscape in which masculinity is increasingly visible, contested, and negotiated.

Strengths and limitations of the study were considered, including the use of focus groups to generate interactional data, the interpretative depth afforded by RTA, and the influence of practitioner-researcher positioning. Consideration was also given to the relatively small and self-selecting sample, the co-constructed nature of focus group data, and the situated and interpretative nature of the analysis.

The implications of this research suggest that masculinity constitutes an active and reflexively negotiated component of professional identity within Educational Psychology. The findings highlight the value of creating spaces within supervision, training, and professional dialogue to explore gender and identity, as well as recognising the relational and contextual nature of masculinity within practice. Situated within a broader sociocultural landscape in which masculinity is often polarised, Educational Psychology can offer a professional space in which more relational and emotionally attuned masculinities are experienced and promoted.

The central contribution of this study lies in conceptualising masculinity within Educational Psychology as an interactionally produced, relationally negotiated, and reflexively managed process, rather than a fixed identity possessed by individuals. Future research directions include exploring masculinity across a more diverse EP workforce, examining intersectional experiences of identity, and extending into other relational professions and systemic educational contexts.

This research process has involved ongoing reflexive engagement with my own positioning as a male TEP. The development of the analytic themes highlighted the

extent to which masculinity operates not only as a topic of study, but as an ongoing internal and relational negotiation within both research and practice. This study contributes to ongoing conversations regarding gender, relational practice, and professional identity within Educational Psychology, while also highlighting the importance of creating professional spaces in which diverse masculinities can be reflected upon, negotiated, and meaningfully recognised within practice.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Checklist Table	203
Appendix B: CASP - Further Study Information	206
Appendix C: Study Mapping Table	213
Appendix D: Recruitment - EPNET Email.....	231
Appendix E: Recruitment - Email to Current and Previous LA.....	232
Appendix F: Recruitment - Email to Cohort	233
Appendix G: Recruitment - Facebook Group Post.....	234
Appendix H: Recruitment Poster	235
Appendix I: Participant Consent Form.....	236
Appendix J: Participant Demographic Information	238
Appendix K: Participant Information Sheet	241
Appendix L: Focus Group Format and Questions	244
Appendix M: Participant Debrief Leaflet	246
Appendix N: Focus Group Transcript Openings	247
Appendix O: Research Diary Extracts	259
Appendix P: Reflexive Coding Memos	260
Appendix Q: Codes - Group 1	261
Appendix R: Codes - Group 2	273
Appendix S: Codes - Group 3	281
Appendix T: Codes - Group 4	295
Appendix U: Reflexive Theme Development Memos	307
Appendix V: Ethics Approval Letter	308
Appendix W: Artificial Intelligence (AI) Declaration	309

Appendix A: Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Checklist Table

CASP Key:  = Yes  = Can't Tell  = No										
Author & Year	Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Is there a clear statement of findings?	How valuable is the research?
S1 Wright (2024)										
S2 Brownhill, Warwick, Warwick, & Brown Hajdukova (2020)										

S3 Francis (2008)	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	—	—	✓	✓	✓
S4 Roulston & Mills (2000)	✓	✓	—	—	✓	—	—	✓	✓	✓
S5 McDowell & Klattenberg (2019)	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	—	—	✓	✓	✓
S6 Murphy & Monsen (2008)	✓	—	—	✗	—	✗	✗	—	✓	✓
S7 Himerich (2019)	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	—	—	—	✓	✓
S8 Schaub (2022)	✓	—	—	—	—	✓	—	—	✓	✓
S9 Haywood & Mac an Ghaill (2012)	✓	—	—	✗	—	—	✗	—	✓	✓

S10 Mills, Haase & Charlton (2008)	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	—	—	✓	✓	✓
S11 Francis & Skelton (2001)	✓	✓	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	✓
S12 McDowell (2015)	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S13 Moskos (2020)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	✓
S14 Simpson (2004)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	—	—	✓	✓
S15 Lupton (2006)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S16 Cross & Bagilhole (2002)	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	✓

Appendix B: CASP – Further Study Information

S1 Wright (2024) Let's Hear it from Them: An Interview Based Exploration of Male Teachers' Perceptions of Gender Imbalance in the English Language Teaching Profession

A: Validity

The study clearly aims to explore how male ESL/EFL teachers perceive gender imbalance and construct professional experience. A qualitative, interpretive design is appropriately adopted, with episodic narrative interviewing generating rich, temporally situated accounts. However, recruitment through personal networks and self-selection, alongside a very small sample ($n = 3$), limits diversity. Reflexive consideration of researcher influence is acknowledged but underdeveloped.

B: Results

Ethical procedures, including consent and anonymisation, are clearly reported. Reflexive Thematic Analysis is used, and findings are clearly structured with supporting extracts. However, the analytic process is described largely procedurally, with limited reflexive engagement in theme development.

C: Value

The study contributes to an under-researched area, highlighting the ambivalent positioning of male teachers within a feminised context. While offering insight into identity negotiation, the reliance on interview data privileges retrospective accounts and limits understanding of how masculinity is co-constructed in interaction.

S2 Brownhill, Warwick, Warwick, & Brown Hajdukova (2020) - 'Role model' or 'facilitator'? Exploring male teachers' and male trainees' perceptions of the term 'role model' in England

A: Validity

The study clearly aims to explore how male primary teachers and trainees interpret the concept of the 'role model' within gendered educational discourse. A qualitative, interpretive design is appropriately adopted, with semi-structured focus groups enabling the exploration of shared and contested meanings through interaction. However, recruitment through convenience sampling resulted in a small, homogenous sample, limiting diversity. While the facilitator role is outlined, reflexive consideration of researcher influence is limited.

B: Results

Ethical procedures are clearly reported, including consent and confidentiality in line with BERA guidelines. Thematic analysis is used and findings are clearly structured with supporting extracts. However, the analytic process is described largely procedurally, with limited reflexive engagement, and includes elements that suggest a more positivist orientation.

C: Value

The study provides a valuable challenge to dominant 'male role model' discourse, offering alternative conceptualisations such as facilitation and collective role modelling. The use of focus groups is a particular strength, highlighting how

meanings are co-constructed in interaction. Despite methodological limitations, the study offers useful conceptual and methodological insight for understanding masculinity in professional contexts.

S3 Francis (2008) - Teaching manfully? Exploring gendered subjectivities and power via analysis of men teachers' gender performance

A: Validity

The study clearly aims to explore how male teachers construct and perform gendered subjectivities. A qualitative, interpretive design grounded in poststructuralist and social constructionist theory is appropriately adopted, with ethnographic observations and interviews providing rich, multi-method data. However, the focus on three selected cases from a larger dataset limits breadth, and reflexive engagement with researcher positioning is relatively limited.

B: Results

Ethical considerations are implied but not extensively detailed. Discourse analysis is well aligned with the theoretical framework, treating accounts as situated and constructed. Findings are richly illustrated through detailed case analysis, demonstrating the fluid and contradictory nature of gendered subjectivities.

C: Value

The study makes a significant contribution by challenging essentialist assumptions and highlighting the diversity and complexity of masculinity in practice. Its focus on performance and discourse provides a strong conceptual foundation for understanding how masculinity is negotiated within professional contexts.

S4 Roulston & Mills (2000) - Male Teachers in Feminised Teaching Areas: marching to the beat of the men's movement drums?

A: Validity

The study clearly aims to explore male teachers' accounts within feminised contexts and interrogate 'male role model' assumptions. A qualitative, interpretive design using interview data is appropriate, and provides rich insight into masculinity in practice. However, the design draws on two case studies from separate projects, with a very small and selective sample, and limited reflexive engagement with researcher positioning.

B: Results

Ethical procedures are not explicitly detailed, although pseudonyms are used. Analysis is theoretically grounded in Connell's (1995) masculinities framework and offers detailed interpretation of discourse and positioning. Findings are clearly articulated, demonstrating how male teachers may reproduce hegemonic masculinity within feminised settings.

C: Value

The study makes a significant conceptual contribution by critiquing 'male role model' discourse and highlighting how masculinities can be reproduced rather than transformed within feminised professions.

S5 McDowell & Klattenberg (2019) - Does gender matter? A cross-national investigation of primary classroom discipline

A: Validity

The study clearly examines whether teacher gender influences classroom discipline through language. A qualitative, interactional sociolinguistic approach is well aligned with this aim, supported by a multiple case study design across UK and German contexts. Data collection is a key strength, with extensive audio/video recordings (160 hours). However, sampling is purposive and non-representative, and reflexive engagement with researcher positioning is limited.

B: Results

Ethical procedures are not extensively detailed. Analysis is rigorous, using established sociolinguistic frameworks and systematic coding. Findings are clearly presented, demonstrating that disciplinary practices are shaped more by context and professional role than by gender.

C: Value

The study makes a significant contribution by empirically challenging gender stereotypes, particularly the assumption of men as natural disciplinarians, and supporting a more context-dependent understanding of gender in professional practice.

S6 Murphy & Monsen (2008) - Gender balance amongst educational psychologists: An attempt to explain the male minority

A: Validity

The paper clearly aims to explore explanations for the male minority in Educational Psychology. However, it is a conceptual/narrative review rather than an empirical qualitative study, with no formal recruitment and limited primary data (small survey, n=26). Methodological transparency and reflexive consideration of researcher positioning are minimal.

B: Results

Ethical considerations are not discussed. Analysis is presented as reasoned argument rather than systematic qualitative analysis, though key explanations are clearly articulated. Findings are framed conceptually, identifying multiple potential factors influencing gender imbalance.

C: Value

The paper offers high relevance to Educational Psychology, providing a useful overview of explanatory frameworks and highlighting gaps in empirical research, despite its limited methodological rigour.

S7 Himerich (2019) - Male clinical psychologists: Role of the male gender in therapy and on the route to qualification

A: Validity

The study clearly explores how male clinical psychology trainees experience a female-dominated profession. A qualitative interview design is appropriate and enables in-depth exploration of identity and meaning making. However, the sample is

relatively small and self-selecting, and reflexive consideration of researcher positioning is limited.

B: Results

Ethical procedures are not always fully detailed. Thematic analysis is appropriate but described at a largely procedural level with limited reflexive depth. Findings are clearly presented and supported by participant extracts.

C: Value

The study offers valuable insight into male experiences within a female-dominated psychology profession, highlighting tensions, visibility, and identity negotiation, though it remains limited by its reliance on individual interview accounts.

S8 Schaub (2022) - Social work men as a feminist issue.

A: Validity

The chapter clearly aims to critically examine men's position in social work. However, it is a conceptual/theoretical piece drawing on prior research rather than a standalone qualitative study, with limited methodological detail. Recruitment and data collection relate to earlier work and are not fully outlined, though reflexive positioning is a key strength.

B: Results

Ethical considerations are implied but not extensively detailed. Analysis is theoretically rich, drawing on feminist theory and masculinity frameworks, though not systematically described. Arguments are clearly presented and supported by participant extracts.

C: Value

The chapter offers a highly valuable conceptual contribution, integrating feminist perspectives with men's experiences to highlight the complex interplay of marginalisation and privilege within feminised professions.

S9 Haywood & Mac an Ghaill (2012) - What's next for masculinity? Reflexive directions for theory and research on masculinity and education

A: Validity

The paper clearly aims to critically reconfigure conceptualisations of masculinity in education. However, it is a theoretical review rather than an empirical study, with no recruitment and non-systematic selection of literature. While not methodologically structured, it demonstrates strong reflexive engagement with theoretical positioning.

B: Results

Ethical considerations are not applicable. Analysis is conceptually rigorous but not systematic. Arguments are clearly presented, including critiques of hegemonic masculinity and the development of alternative frameworks such as post-masculinity.

C: Value

The paper makes a highly significant theoretical contribution, advancing critical and reflexive approaches to masculinity and providing an important conceptual foundation for research in educational contexts.

S10 Mills, Haase, & Charlton (2008) - Being the 'right' kind of male teacher: The disciplining of John

A: Validity

The study clearly explores how masculinity expectations shape male teacher identity through an in-depth case study. A qualitative, narrative design is well suited to this aim, providing rich, contextualised data. However, the single-case design and opportunistic recruitment limit breadth, and reflexive consideration of the researcher-participant relationship is limited.

B: Results

Ethical procedures are not extensively detailed, though anonymity is implied. Analysis is theoretically informed and rigorous, drawing on masculinity and identity frameworks. Findings are clearly presented, illustrating how gendered expectations shaped experience and contributed to attrition.

C: Value

The study offers a nuanced and highly relevant insight into masculinity, professional identity, and workforce retention, highlighting the constraining effects of dominant gender expectations within feminised professions.

S11 Francis & Skelton (2001) - Men teachers and the construction of heterosexual masculinity in the classroom

A: Validity

The study clearly explores how male teachers construct heterosexual masculinity in classrooms. A qualitative, interpretive design using observational and interview data is appropriate; however, the study relies on secondary analysis of existing datasets, with limited recruitment detail and only partial reflexive engagement.

B: Results

Ethical procedures are not explicitly detailed. Analysis is interpretive and theoretically informed but not systematically outlined. Findings are clearly presented, illustrating how masculinity is constructed through discourse, including homophobia and gendered power dynamics.

C: Value

The study makes a strong conceptual contribution by linking masculinity to classroom practice and highlighting how gendered norms are reproduced through interaction and discourse.

S12 McDowell (2015) - Masculinity and non-traditional occupations: Men's talk in women's work

A: Validity

The study clearly explores how men construct identity through language in a feminised profession. A qualitative, social constructionist design using discourse analysis of naturally occurring interaction is highly appropriate, supported by a strong dataset (50 hours). However, the small sample limits representativeness, and reflexive engagement with researcher positioning is limited.

B: Results

Ethical procedures are clearly addressed. Analysis is rigorous and systematic, using established sociolinguistic frameworks. Findings are clearly presented, showing that professional identity often takes precedence over gendered expectations in practice.

C: Value

The study makes a significant contribution by demonstrating the fluid and context-dependent nature of masculinity, highlighting how professional norms can reshape gendered identity within feminised workplaces.

S13 Moskos (2020) - Why is the gender revolution uneven and stalled? Gender essentialism and men's movement into 'women's work'

A: Validity

The study clearly examines why men's movement into feminised work remains limited. A qualitative, multi-case design across occupations is highly appropriate, supported by a large and diverse sample (107 interviews across multiple stakeholder groups). However, reflexive engagement with researcher positioning is limited.

B: Results

Ethical procedures are clearly addressed. Analysis is systematic, combining inductive and deductive coding, though it leans towards a more categorical and less reflexive approach. Findings are clearly structured, highlighting the interplay of supply- and demand-side processes.

C: Value

The study offers a highly valuable and comprehensive account of occupational segregation, integrating structural, cultural, and interactional explanations, and moving beyond individualised accounts of men's career choices.

S14 Simpson (2004) - Masculinity at work: The experiences of men in female-dominated occupations

A: Validity

The study clearly explores men's experiences and identity negotiation within feminised occupations. A qualitative interview design across multiple professions is appropriate and provides comparative depth. Sampling is broad (n=40) but relies on self-selection, and reflexive engagement with researcher positioning is limited.

B: Results

Ethical considerations are implied but not detailed. Analysis is systematic (framework approach), though less reflexively positioned. Findings are clearly presented, including typologies of career entry and patterns of minority advantage and identity negotiation.

C: Value

The study makes a highly influential contribution, offering key conceptual insights into masculinity, minority status, and professional identity in feminised work.

S15 Lupton (2006) - Explaining men's entry into female-concentrated occupations: Issues of masculinity and social class

A: Validity

The study clearly examines men's entry into female-concentrated occupations, focusing on masculinity and social class. A qualitative interview design is appropriate and enables exploration of identity and occupational pathways. The sample (n=27) allows comparative insight across occupations, though recruitment via networks limits representativeness. Reflexive consideration of the researcher–participant relationship is a strength.

B: Results

Ethical procedures are clearly addressed. Analysis follows an iterative thematic approach, though with limited explicit reflexive positioning. Findings are conceptually rich and clearly articulated, particularly in relation to the interplay between masculinity and social class.

C: Value

The study makes a significant contribution by extending explanations beyond masculinity alone, foregrounding social class as a key factor shaping men's occupational trajectories.

S16 Cross & Bagilhole (2002) - Girls' jobs for the boys? Men, masculinity and non-traditional occupations

A: Validity

The study clearly explores how men negotiate masculinity within non-traditional occupations. A qualitative interview design is appropriate and enables in-depth exploration of identity and gendered experience. The small sample (n=10), recruited through informal networks, limits diversity, though strong reflexive consideration of the researcher–participant relationship strengthens the design.

B: Results

Ethical considerations are implied but not extensively detailed. Analysis is thematic and interpretative, though less systematically or reflexively articulated. Findings are clearly presented, highlighting tensions and strategies in managing masculinity.

C: Value

The study offers a valuable contribution, providing detailed insight into identity work and the negotiation of masculinity within feminised professions.

Appendix C: Study Mapping Table

213

Author / Year / Title	Study Focus	Location	Participants / Professional Context	Data Collection / Analysis	Key Findings	Limitations
S1 Wright (2024) Let's Hear it from Them: An Interview Based Exploration of Male Teachers' Perceptions of Gender Imbalance in the English Language Teaching Profession	Explores male teachers' experiences of working within a female-dominated profession (teaching English to speakers of other languages - TESOL). A particular focus on how gender shapes their professional experiences, how masculinity is perceived, negotiated, and positioned, and the impact of gender on self-worth, opportunity, and identity.	International TESOL contexts.	3 male teachers Mid-career (10–20 years' experience) Cisgender, Caucasian, non-native English-speaking. Working in higher education and secondary education Context: TESOL.	Qualitative design, semi-structured interviews. Focus on lived experiences and perceptions of gender. Thematic Analysis.	Men occupy an ambivalent position: experience both advantage and marginalisation. Masculinity is shaped by gendered expectations: men positioned as disciplinarians / authority figures. Participants engage in strategic negotiation of masculinity: adapt behaviour, communication, and presentation. Male teachers experience simultaneous inclusion and marginalisation. Masculinity is situationally constructed and context dependent. Participants engage in ongoing identity negotiation and positioning. Gendered expectations are both resisted and reproduced. Feminisation impacts self-worth, recognition, and professional identity	Very small sample (n = 3) limits breadth of perspectives. Reliance on interview data limits interactional co-construction of meaning. Recruitment via personal networks introduces potential bias. Limited reflexive transparency in analytic process. Minimal engagement with intersectionality (e.g., race, sexuality). Focus on cisgender male experience excludes broader gender diversity.

					Experiences are shaped through subjective, emotional meaning-making.	
S2 Brownhill, Warwick, Warwick, & Brown Hajdukova (2020) 'Role model' or 'facilitator'? Exploring male teachers' and male trainees' perceptions of the term 'role model' in England	Explores how male primary school teachers and trainees understand and interpret the concept of the 'role model'. Examines tensions in: policy discourse (men as role models for boys) and professional identity. Critically interrogates assumptions that male teachers should serve as gendered role models.	England (Southeast; higher education and primary school contexts).	11 male participants: 6 primary school teachers (1–4 years experience) 5 trainee teachers All participants: White British adult professionals / trainees in primary school teaching.	Qualitative design, 2 focus groups (approx. 1 hour each). Semi-structured format. Data collected through group discussion, shared meaning-making. Thematic analysis (using NVivo). Inductive coding process: themes developed from participants' accounts. Explicitly situated within an interpretive paradigm.	The concept of the 'role model' is ambiguous, contested, and inconsistently understood by participants. Masculinity is not necessarily tied to gender-matching. Participants challenged the idea that boys need male role models. Teachers are repositioned as facilitators rather than role models, supporting children to identify their own influences rather than embodying one. Role modelling was understood as involving selective imitation, rejection, and adaptation of behaviours, rather than passive copying. Participants' accounts suggested that policy discourse oversimplifies the role model concept, positioning it as a 'solution' to gendered concerns.	Homogeneous sample (White British only). Small sample size (n = 11). Convenience sampling introduces potential recruitment bias. Limited exploration of intersectionality. Focus on perceptions rather than observed practice.
S3 Francis (2008) Teaching manfully?	Explores how male primary school teachers construct and perform gendered subjectivities, and how these relate to power, pedagogy, and policy	UK (London & Northeast England).	Draws from a larger study of 51 primary school teachers (male & female) and 307 pupils.	Methods: Ethnographic classroom observations.	Male teachers' accounts and practices illustrate diverse and non-uniform constructions of masculinity, challenging assumptions of gendered teaching styles.	Small number of case studies limits breadth and transferability.

Exploring gendered subjectivities and power via analysis of men teachers' gender performance	assumptions about 'gender match'.		Focus in this paper: 3 male primary teachers (case studies). Context: Primary teaching.	Semi-structured interviews (teachers + pupils). Analysis: Social constructionist / poststructuralist discourse analysis. Focus on: subjectivity discourse power relations.	Gender is constructed as fluid, contradictory, and contextually performed, rather than fixed or biologically determined. Participants positioned themselves in varied ways, including disciplinarian authority, nurturing facilitator, and 'laddish' relational figure. Accounts suggested that masculinity can incorporate elements traditionally coded as feminine, evidencing 'male femininity'. Gendered subjectivities were shown to be discursively produced and shaped by institutional, relational, and contextual factors. Masculinity was implicated in power relations, with certain performances facilitating stronger authority and control within the classroom. Findings challenge policy assumptions that male teachers provide uniform benefits as role models for boys.	Selection criteria for case studies not fully elaborated on. Limited reflexive transparency in relation to researcher influence. Ethical procedures not extensively detailed within the paper. Focus on primary school context may limit applicability to other professions. Interpretation relies on researcher's theoretical lens (poststructuralist framing).
S4	Explores how male teachers construct and	Australia & Canada (data	Drawn from two qualitative case	Semi-structured interviews.	Participants' accounts illustrated that male teachers in feminised contexts often	Very small sample (n = 2) limits transferability.

Roulston & Mills (2000) Male Teachers in Feminised Teaching Areas: marching to the beat of the men's movement drums?	perform masculinity within feminised teaching contexts (music education) and critiques the 'male role model' discourse.	drawn from both contexts).	studies (2 male music teachers). Primary/secondary school music education.	Extracts from two separate qualitative studies. Thematic - discursive analysis. Informed by Connell's (1995) masculinities framework (hegemonic masculinity).	position themselves in relation to dominant masculinities, rather than outside them. Masculinity was constructed as something that needed to be actively asserted and defended within feminised professional spaces. Accounts suggested that male teachers may adopt 'laddish', rebellious, or sporting identities to establish credibility with pupils, particularly boys. Participants positioned themselves as role models for boys, often reinforcing gender binaries and oppositional positioning between boys and girls. Practices described were shown to reinforce hegemonic masculinity, including homophobia and distancing from femininity. Engagement strategies with boys were constructed in ways that privileged certain masculinities while marginalising others. Findings challenge the assumption that increasing male representation alone	Data drawn from two separate studies may reduce coherence. Limited detail on recruitment and sampling strategy. Lack of explicit reflexivity regarding researcher positioning. Ethical procedures not clearly outlined. Focus on music education may limit applicability to broader professions.
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					leads to more equitable or progressive outcomes.	
S5 McDowell & Klattenberg (2019) Does gender matter? A cross-national investigation of primary classroom discipline	Explores whether teacher gender influences classroom discipline, focusing on how masculinity and femininity are enacted through linguistic practices.	UK and Germany.	16 primary school teachers (8 male, 8 female) working in primary schools.	160 hours of classroom audio/video recordings. Interactional Sociolinguistic analysis. Thematic and discursive analysis of linguistic strategies.	Masculinity and femininity were not fixed attributes, but performed through flexible linguistic strategies. Male teachers frequently used 'feminine-coded' practices (e.g., mitigation, indirectness, relational talk). Female teachers also enacted 'masculine-coded' authority (e.g., direct commands, sanctions). Professional role demands (teaching/discipline) overrode gendered expectations, shaping interactional behaviour. Masculinity was contextually negotiated rather than consistently enacted, shifting across situations. The data challenged the assumption that male teachers provide tougher discipline. Evidence supports the argument that occupational identity may take precedence over gender identity in professional contexts.	Small non-representative, purposive sample. Limited reflexive transparency. Ethical procedures not extensively detailed. Cross-cultural comparisons lead to caution due to contextual variation. Focus on primary teaching only may not capture wider aspects of teaching identity.

S6 Murphy & Monsen (2008) Gender balance amongst educational psychologists: An attempt to explain the male minority	Explores the underrepresentation of men in Educational Psychology and evaluates possible explanations.	UK.	Not a primary empirical sample; draws on national workforce data literature across educational psychology.	Secondary data analysis (AEP statistics). Literature review across multiple domains (career choice, communication, pay). Small-scale survey (descriptive). Conceptual / theoretical analysis. Introduction of social constructionist perspective.	Educational Psychology was constructed as a predominantly female profession, with a sustained decline in male representation. Explanations for male underrepresentation were explored but found to be inconclusive and fragmented. Gender stereotypes were positioned as a key mechanism shaping occupational entry and exclusion. Masculinity and professional suitability were implicitly linked through assumptions about communication, empathy, and care. The profession was constructed as potentially unattractive or misaligned with dominant masculine norms. Gender imbalance was framed as both a workforce issue and a discursive construction problem.	Lacks primary qualitative data (no participant voice). Limited engagement with lived experience or identity negotiation. Some explanations remain speculative rather than analytically developed. Reliance on secondary data and theoretical argument.
S7 Himerich (2019) Male clinical psychologists:	Explores how male trainee clinical psychologists experience their role within a female-dominated profession.	UK.	10 male trainee clinical psychologists (aged 24–39) from six UK training courses.	Qualitative design (interviews). Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA), informed by	Participants' accounts illustrated that male trainees occupy a visible and distinctive position within the clinical psychology profession.	Small, specific sample of trainees limits transferability to other qualified professionals.

Role of the male gender in therapy and on the route to qualification				hermeneutic phenomenology.	Masculinity was constructed by participants as both advantageous (benefiting from authority, credibility) and potentially incongruent with expectations of therapeutic practice. Accounts suggested that participants engaged in active negotiation and management of masculinity, particularly in relation to emotional expression and relational work. Professional identity was shaped through tensions between traditional masculine norms and expectations of care and empathy. Gendered assumptions were shown to persist within training and professional contexts, influencing how participants were perceived and positioned. Findings highlighted the complex and ambivalent nature of male identity within feminised professions.	Interview-based design lacks interactional co-construction of meaning. Narratives may be shaped by professional self-presentation and performativity within interviews. Researcher insider positionality (male trainee) may have influenced both data generation and interpretation. Context-specific (clinical psychology), limits direct transferability.
S8 Schaub (2022)	Examines men's experiences in social work, integrating feminist theory and masculinity	Primarily UK (with broader contextual references).	Draws on: Prior qualitative study of 21 male social work students in social work	Secondary use of qualitative interviews (from prior doctoral study).	Participants' accounts illustrated that men in social work occupy a complex position of both privilege and marginalisation.	Based partly on secondary analysis of prior research.

Social work men as a feminist issue	frameworks, and exploring how masculinity, power, and gender norms operate within the profession.		education and practice.	Thematic analysis of student experiences. Theoretical framing: feminist theory, 'doing gender', hegemonic masculinity.	Masculinity was constructed as incongruent with caring roles, with participants positioned as 'unnatural' social workers. Accounts suggested that men experience heightened scrutiny and anxiety, particularly in relation to physical contact and safeguarding concerns. Participants positioned themselves as needing to manage and regulate their behaviour, reflecting awareness of gendered risk. Experiences illustrated that men may feel unwanted or marginalised within training and professional contexts. The profession was constructed as both feminised and shaped by patriarchal structures, reflected in the 'glass escalator' phenomenon. Findings highlighted that gender inequality operates in complex and contradictory ways, affecting both men and women.	Focus on students rather than qualified professionals. Limited methodological transparency. Ethical procedures not fully detailed. Strongly shaped by author's theoretical positioning.
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S9 Haywood & Mac an Ghaill (2012) What's next for masculinity? Reflexive directions for theory and research on masculinity and education	Critically examines how masculinity is conceptualised within educational research, exploring shifts towards plural, fluid, and post-structural understandings of gender.	Theoretical paper drawing on international literature.	No primary participants. Draws on studies within educational contexts (schools, higher education, youth settings).	Conceptual/theoretical review. Narrative synthesis of existing studies. Engagement with: Hegemonic masculinity theory, Inclusive masculinity, Queer theory, Post-structuralism. Reflexive theoretical critique.	Literature illustrated that masculinity is increasingly conceptualised as plural, fluid, and context-dependent rather than fixed. Accounts suggested that hegemonic masculinity is being reconfigured, contested, and fragmented within educational contexts. Research constructed masculinity as not inherently tied to male bodies, evidenced through work on female masculinities too. Findings indicated that masculinity can be performed in ways that do not rely on dominance, homophobia, or misogyny. Conceptual developments illustrated a growing move towards decoupling gender from biological sex. The literature positioned masculinity itself as a potentially limiting analytical construct, prompting consideration of 'post-masculinity' approaches. Analysis suggested that gender may be understood through alternative	Not a systematic review. No primary empirical data. Strong reliance on theoretical interpretation. 'Post-masculinity' position may risk losing focus on structural inequalities.
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					frameworks (e.g., sexuality, class, ethnicity) rather than masculinity alone.	
S10 Mills, Haase, & Charlton (2008) Being the 'right' kind of male teacher: The disciplining of John	Explores how expectations of masculinity shape the professional identity of a male primary school teacher and contribute to his decision to leave the profession.	Australia.	Single male primary school teacher (John), early career, working in a primary school.	In-depth qualitative case study; life-history interview approach; discursive/interpretive analysis of identity construction.	The study illustrated that male teachers are positioned as valuable yet simultaneously constrained by normative expectations of masculinity. John's account constructed the 'imaginary male teacher' as authoritative, disciplinarian, emotionally controlled, and sport oriented. Institutional practices positioned masculinity as a resource for behaviour management, evidenced through allocation to a challenging class. Accounts suggested that failure to enact hegemonic masculinity was experienced as professional and personal inadequacy. Masculinity was constructed as regulated and policed within the school context, shaping identity and practice. The findings indicated that male teachers may be disciplined into adopting more authoritarian masculine performances over time.	Single case study limits transferability. Researcher–participant relationship not fully reflexively explored. Context-specific (Australian primary education). Retrospective account subject to reconstruction of experience.

					Experiences illustrated that these pressures can contribute to stress, identity conflict, and attrition from the profession. The study suggested that dominant masculinity discourses may marginalise alternative ways of being male within professional roles.	
S11 Francis & Skelton (2001) Men teachers and the construction of heterosexual masculinity in the classroom	Explores how male teachers construct and perform masculinity within classroom interactions, focusing on the use of discourse, discipline, and interaction.	UK.	Male teachers in primary and secondary schools. Based on classroom observations, ethnographic case studies, pupil interviews.	Classroom observations (primary and secondary settings). Interviews with pupils. Secondary analysis of existing datasets. Content analysis and discourse analysis. Interpretive, theoretically driven analysis.	Masculinity was constructed through discursive practices, particularly through alignment with heterosexual norms. Participants' practices illustrated that masculinity was often established through distancing from femininity and homosexuality. Accounts suggested that homophobia and misogyny functioned as tools for both identity construction and classroom discipline. Male teachers were positioned as actively reproducing gendered power relations, rather than neutrally facilitating learning. Masculinity was constructed through authority, control, and 'laddish' alignment with male pupils.	Small sample (limited number of male teachers). Observational and interpretive (no longitudinal data). Limited methodological transparency and analytic detail. Focus on classroom interaction only (limited organisational context). Potential researcher subjectivity in interpretation.

					Findings illustrated that classroom interactions function as sites where gender and sexuality are continuously negotiated and reinforced. The study highlighted tensions between relational teaching practices and the performance of dominant masculinity.	
S12 McDowell (2015) Masculinity and non-traditional occupations: Men's talk in women's work	Explores how men construct identity through language within the nursing profession, focusing on masculinity, professional identity, and workplace discourse.	Northern Ireland.	3 male nurses in a hospital setting – primary participants. Additional interacting staff (male and female nurses, wider medical staff).	50 hours of audio-recorded naturalistic workplace interactions. Discourse analysis (interactional sociolinguistics). Community of Practice (CoP) framework. Social constructionist orientation.	Participants' accounts illustrated that identity was constructed primarily through alignment with a professional 'nursing identity' rather than hegemonic masculinity. Masculinity was not foregrounded but reconfigured in relation to workplace expectations and norms. Accounts suggested that male nurses drew on discursive practices typically associated with femininity (e.g., relational talk, mitigation, collaboration). Findings illustrated that language functioned as a tool for building solidarity and in-group membership within the Community of Practice. Participants positioned themselves as members of a collective (we), emphasising	Small, context-specific sample (n=3). Male participants self-selected leading to potential bias. Single workplace setting limits transferability. Focus on linguistic behaviour excludes non-verbal identity performance. Findings may not generalise across all male-dominated or feminised professions.

					shared identity over gender difference. Masculinity was constructed as flexible, context-dependent, and shaped by institutional demands. Evidence suggested that professional identity may take precedence over gender identity in feminised workplaces.	
S13 Moskos (2020) Why is the gender revolution uneven and stalled? Gender essentialism and men's movement into 'women's work'	Explores why men's movement into female-dominated occupations is limited, focusing on gender essentialism, occupational segregation, and labour market processes.	Australia.	107 participants including: male workers in female dominated professions (childcare, commercial cleaning, care homes), unemployed men managers, clients.	Qualitative semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis (NVivo-supported). Inductive and deductive coding. Comparative case study approach.	Accounts illustrated that occupational sex segregation is maintained through both supply-side and demand-side processes. Participants constructed female-dominated work as incompatible with masculine identity, particularly due to associations with care and emotional labour. Masculinity was positioned in relation to breadwinning, physicality, and technical competence, shaping occupational preferences. Accounts suggested that structural factors (low pay, insecure work) interact with gender norms to deter men.	Context-specific (Australia). Limited reflexive transparency. Absence of female worker perspectives. Potential overemphasis on gender compared to other intersectional factors. Some analytic framing leans toward categorical (supply/demand) rather than fully interactional.

					Findings demonstrated that employers and clients actively reproduce gendered assumptions, limiting men's entry. Masculinity was constructed as both a barrier and a resource, depending on context. Evidence illustrated that gender essentialism can facilitate entry when work is reframed as 'masculine'. This resulted in internal segmentation within occupations, rather than full integration. Occupational integration was shown to be partial, uneven, and often self-reproducing.	
S14 Simpson (2004) Masculinity at work: The experiences of men in female-dominated occupations	Explores men's experiences in female-dominated occupations, including the implications for gender identity and masculinity, and how men manage identity tensions.	UK.	40 male participants. Occupations: primary teachers, nurses, cabin crew, librarians.	In-depth semi-structured interviews. Framework analysis - interpretive, grounded approach. Theoretically informed by post-structuralist masculinity literature.	Participants' accounts illustrated that men enter feminised professions through diverse trajectories, including seeking, finding, and settling. Masculinity was constructed as both advantageous and precarious. Accounts suggested that men benefit from minority status, including accelerated career progression,	Self-selected sample (potential bias toward reflective participants). Limited diversity across professions. Other aspects of intersectionality not explored. UK-specific context.

					assumed authority, and differential treatment. Masculinity was positioned as requiring active maintenance through 'gender work'. Participants constructed strategies such as: re-labelling roles, emphasising masculine aspects of work, and distancing from femininity. Accounts illustrated a tension between private comfort and public identity performance. Masculinity was regulated through peer surveillance, particularly from other men.	Interpretive design limits generalisability.
S15 Lupton (2006) Explaining men's entry into female-concentrated occupations: Issues of masculinity and social class	Explores why men enter or avoid female-dominated occupations and how masculinity and social class shape occupational pathways.	UK.	27 men across multiple occupations. Female-dominated (e.g., teaching, HR, librarianship). Male-dominated (e.g., law, accounting, computing).	In-depth semi structured qualitative interviews. Iterative thematic, interpretive analysis.	Participants' accounts illustrated that female-dominated occupations are constructed as threatening to masculinity, particularly through associations with femininity and stigma. Masculinity was positioned as socially regulated through perceptions of sexuality, status, and gender norms. Accounts suggested that men often 'end up' in these occupations rather than actively choosing them.	UK-specific context. Limited intersectional analysis beyond class. Relies on retrospective accounts, leading to possible reconstruction bias. Critical realist framing - less aligned with fully constructionist approaches.

					Occupational outcomes were constructed as shaped by structural constraints rather than individual preference alone. Social class was positioned as a central organising factor in occupational trajectories. Working-class participants constructed work as a source of security and a means to support life outside work. Accounts illustrated that working-class men had reduced access to high-status, male-dominated professions. Masculinity was constructed as more tightly bound to physical labour and traditional roles within working-class contexts. Entering female-dominated occupations was experienced as producing identity tension and disruption. Findings suggested that gender and class operate together to shape occupational outcomes.	
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S16 Cross & Bagilhole (2002) Girls' jobs for the boys? Men, masculinity and non-traditional occupations. Gender, Work & Organization, 9(2), 204–226.	Explores how men experience working in female-dominated ('non-traditional') occupations.	UK (East Midlands).	10 men working in female dominated occupations (e.g., nurse, teacher, social worker, cleaner).	Semi-structured interviews. Thematic, interpretative analysis. Focus on identity construction and gendered experience.	Participants' accounts illustrated that entering feminised professions challenges masculine identity. Masculinity was constructed as socially policed, particularly through assumptions about sexuality and stigma associated with care work. Accounts suggested that men experience both external and internal regulation of masculinity. Participants positioned themselves through strategies that either maintained traditional masculinity, or reconstructed masculinity. Maintaining masculinity involved distancing from femininity, emphasising competence, authority, and difference from women. Reconstructed masculinity involved incorporating care, empathy, and emotional openness. Masculinity was constructed as fluid, situational, and internally contradictory.	Small sample (n = 10). Limited diversity - all white, mostly heterosexual. UK-specific context.
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					Accounts suggested that masculinity adapts to preserve male advantage, even in female-dominated contexts. Findings illustrated that men may retain structural and symbolic dominance despite minority status.	
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Appendix D: Recruitment - EPNET Email

Are you a fully qualified main grade or senior male EP working within a Local Authority or private practice in the UK?

Are you interested in discussing the topics of gender, professional identity, and masculinity in relation to the EP role?

My name is Billy Stephens and I am a Trainee EP at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. For my doctoral thesis, I am looking to provide a space for male EPs to speak freely regarding the topics above, exploring what it is like to be male EP in the profession.

This study is entirely voluntary. Should you wish to participate, you will be invited to take part in a focus group with up to 5 other male EPs. Focus groups will be conducted online via Microsoft Teams, and will last for 60-90 minutes.

If you have any questions, or you wish to express an interest in my study, please feel free to contact me here: bstephens@tavi-port.nhs.uk

I look forward to hearing from you!

Billy Stephens

Appendix E: Recruitment - Email to Current and Previous LA

Dear (Name),

I hope you're well. I am reaching the point of participant recruitment for my thesis study and I would be very grateful if you could support me with this by sending on some information to relevant individuals in your local authority. I am looking for fully qualified male EPs working at a main grade or senior EP level to participate in online focus groups. The groups will provide a space for male EPs to come together to speak freely and explore their own experiences, with a particular focus being placed on how they navigate their own professional identity and masculinity when in role. I have attached my recruitment poster and participant information sheet to this email which presents some key information about the study, alongside my contact details should individuals wish to take part. I would be very grateful if you could send this information on to main grade or senior male EPs in your local authority, or any other individuals that fit the criteria who you think may be interested in taking part.

Thank you and best wishes,

Billy

Appendix F: Recruitment - Email to Cohort

Hi XXXX,

Hope you're having a lovely Easter break.

I am reaching out to ask a favour please. I wondered if you'd be so kind as to circulate my thesis study to male EPs in your local authority. My inclusion criteria is below:

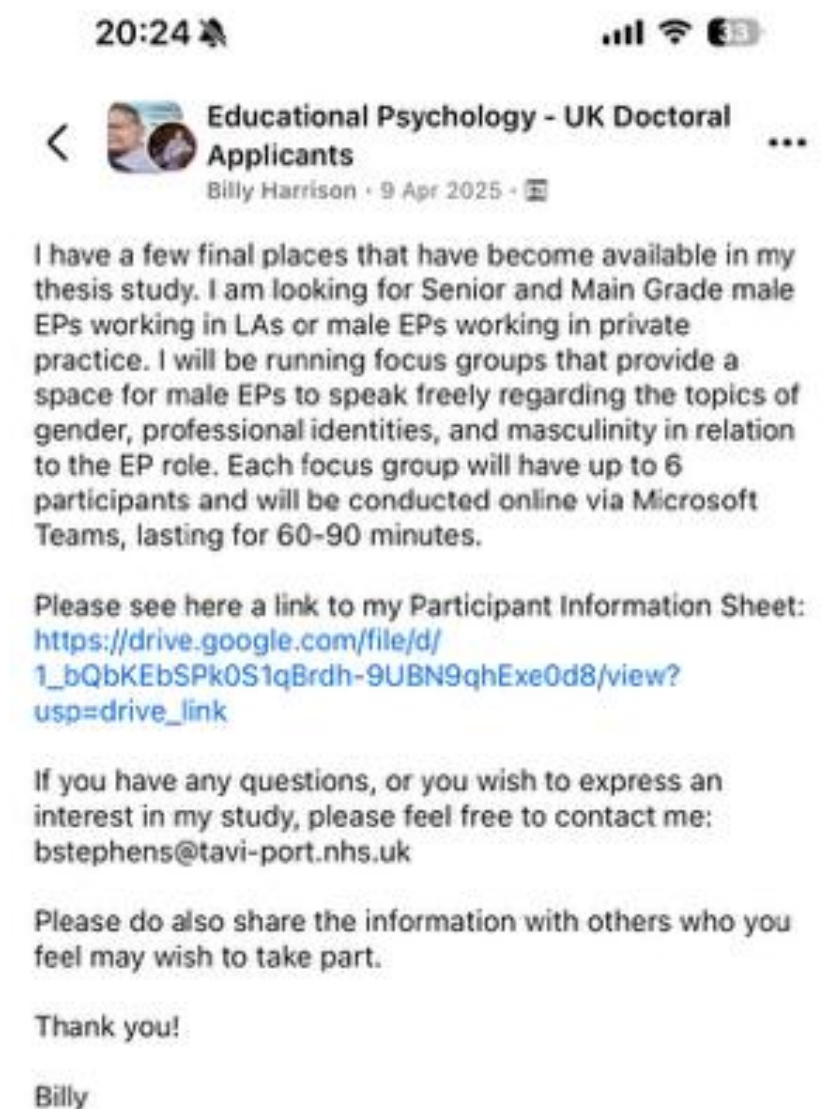
I am looking for fully qualified male EPs working at a main grade or senior EP level to participate in online focus groups. The groups will provide a space for male EPs to speak freely regarding the topics of gender, professional identity, and masculinity in relation to the EP role. Each focus group will have up to 6 EPs, and will be conducted online via Microsoft Teams, lasting for 60-90 minutes.

I have also attached my study poster and participant information sheet to this email.

Thank you so much in advance!

Billy

Appendix G: Recruitment - Facebook Group Post



Appendix H: Recruitment Poster

Are you a qualified main grade or Senior male EP working within a Local Authority in the UK?

 **The Tavistock and Portman**
NHS Foundation Trust

DOCTORAL THESIS

Are you interested in discussing the topics of gender, professional identities, and masculinity in relation to the EP role?

Who am I?

Billy Stephens – Trainee Educational Psychologist



2025-2026

I would love to invite you to take part in my doctoral thesis study!

What does it involve?

- Online focus group with up to 5 other male EPs
- 60- 90 minutes of your time
- A safe and containing space
- A chance to explore experiences with others

How can I take part?

For more information or to express your interest, please contact me: bstephens@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Appendix I: Participant Consent Form

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Title of Research: Masculinity and Professional Identity: Exploring the Experiences of Male Educational Psychologists

Name of Researcher: Billy Stephens (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

Name of Principle Investigator: Dr. Katy Cole (Academic Tutor and Research Supervisor)

This research is being undertaken as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust.

Please read the attached information sheet before signing this consent form. The researcher will be happy to answer any questions you have.

Please circle as appropriate

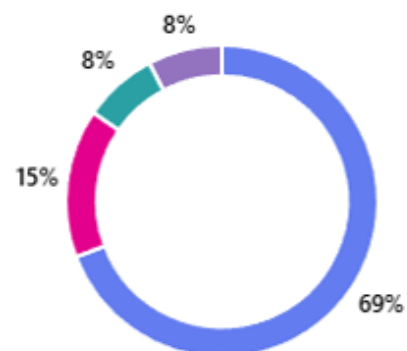
I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study, and I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions.	YES	NO
I understand that my participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and that I am free at any time to withdraw consent without giving a reason up to 2 weeks after the focus group. I understand that my contributions may still influence the conversation and resulting analysis of data.	YES	NO
I understand that I have the right to choose which questions to answer and I can share as much or as little information as I wish.	YES	NO
I agree to respect the confidentiality of others taking part in the focus group and to keep what is shared within the confines of the group.	YES	NO
I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researcher will not be shared with others, unless they are concerned that I, or someone else, is at risk of harm.	YES	NO
I have seen the privacy statement on the participant information sheet, and I know how you will keep my information safe.	YES	NO
I understand that an audio and video recording will be taken during the group and I agree to this information being held securely by the researcher and the research supervisor.	YES	NO
I understand that despite my name being removed in the research submission, other people in my focus group may recognise my quotes.	YES	NO
I understand that the results of this study will be submitted as part of a doctoral thesis and may be published in academic journals relevant to Educational Psychology.	YES	NO
I consent to participate in the focus group under these conditions.	YES	NO

Participant Name:	Date:	Signature:
Researcher Name:	Date:	Signature:

Appendix J: Participant Demographic Information

1. Do you work within a Local Authority, private practice, or both?

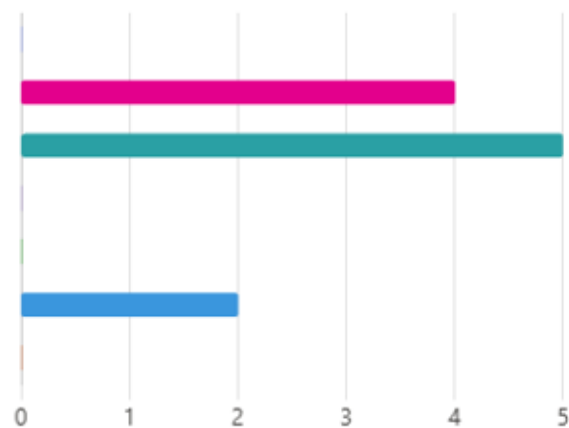
Local Authority	9
Private Practice	2
Both	1
Other	1



Other: Locum work

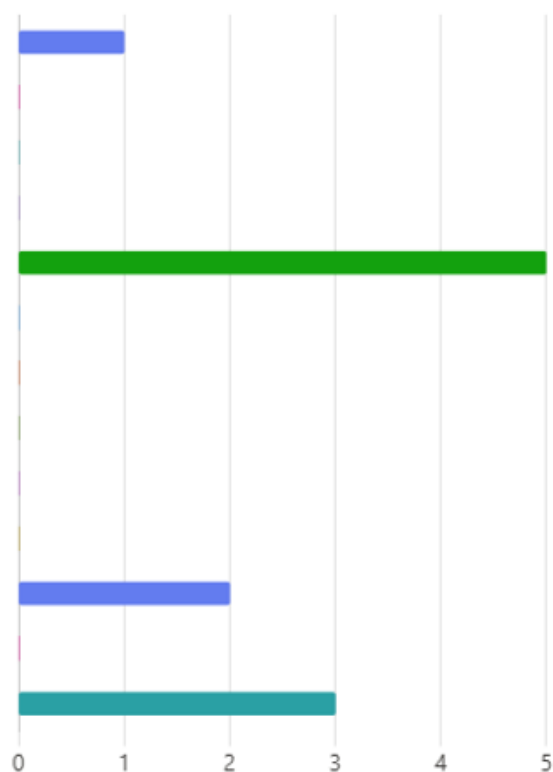
2. What is your age bracket?

Under 25	0
25-34	4
35-44	5
45-54	0
55-64	0
65+	2
Prefer not to say	0



3. What is your ethnicity?

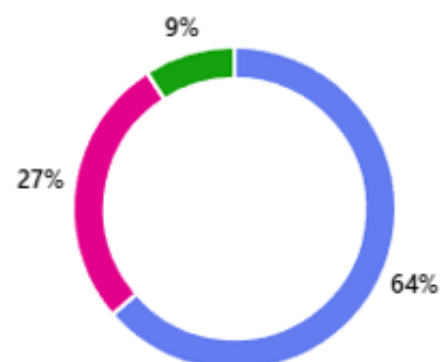
Asian or Asian British	1
Black - African	0
Black - Caribbean	0
Bangladeshi	0
British (White)	5
Chinese	0
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0
Indian	0
Latin American	0
Pakistani	0
White European	2
Prefer not to say	0
Other	3



Other: Mixed white European and Asian, Mixed Pakistani and White British, one did not state

4. Which option best describes your sexuality?

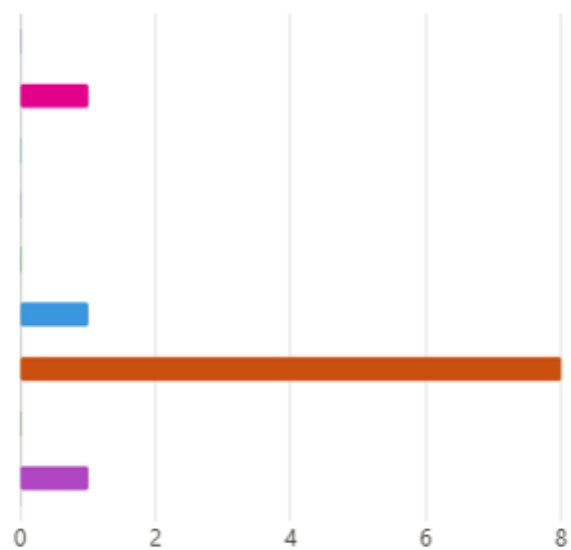
Heterosexual	7
Gay	3
Bisexual	0
Prefer not to say	0
Other	1



Other: pansexual

5. What is your religion or belief?

● Buddhist	0
● Christian	1
● Hindu	0
● Jewish	0
● Muslim	0
● Sikh	1
● No Religion	8
● Prefer not to say	0
● Other	1



Other: spiritual

Appendix K: Participant Information Sheet

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Research Title: Masculinity and Professional Identity: Exploring the Experiences of Male Educational Psychologists

Who is doing the research?

My name is Billy Stephens and I am in my second year of studying Child, Community and Educational Psychology at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. I am doing this piece of research as a part of my course and I would like to invite you to take part. The research will be supervised by Dr. Katy Cole, a University tutor and fully qualified practicing Educational Psychologist.

What are the aims of the research?

The research seeks to explore the experiences of male EPs, in particular how they navigate their professional identity and masculinity when in role. It is hoped that participating will enable male EPs' voices to be heard in a safe and containing group setting, alongside providing them with an opportunity to reflect on role and contribute to further knowledge and research into the topic area.

Who has approved this research?

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust has given ethical approval to carry out this research.

Who can take part in this research?

Fully qualified main grade or senior male Educational Psychologists working within a Local Authority team, or private practice.

What does participation involve?

- If you agree to take part, you will join a focus group of up to 6 participants.
- You will not be placed in the same focus group as another EP from your Local Authority.
- At the start of each focus group, you will also have the option to withdraw or be re-allocated to a different group if you would like to.
- The focus group will last for 60-90 minutes and will be conducted online via Microsoft Teams at a mutually convenient date and time (arranged once you have expressed your interest).
- Throughout the session, the group will receive questions and topics related to the experiences of being a male EP. A particular focus will be on masculinity and how participant views on this may intersect with the different identities

within the EP role (experiences with schools, parents, young people, and colleagues etc).

- You will have the right to choose which questions to answer and you can share as much or as little information as you wish.
- You will also receive a debrief leaflet straight after the focus group, and you will be given an opportunity to debrief with me on a 1:1 basis should you wish. A summary information sheet will also be provided with the main findings once data analysis is complete, alongside an additional opportunity to discuss the findings with me.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. If you do decide to participate but then change your mind, you may withdraw consent for your direct quotations to be used up to 2 weeks after the focus group. However, as focus groups involve shared discussions, your contributions may still influence the conversation and resulting data analysis.

Will my views be kept confidential?

Yes. Everything talked about at the focus group will be kept private and confidential, and this will be made clear to all participants at the start and end of each group. Focus groups will be recorded and transcribed, and these recordings will be deleted after transcription. In the research write up, a pseudonym will be used for each participant and other details which might help someone to identify you will be removed to ensure that your data remains confidential. All records related to your participation in this research study will be handled and stored securely on an encrypted drive using password protection.

Trust data protection link: [Trust's Data Protection and handling Policies.](#)

Trust privacy policy link: [Privacy policy - Tavistock and Portman](#)

Are there any exceptions?

The only time I would need to share any information is if there was a perceived safeguarding risk, or a disclosure was made of imminent harm to self and/or others.

What are the possible benefits for me of taking part?

There is very little research into the experiences of male EPs when in role, especially with regards to their professional identity, and how they navigate their own masculinity when working in a predominantly female field. The study will provide a valuable, containing space for male EPs to come together and share experiences, something that may be hard to come by in the busy day to day EP role. You will have the opportunity give a voice to male EPs and contribute to knowledge in the area with the potential to inform future practice and experience.

Contact details:

If you have any questions about any aspect of the research, or you would like to express an interest in taking part, please feel free to contact me: bstephens@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Support links:

- <https://hischarity.org.uk/>
- <https://www.mensmindsmatter.org/>
- <https://andysmanclub.co.uk/>
- <https://www.jamesplace.org.uk/>
- <https://www.mhm.org.uk/kent-safe-havens>

If you have any concerns about the research, then you can contact the Trust Quality Assurance Officer

Paru Jeram: pjeram@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Please note: Recruitment for this study is taking place on a ‘first come first serve’ basis and it may not be possible to contact everybody where there are more interested parties than can participate. No references to the interviews, data or any individual’s participation (or non-participation) in the research will be made in future personal or professional encounters.

Appendix L: Focus Group Format and Questions

- Thank all for attending
- Highlight that the group is a confidential space
- It's an opportunity for us to discuss and explore the male EP role together
- I have some prompt questions focusing on how male EPs navigate their own professional identities and masculinity when in role
- You may contribute as much or as little as you like, and you are not obliged to answer any of the questions
- There may be some periods of silence – this is okay. Allows time for us all to think and formulate responses
- Important to remain respectful of others' views throughout the conversation today, even if we do not agree
- The allocation of groups has been organised so that you shouldn't be in the same group as someone from your Local Authority, however, you may still recognise someone you know
- Before we have some introductions and I start the recording, I'm going to ask us all to take 5 minutes with our cameras off, grab a drink if you haven't got one already
- This is an opportunity to leave the meeting or be re-allocated to another group if you wish by private messaging me
- When we come back, we will start with introductions – name and why this topic area sparked your interest

When we come back:

- **START RECORDING AND TRANSCRIPTION (check everyone is okay with this)**
- We have until 3 o'clock together today and this will include a short debrief section at the end
- Format – free flowing conversation that mirrors in person as much as possible. Everyone cameras on and unmuted throughout
- Reminder you can contribute as much or as little as you like
- Does anyone have any questions before we start?
- Billy to model first – why the topic sparked my interest
 - Only male training in my cohort at the Tavistock – led me to reflect on intersectionality and group dynamics
 - From a TEP perspective, work in Local Authorities and schools – minority as a male
 - Been into some schools where the whole teaching staff are female
 - Why is this? What does it mean for us as a workforce, and the children / families we support?
 - Where does masculinity fit into all of this?

- This led me to my focus groups ... where I'd like to hear from male EPs about their experiences when in role, the different identities they hold, and how masculinity may intersect with these experiences
- Go round the group for introductions
- **Gender** –
 - What is it like to be a male within the EP profession?
- **Masculinity** -
 - What does masculinity mean to you, and how does this relate to the EP role?
- **Identity** –
 - Are there any other aspects of your identity which may be a factor in how you navigate being a male in the EP profession?
- **Other** -
 - Have you noticed any expectations, opportunities, or challenges related to being a male EP?
 - Have you noticed any ways in which gender might shape interactions with schools, parents, or young people?

Debrief section

- We're approaching the end of our time together now... moving into our final debrief section
- Does anyone have any reflections on the discussion that they would like to share?
- Did any topics feel particularly significant or bring up strong reflections for you?
- Are there any topics that you found particularly interesting?
- Remind participants that they can reflect further in their supervisory spaces, respecting the confidentiality of group members
- Additional support services are available if needed (via follow up email / leaflet)
- I will also be available for 30 minutes after the session if anyone would like a debrief conversation
- You can also email me to arrange an alternative time to chat
- Thank all for their time and contributions
- Email debrief leaflet

Appendix M: Participant Debrief Leaflet

Dear (Name),

Thank you for taking the time to take part in my study. As promised, please find attached a leaflet with information on support services, specifically charities supporting men's mental health. I'd also like to take this opportunity to remind you of specific support avenues that will be present in your own local authorities, such as supervision or support groups. I would be more than happy to have a debrief meeting or call with you if you'd prefer.

Best wishes,

Billy

Andy's Man Club:
Website: <https://andysmanclub.co.uk/>
Email: info@andysmanclub.co.uk

Men's Minds Matter:
Website:
<https://www.mensmindsmatter.org/>
Email: contact@mensmindsmatter.org

The Samaritans:
Website:
<https://www.samaritans.org/>
Phone: 116 123



His Charity:
Website: <https://hischarity.org.uk/>
Phone: 07570 108904 (open 24hrs 365 days a year)

James' Palace:
Website: <https://www.jamesplace.org.uk/>
London Email: london@jamesplace.org.uk
London Phone: 020 3488 8404
Newcastle Email: newcastle@jamesplace.org.uk
Newcastle Phone: 0191 406 6000
Liverpool Email: liverpool@jamesplace.org.uk
Liverpool Phone: 0151 303 5757

Kent and Medway:
Mental Health Matters: 0800 107 0160
<https://www.mhm.org.uk/kent-safe-havens>
<https://www.kmpt.nhs.uk/need-help/>

KCC staff counselling support line:
Website: www.staffcareservices.co.uk
Email: supportline@kent.gov.uk
Phone: 03000 411411

Appendix N: Focus Group Transcript Openings

Focus Group 1

Billy:

OK, so we have until about 3 o'clock together today. And in terms of kind of the conversation flow, I want to try and replicate in person as much as possible. I know that's tricky online. I know we obviously work a lot online nowadays as kind of EPs and TEPs, and in terms of kind of muting, if everyone could just be unmuted, cameras on the whole time, that'd be really helpful. And it's not a meeting, it's just a conversation. So there's no need to kind of put your hand up, and just contribute as much as little as you want, as I said.

But I thought it'd be good if we could start with some introductions. So I know you all know my name, but my name is Billy and I'm in the year 2 cohort at Tavistock at the moment and when we introduce ourselves, I thought it'd be quite nice if we could just say your name and then perhaps what sparked your interest in this topic.

Obviously you received it, maybe on EP net or through word of mouth, but just what made you think, yeah, I want to, I want to take part in this.

And so for me personally, I'm the only male at the moment training at the Tavistock in year two. We have I think one in year one and then none in year three, so kind of across the board there's only sort of two of us across 48, and that makes me just reflect a bit on intersectionality - group dynamics. Why is this the case? Why are male EPs or why are males not kind of going into the EP role? Or not as many. What does that mean for the workforce? What does it mean for the children, the young people we're working with as well? And yeah, it just made me really, it wasn't something that was present for me, gender and kind of being a male, but just being on the course and kind of doing the profession, yeah, just made me reflect on it and I wondered why. So I've made a thesis out of it that's gone through ethics and it's led me to my focus groups, so I'd love just to hear from you guys just what it's like to be a male EP. What does it mean for you?

And as I said, I've got some prompt questions, but yeah, just contribute as much or as little as you want. Hopefully we can have a lovely conversation together. OK, so that's me. Is everyone happy just to say their name and their reason why they sparked their interest? Theo, I'm going to start with you. Just because you're to the right of me, if that's okay.

Theo:

Yeah, no problem. Can you hear me okay?

Billy:

Yeah.

Theo:

Yeah. My name is Theo. I'm a senior educational psychologist in X. It is a very interesting topic. We are certainly outnumbered within the profession and it is very, I find it really interesting to think about why that might be really, but actually I'm. I'm, when I trained at X, there were 6 males on the course.

So yeah, and actually we work in, I work in X and the team is entirely male and there's only three of us, but all three EPs are male, so it's not always the case. But yeah, it's an interesting topic certainly. Yeah. Thanks, Billy.

Billy:

Thanks, Theo. Oliver, you're to the right of Theo. You're up next if you're happy to share.

Oliver:

Yeah. Hi, guys. I had this conversation with a friend that we might be in this place in terms of the demographics, was many years ago. The AEP used to keep demographic information on our cohorts and so the inflows and, he was a very experienced EP Senior and I think a PEP somewhere as well in his distant past and we're just having lunch and he just mentioned that the profession was likely to change and we might be in a position where the tipping point would come and then we'd lose a lot of male applicants.

His view at the time caused an interest in me because I asked him why that was the case and he thought the loss of parity with the wage scales that EPs historically had, which might be equivalent to say, what we might see today in a deputy headship with a small school or assistant headship in a large school, and I guess because I've got friends who work in those places and I see the salaries they bring in, he ceases over the 20 years since we had that conversation. Actually, I think it was more, I think about 25 years ago that's kind of come to fruition.

So then when Billy did what he did, I guess it was me checking out with the new folk coming in - What did they find that was appealing about the EP role? And I don't want to say too much more of what he said because it was conversations of its time 25 years ago and, you know, I'm entirely sensitive that different generations view explanations completely, you know, in their own interpretation. So I don't want to go too much into that unless you know you want to ask me something specific, which I'm happy to share. The colleague has long since retired from the profession, and I think I'd be OK to share.

But we were talking around lunchtime it wasn't confidential. It was just two EPs who happened to be male and we were happening to be talking. So there's no insensitivity about it. So when Billy came across and I got an e-mail. I think it was

from you, Billy. I was intrigued to see just what the touch point was for, you know fellow males, because we are now literally the last of a dying breed. I can't remember exactly how many males we had on the course back when I qualified in the, I say mid 90s, but I know there was a quite a nice balance. I think what we had on our course was a lot of experienced people who had all been teachers or in fact all of us had been teachers because that was the entry qualification back in those days. So, but it was a question of how much teaching experience some of us, some of us were senior or pastoral heads or so on and so forth. But we actually took a pay cut to come into the profession.

Billy:

Okay. No, thank you, Oliver. That's really, really insightful. Thank you. Really appreciate your contributions. Okay. Moving to Ethan, if you're happy to share next.

Ethan:

Yeah. Nice to meet you all. My name is Ethan. What made me interested was, Firstly, I think it's important for EPs in general to take part in each other's research. I think it builds a strong network and helps us learn from each other. And then I guess getting to the specific demographic that you were looking for, there's a sense of responsibility as people have mentioned there aren't too many of us out there and I think, yeah, I've kind of it's you're always, I suppose considering it throughout my time training and then moving into different places because you have such different experiences and it always seems to be present in a different way. So on my course I think similar to what Theo was saying, there were five of us, which was quite a lot. I know, speaking to people who were at the Tavi or other places like it seems like that's always less. I find that kind of interesting in itself, different courses. And then the different placements and then workplace I've had it's kind of varied and I've settled in a place now where there are two other men and one has just left in a fairly big team, so.

But it comes up often because other people in the team mention, you know, you're the only male EP or you're one of the few. So we have conversations about it anyway, but it'll be useful to, yeah, draw upon other people's insights. And just I was interested to see where the conversation goes.

Billy:

That's brilliant. Thank you, Ethan. Samuel.

Samuel:

Hi, everyone. Yeah, Samuel, great to hear all your all your reasons and experience - should be an interesting conversation. I'm a newly qualified EP and when I was

trying to decide on my thesis, I was looking through lots of the papers that had been sort of recently published and a lot of them seem to focus on young women or girls, so a big focus on how Autism might present in women, for example, or other things. So I think that already had me thinking how maybe the gender bias in educational psychology influences the work that we do, and maybe our sort of collective construction of things. I think as well, sometimes there's, I can't remember which one it is, you know, with sort of this alpha bias and beta bias with the gender. I think, you know, there can be sometimes I see, especially when I'm working in schools, a kind of a really sort of clear split between how a boy might present or how a girl might present, and I suppose I think sometimes these constructs can be a little bit too, or seem to me a little bit too rigid.

So I think it's just interesting. Yeah, having maybe more men in just in, in the education space in general, I mean certainly in early years education, we can be sometimes the only males that you know people interact with on quite a long journey of outside involvement.

Billy:

That's brilliant. Thank you, Samuel. And then Ryan, last but not least.

Ryan:

Last but not least, that's all right. Hi, everyone. My name is Ryan and I trained at X. See some X faces, which is always nice. Yes, I'm nearly two years in post qualification. I work for X. There are about 30 or 35 and there are quite a few men which is unusual, and I guess you know the topic of being a male EP has come up a few times since they've been qualified.

And I have been wondering about, you know, what impact that might have, both kind of positive and negative. And yeah, I think it's an interesting area to explore kind of, you know, see how it might impact dynamics as well because in terms of the work you're doing, the schools and just generally, it's mostly with women. So I just wonder what their perceptions are coming in to have a meeting with a man, male EP. So yeah, I'm just interested to see what comes up. Really. Thank you for having me.

Billy:

Oh, brilliant. Thank you. Ryan, just hearing you speak then makes me maybe think of who young people and families expect to see when we turn up. And like you said, Ryan, is it a man? Is it a woman? Is it someone older? Younger. Yes. That's a really interesting. Yeah. Point to kind of start with I think.

Focus Group 2

Billy:

Thank you again for obviously joining the focus group. Really appreciate it. We've got to about 3 o'clock together today that would include sort of like a short debrief section at the end for sort of five or 10 minutes just to reflect on the discussions that we've had.

In terms of, I guess the conversation flow, I'd like to try and replicate as in person as much as possible. I know that is tricky when we're online, but if we could all just sort of keep our cameras on unmuted, it's not a formal meeting, it's a conversation, it's a discussion. So there's no kind of hand up system if you've got something to say. Just blurt it out and say it. So whenever you feel comfortable and you don't have to answer every prompt question, it's very much open to the group if you yeah, you hear a question you think or you know, I don't really have anything to add to that or you'd rather just not answer it. That's absolutely fine. There's no pressure at all. And it's whatever you're sort of comfortable bringing to the group. Is that okay for everyone? Yeah. And so if we could maybe just start with, I guess just a quick introduction. There's no need to sort of state your role or where you're working. If you slip up and say it's not the end of the world, don't worry. I know what it's like. If you could just maybe state your name and the reason I guess this thesis topic sparked your interest and I'm happy to sort of model that and go first.

So I'm Billy, as you all know, thank you again for your sort of emails back and forth me and yeah, just turning up, it's been greatly appreciated. In terms of my, I guess my thesis topic and why I came to this. I'm training at the Tavistock. As you know, I'm the only guy on my cohort in my year. There's no males in year three currently and I think there's two in year one. So sort of across the 48 of us, there's three males.

And it just led to me to kind of think why is that? Why is there, you know, such few males around me training to do this profession, which obviously I'm biased, I think it's a great profession to be in because I'm doing it, but yeah, it just led me to think about intersectionality more widely, group dynamics as well, and also what it kind of means for the children, the young people, the families that I'm working with when I turn up to schools, are they expecting to see a young male? Are they expecting a middle-aged female? Who were they expecting? Was it me? Was it something different?

Sometimes I'll go into primary schools. I guess you've all probably experienced this. I'm the only man. The kids look at me as if I'm like an alien because they just don't see men, which is really interesting and I guess that led me to think about masculinity and how that kind of intersects with the role as myself as the TEP, and you guys as EPs and yeah, that led me to my topic and my focus groups.

So that's a little bit about me and is everyone sort of happy to just state their name

and why the topic sparked their interest? Is that Okay with everyone? Yeah. And I'm going to go to Reuben first if that's Okay.

Reuben:

Yeah, yes, obviously I'm Reuben and I suppose the topic sparked my interest similar to you, Billy, I was the only male in my cohort. I can think there was possibly one or two males in the two years above me and there was this moment I remember the first day of the course everyone was sort of coming in the room at different times and it was a bit like the sort of traitors if you ever watch that and then sort of when I walked in, it's like everyone burst out laughing because it was like the last in the room. And it's like, wow, here comes like the guy. Then I thought well...So it kind of it was a bit of a shock to me. And in terms of in my practise and yeah, I've had, interestingly the timing of your e-mail was timing with me and my supervision sort of reflecting on. I was, I was sort of talking about my consultation skills trying to unpick them a bit further because I had some experiences where a female EP in our team had had a consultation with the same parents I had about a different child and had a very different conversation to the one I had and it was sort of then I was thinking right, well, why did they talk to you about those things but not to me and so it then got me thinking about some of the, I was trying to understand it, is there a masculinity side to it? And then yeah, then your e-mail pretty much came through about a week later. So yeah, perfect timing.

Billy:

Call me sidekick. Reuben. No, that's great. Thank you. And then moving on to Archie, if you're happy to share.

Archie:

Yeah, I'm Archie. Obviously Yeah. I think even from starting in, like, undergrad psychology, it was, it was very evident that that there was like a big gender split. And I never really understood why that was or what made it such a draw for women and not for men. And I think I thought during the doctorate that there would be a lot more like direct exploration of these issues like gender, class, kind of the factors that make us up and that affect how we're perceived or perceive ourselves, but it never really happened and I've just kind of gone along without really having that many spaces to explore in a structured way. So I was kind of drawn to that opportunity to. Yeah, to kind of to do that, you know, I felt.

It's a difficult one because sometimes I I've seen things come up in the past that seem a bit men's rightsy about like men in female dominated professions. And like, I've really felt uncomfortable with that tone. But the tone of how you describe this

conversation felt like not that. So I was like. Alright. Like it feels like a match to have a discussion and I think about the topic.

Billy:

Yeah. Brilliant. That's great. Thank you, Archie. Noah, have I pronounced your name right?

Noah:

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, yeah. I mean similar really. But I think I'm a bit older than the rest of you. So I trained in early 2000 and there were three blokes in my group. So in some way I feel there were more in my group and I remember there was a discussion a few years ago on EP net and similar discussion, which was somebody talking about, they had looked at the names and like 80% of the names come up for the principal EP at the time was female, but unfortunately the discussion was quickly shut off because people complain that then people started talking about how the world is designed against females, which it is as well. That's why this so, so kind of the discussion that we could have had had to be stopped because it became more like progressive or anti progressive. So, if you say you argue, not argue but if you discuss well why is there so few males then you were projected as being anti progressive.

But really, you might be progressive because you may still argue the same thing if it was other way around. So, so that's it's always been on my mind. And the other thing is I'm independent. I don't know if anybody else is. And 90% of my caseload or people I see or I discuss are male, so it's that. That's the other aspect of it is why is there so few men who are EPs? That's it.

Billy:

That's great. Thank you, Noah. It makes me think of, you know, are we representative as a workforce of the young people we're supporting and just hearing you say that kind of, yeah, just leaves me wondering, does it? I think, Zachary, are you happy to go next? Is that okay?

Zachary:

Yeah. So I'm obviously I've got quite a strong interest in masculinity. I was also one of 16. The only male on my cohort. So yeah, yeah, I think just seeing sort of masculinity and seeing masculinity from a new perspective and thinking about it as you know, as adults and why it impacts the profession outside of purely the young people we work with is going to be interesting to me.

Billy:

Yeah, that's brilliant. Thank you, Zachary. Then oh, go Noah.

Noah:

Sorry, can I just say there is some building work going on around me, so when they start drilling, unfortunately my next door is having an extension at the moment they're drilling. So I just turn my mic off just for that bit.

Billy:

That's fine, Noah. No problem. Thank you for letting me know. Kai, last but not least, over to you.

Kai:

Hi, I'm Kai. I think two things really some of the similar things to what you guys have raised already. I think my role before this was as a teacher and then a little bit of time in social care and all of those roles, I think I've been, I was, you know, always in a bit of a minority there and but I think lots of things were often raised around how the fact that I was a man has impacted some of the interactions I've had. I think when I was a teacher there was lots of conversations around discipline being different because I'm a man, and I always found that quite interesting because I'm not someone I would say presents as traditionally masculine.

I'm quite a small man as well and quite a camp man, and I think like that has always been something that I always thought was a bit interesting. I'd like to think more about it and I would say also I think in supervision often the work I do with young people, particularly in secondary, I think my identity and how I come across is something I'll talk about and discuss and I think like you guys have said a lot of the work I do in secondary is with kind of adolescents, young men and I think it's, I often think about how my role as a man, but a man that presents very differently to a lot of these people and what the impact that is. So yeah, I think there was a few kind of things that have popped up over the years, I've been curious about and it felt like a nice chance to kind of discuss some of those things.

Billy:

Yeah. No, that's brilliant. Thank you, Kai, I think, yeah, just hearing the five of you speak about kind of what sparked your interest. I think it's going to lead to some really interesting conversations today.

Focus Group 3

Billy:

So, yeah, thank you again all for sort of coming together. Marcus, just kind of take your time in sorting your sort of sound and video out. We've got until 3 o'clock together today. And in terms of the conversation, I don't want this to be like a formal meeting. It's very informal.

I'd rather it be, you know, replicating as in person as much as possible. I know, that's really tricky online, but if we could all just have our cameras off and sorry, cameras on and sort of microphones on as well and not have them muted just to kind of jump in, you don't need to use the hand up feature just whenever you feel comfortable to sort of jump in with an answer. That's absolutely fine. And as I said, you don't have to sort of answer every question, it's just free flowing as much as possible and I wondered if it would be a nice sort of place to start if we could just maybe just say our names and the reason this topic sparked our interest. And yeah, there's no sort of need to go into where you work or your local authority.

And just kind of kind of keeping it confidential as much as possible, but as you know, my name is Billy. I'm training at the Tavistock. I'm currently in year two and I think for me, yeah, starting the course, there was something that struck me on day one. I was the only man in the room. And then we had like a meet the year twos and obviously I was year one at the time and the year twos came in and there was no men and I was like what's going on here? What is this about? And it just led me to think, you know, why is that? why is there so few men that are training to do this profession in which again being biased, I'm training to be an EP, I think it's great, but yeah, it just led me to think about group dynamics, intersectionality and yeah, sometimes I'll be in schools. I'll be the only man. And the kids look at you as if you've got like 5 heads because they've never seen a man come into their school before. And I just find that so, yeah, just really interesting and yeah, just how that sort of intersects with kind of the topic of masculinity as well. And if that has an impact maybe and yeah, it led me to my thesis topic and my focus group. So yeah, if anyone feels sort of happy to go first, just sort your name and the reason this topic sparked your interest.

Dylan:

Actually can I go?

Billy:

Yeah. Yeah.

Dylan:

So yeah, so my name's Dylan. I guess I had probably had similar experiences to you, Billy. I was the only man in my cohort, and actually probably I was probably interested in it because like I guess in our role, I think I've probably been exposed to more like stuff and stuff on social media and how it's influencing teenagers and it comes up with random topics, but it's nothing really concrete about it and probably it

maybe I've been. I feel like I've been influenced by as well, like a lot of like YouTube and, you know, podcasters and like, stuff like that. And I'm, and I listen to it and I just think, what the hell is going on kind of thing.

And I guess maybe I just don't ever discuss it with anyone either. It's just something I listen to and it's very isolated as well. And I think that's what teenagers are probably more exposed to now as well. And they're dealing with different things that probably that I didn't experience when I was growing up. With the yeah, with the kind of masculinity.

Billy:

Yeah, absolutely. Thanks Dylan.

Isaac:

Yeah. OK. Shall I go?

Billy:

Yep, sure.

Isaac:

My name is Isaac. I think I'm, I think as a if you if you become a psychologist, you get used to being a minority, right. If you're going to think about gender kind of spaces even in undergrad or doctorate. So kind of similar things to what has been said before, but also I think what really motivated me to come here was to almost if, like some assumptions about why someone would come on this group but challenging them. So the idea that actually we don't have to occupy the same spaces as other psychologists and just give a male kind of perspective on that. So actually there is something about gender having a place in how we might approach certain cases, and that's okay. There's something about acknowledging on a group level. So obviously there's going to be a huge individual variance that, there's something about the role that fathers might play in the group, in the family dynamics, which is really important.

There's something about motivational approaches that might be gender specific. On average in certain situations, there might be something around using value or sports based activities for certain groups. And so it's kind of those kind of things and plus like I've always thought about being male and like what that kind of means. So it's always been, It's always been a thing, right? And like the cultural imagined version of what it means to be male, but less about toxicity. I hate that. I almost kind of. Yeah, I get annoyed with that word. It's about kind of trade-offs, right? Opportunity cost. It's about getting the balance right in certain contexts.

And that's, I suppose that's what kind of I'm just I wanted to. And plus I've just left X and I'm doing loads of boring locum work which is filling the coffers but not giving me meaning. So I thought this is like a break for me right now.

Billy:

Yeah. Brilliant. That's really lovely to hear. Thank you very much. Yeah. Really. I'm really looking forward to this conversation. Already some great reflections. And Marcus, can you hear us now? Are you back?

Marcus:

Yes, I can hear you. There's not the volume's not great, but.

Billy:

Excellent. Right. If you need to use sort of the chat function at any point, then you're welcome to. If that's okay Marcus.

Marcus:

We'll be able to stay with it, yeah.

Thanks. Yeah. Do you want me to? Do you want me to jump in there? Probably. Yeah. Yeah. I think I think, yeah. I think it's an interesting topic. And I think the demographics. Yeah. I mean, when I trained as an EP about 20 years ago, I was the only one on my course actually in X, where 50% of the of the EPs were male and 50% female, which was quite remarkable then really unusual and but now I'm with the service in X and I'm the only man and you know there is a what? There is a male assistant actually, but that's kind of like 1 EP in 1 system out of maybe 25 people with all of the staff, the admin.

So that gender balance imbalance is a present. I think they're definitely economic and demographic changes in the way that men have been employed and what they've done and then the employment that a partner might have as well. So you know the those big impact, but yeah, I mean it's part of the course for me. I mean, I worked as a teacher in the early years before I became a psychologist, so I was definitely feeling, I was definitely an unusual kind of element, you know, like as we were saying, you know. Do I have two heads? That experience is certainly sometimes a feeling, and you're often the only man in a school setting as well. So it does bring some reflections I suppose. Yeah, I'll stop there for now anyway.

Billy:

That's great. Thank you, Marcus. And I think you're you sort of went in and out a little bit sometimes it was a bit broken, but I think most of it was fine. And yeah, as I said, if you need to use the chat, that's fine. But I think it was mostly fine, but yeah, no, thank you. Marcus. Last but not least, Leo if you're happy to share.

Leo:

Yeah. Yeah, thank you. I am Leo. I'm an EP somewhere in X. I yeah, some overlaps with Isaac in a way in that you see all these kind of bids for engagement and participation in TEP research come out.

And it's not that long ago, I guess that I was training. And so I well remember what that was like trying to get recruitment. So this was a nice opportunity to help in one way. So that was definitely an appeal. And then the topic obviously grabbed I shan't say too much because I imagine the questions are going to lead in in some of these directions, but I endorse everything that everyone said and would kind of only throw in one wondering that I had about this about this topic in that for all of the paucity of men in the profession, we are then over represented in positions of management relative to our numbers side of that and that's always kind of irked me somewhat. And so there's thoughts there. And then the other bits are just around second guessing and then triple guessing ourselves and our identities because is it that being a man is one of the kind of least interesting differences between us? Are the interpersonal differences, differences, individual differences between a group of EPs greater than just gender splits, for instance, so we might have more parallels with a female colleague than we would do if we did have a male colleague. You know, two men aren't alike. Two women aren't alike, obviously. So you then sort of get into all these interesting spirals about just what it means and whether it's it is of significance or actually it's not of significance and so on and so forth. But yeah, I'll stay quiet.

Billy:

No, that's absolutely. Yeah, that's brilliant. Thank you, Leo. So now we all sort of know each other a little bit, got the kind of introductions out of the way.

Appendix O: Research Diary Extracts

Example Extract 1

While transcribing, I am noticing myself reacting quite strongly to moments where participants interrupt one another or speak with confidence and authority. I am feeling a degree of discomfort during some of these exchanges, and I am finding myself pausing the recording to think about what might be happening relationally within the interaction. I am starting to wonder whether masculinity is being enacted through subtle performances of dominance, confidence, or seniority, rather than only through what is being explicitly discussed. I keep replaying certain sections and paying closer attention to tone, pacing, overlap in speech, and who seems to hold conversational space most easily. Some voices appear to shape the direction of the discussion more than others, and I am becoming increasingly interested in how influence operates within the group itself, and also what it means for my data.

Example Extract 2

As I'm transcribing, I am catching myself reflecting on my own role within this group dynamic, particularly how my facilitation style, responses, and presence in the group may be contributing to the atmosphere of the discussion. In some moments, humour seems to soften tension and create connection between participants, while in other moments it feels as though it may be masking discomfort or allowing difficult topics to be approached indirectly. I'm going to think more about this as I continue.

Example Extract 3

As I continued listening back to the recordings, I became even more aware of my own position within the online room. As a younger male trainee facilitating discussions with more experienced EPs, I am noticing moments where I feel different or less certain, particularly when participants speak confidently about experiences I haven't done yet. At the same time, I'm also noticing moments of strong alignment, especially when participants describe experiences of being one of few men within the profession. Some of this feels personally resonant, and I can feel myself becoming more emotionally attentive during these sections of the discussions. Rather than trying to distance myself from these reactions, I am treating them as analytically useful. They seem to draw my attention towards particular tensions, interactions, and meanings within the data, even though I am not yet fully clear how these moments will eventually contribute to the developing analysis.

Appendix P: Reflexive Coding Memos

Example Extract 1

While coding, I am noticing that I am initially drawn towards the more explicit references to masculinity within the transcripts. As I spend more time with the data, I am starting to realise that some of the most analytically interesting moments are actually those where masculinity feels only partially present – either minimised, joked about, brushed aside, or only briefly acknowledged before the conversation moves on. I am making a conscious decision to code these moments as meaningful. This includes moments where masculinity seems to sit in the background of the discussion, or where participants seem uncertain about whether gender is relevant at all. I am starting to wonder whether masculinity operates less as something consistently visible and more as something that becomes situationally noticeable depending on context, interaction, relationships, and who is present within the conversation.

Example Extract 2

I'm becoming aware that I am naturally gravitating towards quotes that emphasise more relational, reflective, or 'softer' constructions of masculinity, which feels closely connected to how I understand myself professionally. At the same time, I'm noticing that some of the more dominant, authoritative, or assertive quotes are creating a degree of discomfort for me, and I am catching myself moving past these extracts more quickly during coding. I'm starting to pause and question whether I am unintentionally privileging certain constructions of masculinity because they feel more familiar, comfortable, or professionally acceptable to me. I'm going to consciously hold these extracts and spend more time sitting with the discomfort they create. I want to try and hold multiple interpretations open.

Example Extract 3

I'm in the later stages of coding now, and I'm starting to think more explicitly about my own role within the production of the data itself. As I am revisiting the transcripts, I am noticing multiple points where participants respond directly to my prompts, refer back to earlier parts of the discussion, or appear to shape their responses in relation to what may feel acceptable, safe, or legitimate to say within the group. I am beginning to understand my facilitation as part of the interactional process and how meaning is unfolding.

<i>Code Name</i>	<i>Focus Group</i>	<i>Transcript Page</i>	<i>Phrase and Individual</i>
Acknowledging male minority status	1	2	"We are certainly outnumbered within the profession" (THEO)
Subtheme 1	1	4	"as people have mentioned there aren't too many of us out there" (ETHAN)
	1	7	"So I knew there was there was a lovely vibe around it so I didn't feel uncomfortable, but I was acutely aware that there wasn't any other male candidates in that place." (OLIVER)
	1	8	"...but when I go to conferences and look round to see two other men. I always look at the ratio per hundred, when I go to conferences just to see if my old friend's assertions have come true which it clearly has." (OLIVER)
	1	15	"I'm aware I'm one of the only only a few men in the room, and one of them is the the principle. So what are those dynamics like?" (ETHAN)
	1	24	"We've all remarked on it when we're in nurseries, the youngsters congregate around us. Now whether it's because they suddenly see a male which they don't see throughout the day or indeed they go home and there isn't a male." (OLIVER)
	2	2	"I was the only male in my cohort. I can think there was possibly one or two males in the the two years above me" (REUBEN)
	2	3	"I think even from starting in, like, undergrad psychology, it was, it was very evident that that there was like a big gender split." (ARCHIE)
	2	4	"Yeah, I was also one one of 16. The only male on my in my cohort also went to Tavi." (ZACHARY)

	2	6	"I think there's there's been one or two, I guess, including yourself. One of the kind of male member of staff that I've worked with in the service that I'm in." (KAI)
	3	2	"I guess I I had probably had similar experiences to you, I was the only man in my cohort" (DYLAN)
	3	6	"I actually think about it that much, I definitely echo what the other gent said around this it not necessarily being a surprise to find oneself in an EP service or an EP situation and be the only man or one of a handful of men." (LEO)
	3	16	"40 years ago when I was started as a teacher, it was probably more men than women as psychologists, you know, coming into schools. And then when I trained as a psychologist 20 years ago, it was the other way around. But there was still a lot of men. And then those men have retired now and then and then now. So it's almost 100% women or 95% plus women in the profession." (MARCUS)
Offering a counter-narrative to male marginality	1	2	"The team is entirely male... all three EPs are male, so it's not always the case" (THEO)
Subtheme 1	2	20	"I definitely think even like my course was actually I'd say fairly done and there were six of us out of 22 that were men" (KAI)
	3	5	"is it that being a man is one of the kind of least interesting differences between us? Are the the interpersonal differences, differences. Individual differences between a group of EPs greater than than just gender splits, for instance, so we might have more parallels with a female colleague than we would do if we did have a male colleague. You know, two men aren't alike. Two women aren't alike, obviously." (LEO)

	3	17	“I don't think anything that made me a male EP has presented kind of challenges above and beyond the challenges that are presented anyway.” (ISAAC)
	3	27	“It used to be a more male, you know, in terms of the gender difference, male profession. And then it became 50-50 and then it. Then it became more women than men.” (MARCUS)
Gender made visible through others' comments Subtheme 3	1	4	“Other people in the team mention, you know, you're the only male EP...” (ETHAN)
	1	6	“Actually, it's only been from like conversations I've had with other people. We've kind of like questioned the impact of that” (RYAN)
	2	7	“sometimes it's like when I've walked into a school and found, oh, great, you're a man. The the young person prefers men. And then, oh, right. OK. Then I'd start. Well, why would that be? What is it? What are they going to expect me to be like when?” (REUBEN)
	2	9	“I taught in both secondary and primary, but so frequently it was brought up. Oh, it's fantastic to have a male on board.” (ZACHARY)
	3	5-6	“So I was thinking what is it like to be human in the EP field and what is it like just to be me in the EP field and I suppose I can only react to what it's like to be male by responses that other people might give me in response to seeing me so like my, my identity will be shaped by someone else's responses, and then my response to their responses.” (ISAAC)

Men as visible minority in early years space Subtheme 2	1	5	“I mean certainly in early years education, we can be sometimes the only males that you know people interact with on quite a long journey of of outside involvement.” (SAMUEL)
	1	6	“...whereas a lot of my primary schools or some of the nurseries I've got, I will go in and almost all the staff will be female as well as we so that that can stand out in one sense.” (ETHAN)
	1	9	“I feel I probably notice my gender mostly in early years settings then secondary.” (SAMUEL)
	1	10	“I mean, I was in a nursery this morning doing a statutory assessment and just generally, you're like, whenever the kids will come up to you and like they'll try and touch you and stuff. But I feel quite like anxious in those environments because I'm like, oh, my God, I don't want anyone to think, I don't want it to be seen like, no, the kids like touching me and stuff because it just really makes me panic.” (RYAN)
	1	24	“We've all remarked on it when we're in nurseries, the youngsters congregate around us. Now whether it's because they suddenly see a male which they don't see throughout the day or indeed they go home and there isn't a male.” (OLIVER)
	3	4	“I mean, I worked as a teacher in the early years before I became a psychologist, so I was definitely feeling. I was definitely an unusual kind of element, you know, like as we were saying, you know. Do I have two heads? That experience is certainly sometimes a feeling, and you're often the only man in in a in a in a school setting as well. So it does bring some reflections I suppose.” (MARCUS)
	3	5	“there is something about being a male in certain situations where sometimes there might be an element of surprise if I go into early years.” (ISAAC)

Male presence as symbolically significant Subtheme 2	1	5	“I mean certainly in early years education, we can be sometimes the only males that you know people interact with on quite a long journey of of outside involvement.” (SAMUEL)
	1	7	“...and you get almost you have that responsibility to represent men or something, and it's like I'm in no position to do that.” (ETHAN).
	1	8	“Colleagues have said... they welcome having a male on the team.” (OLIVER)
	1	10	“I feel like the spotlight's on you.” (RYAN)
	1	11	“I almost feel it from the early years staff sometimes as well, like you're a bit of an exotic creature. It's like, oh, there's a man in the in the nursery, this is, you know, you get, yeah. You get treated a bit like an exotic, exotic bird and it can get quite awkward.” (THEO).
	1	12	“And I've done that when I had to work with Orthodox communities as well, where an extremely well known psychologist, nationally known psychologist, couldn't get a foothold into this wealthy Orthodox family. And she basically said to me, do you mind being the front guy on this? Because I know what I need to do and I know what the child needs and everything, but they won't entertain me because I'm a woman”. (OLIVER)
	2	9	“I taught in both secondary and primary, but so frequently it was brought up. Oh, it's fantastic to have a male on board.” (ZACHARY)

	2	9	“But often being treated as some sort of like, well, you have a penis and therefore you you're some sort of saviour to to this to this group because they must, you know, they really relate to the fact that you are. You're a man. It's kind of like a that adds a bit of pressure to it.” (ZACHARY)
	3	6	“there is something about being a male in certain situations where sometimes there might be an element of surprise if I go into early years.” (ISAAC)
	3	13	“Otherwise we just have, like, you know, a 27 year old Rachel, who's an EP who'd be completely fine and all 27 year old Rachel's would look the same, would be completely fine for the profession. But it kind of wouldn't.” (ISAAC)
	1	9	“I think often you know the young children are really excited to see a man, you know rush up to you and sort of crowd you. Oh very exciting.” (SAMUEL)
Normalising male presence as unusual	1	5	“There are about 30 or 35 and there are quite a few men which is unusual” (RYAN)
Subtheme 2	1	9	“But part of me and I don't know what it comes from, sometimes feels a little bit like. I'm sort of an outsider. I shouldn't be there, you know, like, oh, I'm snooping around the school or something, even though obviously I'm not.” (SAMUEL)

Normalisation of male minority status Subtheme 1	1	6	“It's not not something I really think about too much day-to-day. At least it is an interesting issue as we're saying about why why this might have come about, that this is such a female dominated profession, but, either I've gotten used to it or you know, It doesn't make a huge amount of difference” (THEO)
	1	7	“Quite frankly. I just get on with it. You know, my colleagues are females, my line managers being female, my subordinates of being female.” (OLIVER)
	2	6	“I don't tend to have a feeling like I'm sort of, I don't know, outnumbered or people don't relate to me and that sort of thing. I don't. I don't see it as sort of like a a wholly negative experience whatsoever.” (ZACHARY)
	2	7	“I'm not conscious of kind of my being a man being a anything that relevant to it.” (ARCHIE)
	3	6	“I actually think about it that much, I definitely echo what the other gent said around this it not necessarily being a surprise to find oneself in an EP service or an EP situation and be the only man or one of a handful of men” (LEO)
	3	17	“I don't think anything that made me a male EP has presented kind of challenges above and beyond the challenges that are presented anyway.” (ISAAC)

Masculinity becoming salient at particular moments rather than always Subtheme 1	1	6	“Maybe wonder like, oh God, I felt like a bit ignorant maybe. I don't know if I've been kind of blind. It's that. But yeah, I don't really think about it, to be honest. But I do a little bit more now, but yes, that's something that's never really crossed my mind that much.” (RYAN)
	1	7	“But yeah, I suppose it, and throughout my time training it comes in and out as as an important factor” (ETHAN)
Physiological responses in educational settings Subtheme 2	1	10	“I mean, I was in a nursery this morning doing a statutory assessment and just generally, you're like, whenever the kids will come up to you and like they'll try and touch you and stuff. But I feel quite like anxious in those environments because I'm like, oh, my God, I don't want anyone to think, I don't want it to be seen like, no, the kids like touching me and stuff because it just really makes me panic.” (RYAN)
	1	14	“I think about some of the vulnerable groups where if they come in and see a man like, is that going to like high alert almost?” (RYAN)
Awkwardness produced by gendered attention Subtheme 3	1	11	“You get treated a bit like an exotic, exotic bird and it can get quite awkward. I mean, I had one last week and yeah, the kids were mobbing me and I don't you know that I don't. Really. I'm trying to observe one kid, and they're kind of crowding around me. Yeah. It's quite an unusual experience sometimes.” (THEO)
	2	6	“I think times that it's been raised, I think maybe the way that it's been raised has been a little bit awkward and that's maybe times when I felt awkward being a man in the room, but otherwise not really.” (KAI)

Heightened awareness of being male in feminised groups Subtheme 3	1	25	“there's been a few occasions where I've been having a team discussion and I've made like a crystal clear, like a really, really valid point. Like objectively, like, I'm not arrogant or anything, but I've like, you know, contributed in a really like quality way and I just found that it's been shot down and it doesn't really make any sense as to why and they've been primarily female dominated discussions. Maybe it's being a male played into that, I don't know.” (RYAN)
	2	18	“Yeah, I'm not. I don't know that I'm so affected by that now, but I do remember a colleague saying not really that keen on men, are you? And I remember thinking is that how I'm coming across? Yeah, this needs some real thinking about.” (ZACHARY)
Men are isolated/ shut down Subtheme 3	1	25	“there's been a few occasions where I've been having a team discussion and I've made like a crystal clear, like a really, really valid point. Like objectively, like, I'm not arrogant or anything, but I've like, you know, contributed in a really like quality way and I just found that it's been shot down and it doesn't really make any sense as to why and they've been primarily female dominated discussions. Maybe it's being a male played into that, I don't know.” (RYAN)
	1	26	“And like we can never fully know in that context. What? Why? Like, why you're being shut down like you start to question it, it seems like it doesn't feel quite right. You can. Is it because I'm a man? You know, I'm a minority in that situation. Is like, it's quite possible it is.” (ETHAN)
	1	26	“when I just worked as a teaching assistant in a school, there was much more. Again, it was very female dominated and there was a bit more othering and a bit more being treated as a bit of a male stereotype automatically in situations.” (THEO)

	3	10	“if a female, a new female colleague arrived and desperately wanted to talk about what happened in the Premier League over the weekend. That would be a fantastic part of the conversation. It's just that's not something that I often get a chance to lean into, I guess.” (LEO)
	3	20	“it's sometimes harder to get buddies working in an essentially all female environment... I would say that the opportunity for those kinds of deeper friendships that people that allow for you as a kind of single male within a female environment are not there as much” (MARCUS)
Reduction of identity pressure in female-dominated spaces Subtheme 3	2	7	“I am a feeling probably more comfortable in the more in the completely like female dominated team where, that the expectation that I engage in some sort of stereotypical male behaviour is not there and I am just who I am.” (ARCHIE)
Masculinity as background identity rather than active performance Subtheme 1	2	15-16	“I don't even strive towards a healthy and traditional masculinity, particularly like it's almost it feels kind of irrelevant to me. Like I know I am a man like like that's how I present to the world. But I've never. I've never thought like how could I be more of a man in this situation or more masculine, or I wish I had been more masculine.” (ARCHIE)
	3	12	“I feel like I can't even answer it in a way, because I feel like my it's like a it's constructed of everything around me and and like, I'll probably lean into certain things and don't lean into others as well”. (DYLAN)
Gender becomes salient when other privileged	3	19	“my masculinity is sort of or my maleness. Is is perhaps one of my only interesting or noticeable categories, because I've swung through life as a privilege. You know, it's about as serene as it gets. White, middle class, straight, all these things.” (LEO)

identities reduce visibility of difference Subtheme 1			
Males as outsiders in education Subtheme 3	1	9	“But part of me and I don't know what it comes from, sometimes feels a little bit like. I'm sort of an outsider. I shouldn't be there, you know, like, oh, I'm snooping around the school or something, even though obviously I'm not.” (SAMUEL)
Gender influencing consultation dynamics and disclosure Subtheme 3	2	18	“Five years ago, I didn't seem to have a lot of consultations just with dads who are now the primary caregiver, but now I am. But again, I'm thinking right. We're talking about numbers of cars, car, money, they're all these sorts of old masculine sort of economic statements and my female colleagues are that's not coming up” (REUBEN)

<i>Code Name</i>	<i>Focus Group</i>	<i>Transcript Page</i>	<i>Phrase and Individual</i>
Self-silencing to avoid appearing dominant Subtheme 1	1	15	“And I think because I'm a man, I maybe sometimes don't put forward always what I am thinking because it feels like I don't want to move into that space” (ETHAN).
	1	16	“..So there is so much written about it just and how having a few men in a group and yet men speak more than women and so forth. So I think we've got to be acutely aware of that and I only actually respond if I have a direct request of, by and large, as a way of going around that.” (OLIVER)
Men feel safe with other men Subtheme 3	1	16	“...when I'm like on a course when it was maybe me and just the other men on the course, maybe the language we use will be different.” (ETHAN)
	1	20	“But I think with different relationships, different things are always kind of present, so I probably communicate in a slightly different way with some of the male SENCOs I'm working with compared to female ones.” (ETHAN)
Authenticity facilitating relational safety Subtheme 3	1	19	“...being your authentic self is something that young people pick up on quite, quite well, don't they?” (SAMUEL)
	1	21	“But then Samuel's point as well about being authentic is also really important. So you that's a that's a really. Balancing act, isn't it because you've got to be yourself, right? But at the same time you want to connect with the other people that you're a part of and doesn't it get so much more difficult?” (OLIVER)
	2	19	“But also we might want to influence, might want to, you know, adapt how we come across as as men in those situations, to build that relationship and obviously without losing ourselves and taking on those parts of masculinity we might not be so keen on.”

			(ZACHARY)
Unconscious identity regulation in practice Subtheme 2	1	20	"The way I'll approach that relationship might be different, but I guess a lot of that stuff happens unconsciously for us and it always, always is going to happen in different situations" (ETHAN)
Tension between authenticity and professional adaptation Subtheme 2	1	21	"It was interesting you saying about how we have to adapt a lot, almost camouflage ourselves as EPs to be attuned and to, you know have positive unconditional positive regard and that can almost be almost a little bit counterproductive to forming an identity because your identity is necessarily contingent on in that moment your identity as professional as contingent on on sort of how the other person is presenting." (SAMUEL)
	2	19	"being adaptive in those moments that if you were to come across and you're working with a particularly masculine dad, or how we might perceive someone to be sort of very typically masculine, how do we perhaps adapt to that situation to make ourselves, you know, not lose ourselves." (ZACHARY)
	2	23	"And would it be more beneficial if I was actually to be my true self? Or at least what I see to be my more true self and be a representative of a particular class that might be associated with an accent or a way of speaking that I would usually adopt?" (ZACHARY)
			"But also with the way that perhaps I present masculinity and that like, you know, saying earlier that I perhaps intentionally soften it for certain social situations that you know, is there other ways that we are perhaps reducing our masculinity or is trying to be a certain way to adapt to certain situations when actually we could be more role models that you

	2	23	know, masculine people can still be good, doesn't necessarily have to be associated with bad being bad or a negative connotation." (ZACHARY)
	2	23	"But yeah, it certainly makes me reflect about should, That social chameleon, being Chameleon, if that's a term, happen and does it always have the positive effect on me and all and groups that I think it does?" (ZACHARY)
	2	27	"What is regarded as middle class without feeling ashamed of it? That's the point I was making. I shouldn't be feeling ashamed of having some characteristics which might be regarded as middle class. Why shouldn't I? Because I enjoy the activity. So so that that's the that's the conflict." (NOAH)
	2	28	"And actually maybe I should lean into the uncomfortable feeling I have instead of probably very unconvincingly trying to present in a way that is, you know, quite traditionally masculine." (KAI)
	3	24	"And I feel like I'm I use particular language at work, than I do probably outside of work and I'm very aware of that." (DYLAN)
Masculinity softened through age and perceived genuineness	1	22	"Yeah, I think this old bloke is turning up and he's he's authentic and genuine then. Yeah, I can be freer with him. So that's how I play." (OLIVER)

Subtheme 2			
Psychological work framed as privileged access to vulnerability Subtheme 3	1	23	“And that's the bit that I so admire about the privilege we have as psychologists to be in that space to be able to hold people in their most vulnerable moment.” (OLIVER)
Physical presence as emotionally containing rather than threatening Subtheme 3	1	24	“I don't care, as long as they get a good feeling around being around us and that we act appropriately.” (OLIVER)
Discomfort occupying authoritative masculine role Subtheme 1	2	16	“I would feel in terms of how it impacts me in a role like I would shy away from like, say, running like a boys mental health group or something 'cause I would feel like I don't know, like I would like personally, I don't know that I'd want to talk about how to healthily embody masculinity because it feels to me like not even that relevant to something like I that is important for me to embody.” (ARCHIE)
	2	21	“but someone who's no longer in the team said something about how the women in the team look to him as a man, and you could see everybody's toes curling, but from that, it made me think, well, now I'm like I I don't want to take up space and there's, like, lots of intersectionality.” (KAI)
	2	7	“I think there is sometimes like assumptions when I fall like probably kind of in the South there's a lot of doctors who are male in the medical profession and they often lump me into that category. And so there's this idea that actually I come in as an expert and they'll listen to me and I don't. I don't really like that because I'm not.” (DYLAN)

Intentional softening of masculinity to ensure psychological safety Subtheme 1	2	18	“And I think that when I was on a sort of 15 and one course, I was quite often like taking on this role of, I want men terrible and I don't. I don't know if I was as blunt as that, but it was very much like, you know. I don't like this and I don't like this and I wonder about sort of like do I reduce my masculinity intentionally amongst groups of females to make myself fit in and to make them feel safe because I'm worried about how I might come across otherwise so.” (ZACHARY)
Concealment of masculinity to avoid stereotype threat Subtheme 1	2	23	“But also with the way that perhaps I present masculinity and that like, you know, saying earlier that I perhaps intentionally soften it for certain social situations that you know, is there other ways that we are perhaps reducing our masculinity or is trying to be a certain way to adapt to certain situations when actually we could be more role models that you know, masculine people can still be good, doesn't necessarily have to be associated with bad being bad or a negative connotation.” (ZACHARY)
	2	19	“So sometimes I also have to hide my masculinity. The bit that I define myself because I worry that if I did, people say I'm sexist people, people would say he doesn't like women. People would say he doesn't. He doesn't respect women.” (NOAH)
Intentional softening of masculine authority markers Subtheme 1	2	24	“I go by my first name exclusively, like not even Mr or doctor. Even when schools are like, Are you sure you want to just go by Archie? I don't know. Is that a deliberate Softening of a certain masculine authoritativeness. Or is that just me being me and feeling like my name is just a better way to introduce myself to anyone than than a title? But yeah, it's unresolved for me like.” (ARCHIE)
Code-switching sexuality to align with heteronormative masculinity	2	28	“and then my own feelings of being uncomfortable about like if I go into a secondary school and I'm consciously trying to act like I'm what I see as straight or or manly.” (KAI)

Subtheme 1			
Ongoing self-monitoring of masculine presentation	2	31	“...noticing myself notice when I think there's an interaction happening and try and understand. Yeah, because it just feels like it's probably something that needs a bit more sort of conscious thought, I think.” (REUBEN)
Subtheme 2	2	31	“Yeah, It made me reflect on, I guess the way that I present myself and how that might influence certain social situations, I suppose. And yeah, how I might be more aware of that in the future, I guess.” (REUBEN)
	2	31	“and I think I'm realising through some of the points I've raised today that I've almost got an inverted negative perception of masculinity, where I wouldn't expect a man to act in a certain way, but actually a lot of my thoughts around my own masculinity are based in those ideas. So I think it's made me do some of my own thinking on that.” (KAI)
Strategic modulation of masculine self-presentation	3	10	“It's just that you learn over time consciously and and unconsciously I think to bring out some more features of you that you know are going to help rapport with with your colleagues and either push down or just not give much oxygen to those parts that you know won't particularly get you know, get much interest.” (LEO)
Subtheme 1			
Anticipatory caution in mixed-gender professional spaces	3	25	“And maybe it's, I haven't tested or haven't taken those risks with other colleagues because I'm making the assumptions about them, but also because there's a bit of trial and error and reinforcement learning that I've had with other colleagues, which has, well, I'm cautious about that where people have been really sweet and sympathetic but then taking offence” (ISAAC)
Subtheme 2			

Men are dangerous Subtheme 1	1	14	“I think about some of the vulnerable groups where if they come in and see a man like, is that going to like high alert almost?” (RYAN)
	1	19	“And I can kind of try to use those other aspects of myself to, I guess bring people together more and help them to see me maybe not as a threat if they do already I don't know.” (RYAN)
Constraint on physical interactions due to gender Subtheme 1	1	23	“If it's, say, two women compared to me there in terms of like, I'm not even sure how you respond. But like you talk about the physical contact or other things like that, that wouldn't be appropriate for me.” (ETHAN)
Awareness of physical presence as potentially intimidating Subtheme 1	1	14	“Being masculine comes with certain responsibilities into my mind, if that makes sense. A certain awareness of your relative physical strength really, and how that can in many contexts potentially be an intimidating thing. And mitigating that somewhat.” (THEO)
	1	14	“...when I, I have meetings. I'll. I'll make sure that I like a step far away from the door, you know, just in case, like anyone like feels threatened.” (RYAN)
	1	19	“Often the dynamic a little bit, you know coming in as a man, I don't know how that's perceived, so kind of maybe like camping up a bit and like be a bit sassy. And I do think it diffuses the tension. And I think you start leaning into like my northern- ness as well just - I like to kind of like soften being a man where I can”. (RYAN)
	2	18	“And I think that when I was on a sort of 15 and one course, I was quite often like taking on this role of, I want men terrible and I don't. I don't know if I was as blunt as that, but it was

			very much like, you know. I don't like this and I don't like this and I wonder about sort of like do I reduce my masculinity intentionally amongst groups of females to make myself fit in and to make them feel safe because I'm worried about how I might come across otherwise so." (ZACHARY)
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Foregrounding professional seniority Subtheme 1	1	2	“My name is Theo. I’m a senior educational psychologist in X” (THEO)
Establishing authority through experience and history Subtheme 1	1 1 1 3	2 11 17 4	“I had this conversation with a friend... many years ago... a very experienced EP Senior...” (OLIVER) “I have a particular role in the local authority where I was asked by name, so I wasn't asked by rank, but by name, to have a conciliatory and role with, you know, parents and then the county and so on.” (OLIVER) “And I said, quite arrogantly, and I did it deliberately. It was a deliberate point. I said that three people I want on the team is myself. Me, myself and I.” (OLIVER) “Yeah. I mean, when I trained as an EP about 20 years ago, I was the only one on my course actually in X and X, where 50% of the of the EPs were male and 50% female, which was quite remarkable then really unusual and but now I'm with the service in Hull and I'm the only man.” (MARCUS)
Positioning self as historically knowledgeable Subtheme 1	1	2	“The AEP used to keep demographic information on our cohorts...” (OLIVER)

Money = Masculinity Subtheme 2	2	11	“but it could also come down to like money like, as in the caring professions in general, I've seen as not particularly well paying. So and and you know the culture around, you know, typical masculinities generally associated with looking for a high paying profession. I mean, like, you don't tend to look at teaching, psychology as, you know, a way to to, to achieve that type of breadwinning masculinity that, that that is fairly dominant in society right.” (ARCHIE)
	2	11	“I've wondered about, particularly since the past seven years as the relative wages go down and down and down like what that does for men who still in society probably experienced somewhat a greater pressure to earn more than their heterosexual partner”. (ARCHIE)
	2	12	“And for me it was like, you know, having like a lot of sort of 20 to 25,000 roles on the way to having an EP salary and yeah, that is a lot now, but I think about some of the people that went straight out of school and went and became an electrician and now they're on like I don't know, eighty, £90,000 and they didn't have to do all that extra work and they were on that within three or four years and yeah, so I wonder about that as well.” (ZACHARY)
	3	4	“I think they're they're definitely economic and demographic changes in the way that men have been employed and what they've done and and then the employment that a partner might have as well.” (MARCUS)
Claiming moral authority through sacrifice Subtheme 2	1	3	“We actually took a pay cut to come into the profession.” (OLIVER)
Gender shaping relational expectations	1	5	“So I just wonder what their perceptions are coming in to have a meeting with a man, male EP”. (RYAN)

	1	15	“I've got female friends who have made that critique about other men that they've worked with in the EP profession or in schools that they do take up too much space or they make things about them or they kind of, they've read something and they think nobody else has heard of it. So they'll tell everyone.” (ETHAN)
	1	15	“I'm aware I'm one of the only only a few men in the room, and one of them is the the principle. So what are those dynamics like?” (ETHAN)
	1	16	“Dominance. That's a that's a very tough one to balance. If you have to be in in a senior role with colleagues that are all female.” (OLIVER)
	1	26	“also the fact that there are so many men in different leadership positions within the EP World, despite being like the minority group, I suppose there are these like those opportunities, whether people see it like as a man, that's a role that I should go into or less women want to take on those leadership roles because they actually don't want to move into those spaces. Like if you were that way inclined that it could be seen as an opportunity.” (ETHAN)
	1	26	“You know, I think recently I was recently in a meeting, and it was me, another senior and the principal. We were all male. And I think everybody else who was a main grade EP was female and I was very aware of that.” (THEO)
	3	5	“for all of the paucity of men in the profession, we are then over represented in positions of management relative to our numbers side of that and that's always kind of irked me somewhat. And so there's thoughts there.” (LEO)
	3	19	“I was able to occupy positions of of leadership and then of management potentially faster as a man than than a woman. And I think that's partly because of the qualities that other people assume of you before you know there is.” (LEO)

	2	10	into those spaces. Like if you were that way inclined that it could be seen as an opportunity.” (ETHAN) “I remember my kind of colleagues, female colleagues on my course saying, but you'll be fine because you're a man and it'll be so different for you.” (KAI)
	3	5	“for all of the paucity of men in the profession, we are then over represented in positions of management relative to our numbers side of that and that's always kind of irked me somewhat. And so there's thoughts there.” (LEO)
	3	19	“I was able to occupy positions of of leadership and then of management potentially faster as a man than than a woman. And I think that's partly because of the qualities that other people assume of you before you know there is.” (LEO)
	3	19	“So for instance, my assertiveness maybe is always charitably taken as assertiveness because I'm a male, whereas it might come across as kind of bossiness as if I were a female and so that helps you then get up into to those positions, I think and people can more naturally see you as as a leader, perhaps as a manager then.” (LEO)
Tension of men being a minority within an overall patriarchal society Subtheme 3	1	25	“I suppose we're the minority in this situation, but in general men, you know, we live in a patriarchy with we have far more benefits. So like, that's complex to address.” (ETHAN)
	2	3-4	“So if you if you say if you argue not argue but if you discuss well why is there so many few male then you were projected as being anti progressive. But really, you might be progressive because you may still argue the same thing if it was other way around. (NOAH)

	2	6	“when sort of gender is brought up, particularly by men and because there is an enormous amount of gender equality for females in so many professions, and in so many different parts of the world that when males bring it up, it's kind of like, well, you would get everything else. So why do you get the opportunity to talk about this one thing and I? Yeah, I wonder if that is sometimes an influence about what makes that awkward.” (ZACHARY)
Role model discourse and gendered expectations of boys Subtheme 4	1 2 3	26 7 6	“And then there are opportunities like definitely with the demographic we often work with, with children, a lot of them are boys and there are things that I can, I suppose, bring in from my own experience in conversations to just build relationships” (ETHAN) “sometimes it's like when I've walked into a school and found, oh, great, you're a man. The the young person prefers men. And then, oh, right. OK. Then I'd start. Well, why would that be? What is it? What are they going to expect me to be like when?” (REUBEN) “if I see particularly working with boys, slightly older key stage keys stage three boys, I think I am more likely to champion value interest-based activities at the expense of just talking. I think.” (ISAAC)
Gendered division of labour shaping leadership access Subtheme 2	1	26	“And I think there's a lot of females in our service that would probably quite like to be in senior roles, leadership roles, but practically there they work two or three days a week because of childcare. Their husband probably earns more than them. And therefore they're not taking on those roles.” (THEO)
Leadership is structurally enabled	1	27	“And I think there's a lot of females in our service that would probably quite like to be in senior roles, leadership roles, but practically there they work two or three days a week because of childcare. Their husband probably earns more than them.”

Subtheme 1	3	19	And therefore they're not taking on those roles. So, oh yeah, I guess that's just practically there's a there's a difference there. And I've been advantaged by that in terms of taking on a leadership role.” (THEO) “I was able to occupy positions of of leadership and then of management potentially faster as a man than than a woman. And I think that's partly because of the qualities that other people assume of you before you know there is.” (LEO)
Risk of being morally misread when naming male disadvantage Subtheme 3	1 2 2 2	27 3 3 4 6	“I maybe occasionally feel sometimes if I'm making a point that indicates this might be a sphere in which men might be disadvantaged over women, it sometimes comes across as if I'm just being, you know, I'm not seeing the bigger picture or I'm perpetuating the patriarchy or or being incel or something” (SAMUEL) “It's a difficult one because sometimes I I've seen things come up in the past that seem a bit men's rightsy about like men in female dominated professions. And like, I've really felt uncomfortable with that tone.” (ARCHIE) “and I remember there was a discussion a few years ago on EP net and similar discussion, which was somebody was talking about, had looked at the names and like 80% of the names come up for the principal EP at the time was female, but unfortunately the discussion was quickly shut off because people complain that then people started talking about how the world is designed against female, which it is as well.” (NOAH) “So if you if you say if you argue not argue but if you discuss well why is there so many few male then you were projected as being anti progressive. But really, you might be progressive because you may still argue the same thing if it was other way around.” (NOAH) “And I think any conversations that did happen around gender were a bit like kind of some of the things you've talked about, kind of they they had a tone that I think people felt

			slightly uncomfortable with.” (KAI)
Selective attention to gendered disadvantage Subtheme 3	1	27	“But I do sometimes get a sense of maybe those sort of discussions look at, you know, youth offenders, populations, how many of them are, you know, boys compared to girls and and these very real statistics which do show, you know, gender imbalance and and disadvantage it. It doesn't maybe perhaps because our profession is mostly female get maybe as much attention as some of the other issues, but that might just be my projection.” (SAMUEL)
Informal power operating alongside formal structures Subtheme 1	1	28	“So those are the challenges. Knowing how your organisation works and if you work in a in an organisation that's, say predominantly white, predominantly female, predominantly whatever the isms that people attribute to our profession, then you've got to know that there's there's power broking going on in obvious places and in informal places, and that's what you've got to know.” (OLIVER)
Boys need men Subtheme 4	2	4	“And the other thing is I'm independent. I don't know if anybody else is. And 90% of my caseload or people I see or I discuss are male, so it's that. That's that's the other aspect of it is why is there so few men who are EPs?” (NOAH)
	2	5	“a lot of the work I do in secondary is with kind of adolescents, young men and I think it's, I often think about how my role as a man, but a man that presents very differently to a lot of these people and what the impact that is.” (KAI)
	2	7	“sometimes it's like when I've walked into a school and found, oh, great, you're a man. The the young person prefers men. And then, oh, right. OK. Then I'd start. Well, why would that be? What is it? What are they going to expect me to be like when?” (REUBEN)”

	2	8	“Why is there so many men or so many young men that I come across have so little ambition? Ambition to do well, ambition to achieve. Is it because there are no role models, is it because they don’t see masculine. What is it?” (NOAH)
	3	7	“I also see this other side of it is when I’m going to early years settings is sometimes these children run up to you and they’re hugging you and like being around you. And then I and I kind of sometimes I I feel I feel this they’re like do they have the absent fathers who probably look like me and it it just it does it does make me think about that quite a lot.” (DYLAN)
	3	16	“I think a lot of my female colleges have got brilliant insights into the way that boys understand their world. But yeah, maybe we we do have. We all have as individuals, unique perspectives. And they come from different places. Gender, ethnicity, experience, life experience, personality. And we bring all that in.” (MARCUS)
	3	28	“There’ll be expectations that their peers have on them. Society has on them. Teachers have on them that they will maybe face slightly different challenges with lots of overlap but slightly different challenges than their sister would do, and what challenges could there be? Can I predict them? Can I help them towards that?” (ISAAC)
Assumptions of male authority in behaviour management Subtheme 1	2	5	“I think when I was a teacher there was lots of conversations around discipline being different because I’m a man” (KAI)
Breadwinner expectations and masculinity	2	12	“I think it is a lingering part of society that men are expected to have more money and therefore does it suit to sort of have to climb the ladder in that way.” (ZACHARY)

Subtheme 2	2	26	“But then maybe there's well is something if if we are in a very still in a quiet, traditional masculine in the male breadwinner, does that then free up what would be in the typical heterosexual couple? Would that be that the woman has the opportunity to go in and, you know, take a lesser paid role as well and maybe that supports the way through you know the the course when you're dropping the salary. If you weren't the main breadwinner, can you afford to do that as a family because you've got a male, maybe main breadwinner, maybe that comes into it as well.” (REUBEN)
Status rich, feminised pathway role Subtheme 2	2	13	“I think that's probably a point where going down a route like studying psychology or studying teaching the influence of expectations around gender might have more of an impact because actually I think of the EP role as you know, you're a doctor, you are an independent professional. There's lots of things about that that I would say are probably, you know, seen as less traditionally.” (KAI)
Discursive silencing of men's issues Subtheme 3	2	13	“I don't know if you anybody listen to Radio 4 here, but there is a excellent programme. Most daytime called women's hour. So there was discussion why isn't there a programme Mens of it? And immediately that was shut down.” (NOAH)
	2	13	“And I also was watching another programme on TV when a comedian wanted to talk about mental health and men because he was talking about this statistics and I don't know what it is, which shows young men are more in danger of taking their own life. But immediately that discussion was changed, and he was actually very annoyed in that programme, called Daily Politics, which is everyday 12:15 on BBC2. And he was he wanted to talk about men's mental health, but that was very immediately shut down and I think could it be? And I'm not suggesting that. Could it be that because men have been regarded as being strongest sex, whatever that means, which is load of Cosmo, that itself is loaded?” (NOAH)

Masculinity and power imbalance Subtheme 3	2	24	“And we're always sort of being trained on being aware of power and power imbalances and and maybe gender and masculinity is part of that.” (REUBEN)
The EP profession needs men Subtheme 4	3	13	“Otherwise we just have, like, you know, a 27 year old Rachel, who's an EP who'd be completely fine and all 27 year old Rachel's would look the same, would be completely fine for the profession. But it kind of wouldn't” (ISAAC)
Challenging assumption that male presence adds intrinsic value Subtheme 4	3	15	“Is it is it varies through a borderline arrogance to thinking that we bring something as a gender that wouldn't, be that would be missing if it were a totally female dominated profession.” (LEO)
Gendered behavioural double standard Subtheme 1	3	19	“ So for instance, my assertiveness maybe is always charitably taken as assertiveness because I'm a male, whereas it might come across as kind of bossiness as if I were a female and so that helps you then get up into to those positions, I think and people can more naturally see you as as a leader, perhaps as a manager then.” (LEO)
Structural expectations of male competence Subtheme 1	1	15	“But I think in the EP work maybe how it might be presented as kind of an assumption you might be, be a bit more logical, rational, a bit less emotional. Maybe you'd be a little bit more into psychometrics and cognitive stuff.” (SAMUEL)
Gendered conversational patterns Subtheme 4	2	18	“Five years ago, I didn't seem to have a lot of consultations just with dads who are now the primary caregiver, but now I am. But again, I'm thinking right. We're talking about numbers of cars, car, money, they're all these sorts of old masculine sort of economic statements and my female colleagues are that's not coming up” (REUBEN)

Workforce–service user gender mismatch Subtheme 4	2	4	“And the other thing is I'm independent. I don't know if anybody else is. And 90% of my caseload or people I see or I discuss are male, so it's that. That's that's the other aspect of it is why is there so few men who are EPs?” (NOAH)
Explaining gender imbalance through structural factors (income and status) Subtheme 2	1	2-3	“the loss of parity with the wage scales that EPs historically had, which might be equivalent to say, what what we might see today in a deputy headship with a small school or assistant headship in a large school” (OLIVER)
	1	18	“None of this money is yours. You're funded by the public sector. You're never going to go bankrupt, you know. And if you do, don't worry, the government will bail you out or or or change the rules.” (OLIVER)
	1	27	“And I think there's a lot of females in our service that would probably quite like to be in senior roles, leadership roles, but practically there they work two or three days a week because of childcare. Their husband probably earns more than them.” (THEO)
	2	11	“but it could also come down to like money like, as in the caring professions in general, I've seen as not particularly well paying. So and and you know the culture around, you know, typical masculinities generally associated with looking for a high paying profession. I mean, like, you don't tend to look at teaching, psychology as, you know, a way to to, to achieve that type of breadwinning masculinity that, that that is fairly dominant in society right.” (ARCHIE)

Economic restructuring influencing male participation Subtheme 2	3	16	“The big changes that have taken place in the economy and society and how that's impacted on children growing up in our world and and on the jobs that we choose to do, and as we've reflected, there are very few, well, a small proportion, sorry of men kind of wanting to train as educational psychologists.” (MARCUS)
Gender framed as universal yet institutionally marginalised Subtheme 3	2	6	“I feel like considering it is something that is, you know, the entire population is impacted by gender and the way that they exist as a male or female or other gender and how limit how how much of A limited opportunity there was to talk about that was, it's quite a stark difference to other sort of intersectionalities I suppose.” (ZACHARY)

<i>Code Name</i>	<i>Focus Group</i>	<i>Transcript Page</i>	<i>Phrase and Individual</i>
Masculinity as context-dependent and shifting Subtheme 1	1	6	“I reckon for me it depends on the the context I'm in. So if I am in a secondary school it depends on you know you might, you might build patterns with noticing all all the SENCOs I have are female of a certain age, you're just it's something you might reflect upon in general, which kind of brings it into question...” (ETHAN)
	2	19	“I think it's just being about responses to situations and recognising that we can take on so many different types of masculine roles, and then still be OK, and the fact that we can tend to recognise where masculinity can be somewhat problematic when it's taken to certain extremes, and making sure we don't end up on those avenues, I think that that's a key part of the sort of reflective nature of the role.” (ZACHARY)
Questioning rigid gender binaries Subtheme 3	1	4-5	“I think, you know, there can be sometimes I see, especially when I'm working in schools, a kind of a really sort of clear split between how a boy might present or how a girl might present, and I suppose I think sometimes these constructs can be a little bit too erm, or seem to me a little bit too rigid.” (SAMUEL)
	3	26	“What's a feminine male right?” (ISAAC)
	3	26	“Yeah, I think I'd be thinking the same. I didn't like those extremes kind of thing, but I think 'cause everyone lands differently.” (DYLAN)

Cultural norms shaping masculine emotional expression Subtheme 1	1	14	“My dad kisses me to this day. We come from that kind of culture. It's not a big deal to us.” (OLIVER)
Distancing from dominant cultural meanings of masculinity Subtheme 2	1	14-15	“I don't really sort of consider myself to be particularly masculine and almost moved away a little bit from from the term.” (SAMUEL) “...when I think of masculinity tend to, I think my mind gets drawn to a lot of the negative aspects or or some of the qualities that can put people off. Whether that's being like dominant or arrogant, taking up space kind of get similarly like overconfident things, and I think they're they're often the things that I'm trying to like quite consciously, sometimes not go into.” (ETHAN)
	2	5	“...I always found that quite interesting because I'm not someone I would say presents as traditionally masculine. I'm quite a small man as well and quite a camp man, and I think like that has always been something that I always thought was a bit interesting.” (KAI)
	2	7	“I wouldn't say I fit the way I might dress might be different the way I might speak might be quite different to the sort of male figures that the school is saying this person's particularly warm to” (REUBEN)

	2	9	“you I also don't know how everybody identifies exactly in the group, but I wouldn't consider myself too typically masculine, and again not really showing off too many of those really typically masculine things. Again, whatever that is.” (ZACHARY)
	2	14	“I think my perception of masculinity, I think I lump it in with a lot of quite probably quite negative connotations. I think that's probably related to my own experience of feeling that I don't necessarily fit with what I felt that was growing up.” (KAI)
	3	9	“I think I tend to divorce masculinity just thinking if a child or a young person were to come and almost ask me the same question, or at least the first half, I think. How I would describe masculinity would recognise some. I don't think I could broach the topic without describing some stereotypical masculine traits and acknowledge them as such and the the mention of toxic masculinity earlier.” (LEO)
Media discourses shaping understandings of masculinity Subtheme 2	1	15	“I think there is quite a lot in the media about toxic masculinity”. (SAMUEL)
	1	16	“Maybe kids don't have to only see the kind of toxic influencers that are out there in the world and and just by not being that maybe it's quite powerful.” (ETHAN)
	3	2	“I guess in our role, I think I've probably been exposed to more like stuff and stuff on social media and how it's influencing teenagers and it comes up with random topics, but it's nothing really concrete about it and probably it may be. Maybe I've been. I feel like I've been influenced by as well, like a lot of like YouTube and and, you know, podcasters and like, stuff like that. And I'm and I listen to it and I just think, what the hell is going on kind of thing.” (DYLAN)

	3	3	“And like the cultural imagined version of what it means to be male, but less about toxicity. I hate that. I almost kind of. Yeah, I get annoyed with that word. It's about kind of trade-offs, right? Opportunity cost. It's about getting the balance right in certain contexts.” (ISAAC)
Masculinity associated with negatively valued traits Subtheme 2	1	15	“...when I think of masculinity tend to, I think my mind gets drawn to a lot of the negative aspects or or some of the qualities that can put people off. Whether that's being like dominant or arrogant, taking up space kind of get similarly like overconfident things.” (ETHAN)
	3	9	“I think I tend to divorce masculinity just thinking if a child or a young person were to come and almost ask me the same question, or at least the first half, I think. How I would describe masculinity would recognise some. I don't think I could broach the topic without describing some stereotypical masculine traits and acknowledge them as such and the the mention of toxic masculinity earlier.” (LEO)
Constructing an alternative, relational masculinity Subtheme 2	1	15	“I suppose it's just demonstrating that men can, I suppose, possess a lot of the skills that are really part of the EP role anyway. So and that makes it quite easy like - being a good listener or bringing lots of other people into the conversation yourself to reflect on things” (ETHAN).
	2	15	“you know, being soft, caring. I also see as part of me. You know what does that mean? Does that mean I'm not masculine because I'm soft and caring?” (NOAH)

	2	15	“There's a a Kate Nash song at the minute called Germ where she talks a lot about lots of these things and one of the things she says is we don't have a problem with masculinity. We have a problem with toxic masculinity.” (KAI)
Intersectionality of male EPs Subtheme 3	1	17	“We were really, under represented ethnicity wise, you know black representation and minority representation was really, really weak when I became an EP. That's balanced itself out a little bit.” (OLIVER)
	1	19	“I mean, for me being male, straight white. You know, kind of ticking all of the majority boxes.” (THEO)
	1	19	“So obviously being a man, but also a gay man, I feel like, you know, there are times where I kind of make that, like quite obvious, you know, like when I'm working like teachers or whoever it is just like maybe like ... Often the dynamic a little bit, you know coming in as a man, I don't know how that's perceived, so kind of maybe like camping up a bit and like be a bit sassy. And I do think it diffuses the tension. And I think you start leaning into like my northern- ness as well just - I like to kind of like soften being a man where I can.” (RYAN)
	1	20	“part of our role is trying to sort of be camouflaged and mould into these school systems and work with them so depending on the set up that those schools have camouflaging as a as a man or young man with a mixed race background can be easier or more difficult.” (ETHAN)
	1	20	“I think like more when I'm working with young people, the race aspect might come up more and more because I'm working with often children from minority backgrounds. So that's sometimes seen as a more important thing or building relationship with them might

			involve sharing that talking about different stories. It can be quite a nice way into some of that life story work.” (ETHAN)
	2	20	“And I'm like, is that like where I live like, you know, I don't recognise the London you're describing as a as a middle class woman, and I'm finally a really hard to relate as like a working class Irish person.” (ARCHIE)
	3	6	“I know other EPs have said this as well. Actually from a South Asian background, or who looks South Asian, where people perceive that you should be like in the IT kind of support or like you've come to fix the computer and stuff like that.” (ISAAC)
	3	15	“And this like and the same as like my kind of South Asian heritage. Sometimes I use it. Sometimes I kind of run away from it like I always. I always try. If anything, try to stick with psychology. I'm kind of really like I almost actively fight against. Where where it becomes too much kind of identity based kind of thinking or category based thinking I kind of I much prefer sticking to Psychology that just feels safer with me.” (ISAAC)
	3	19	“I've swung through life as a privilege. You know, it's about as serene as it gets. White, middle class, straight, all these things. So being male in a female dominated profession is something that really, really strikes a cord with me I guess.” (LEO)

Difficulty disentangling intersecting privileges Subtheme 3	1	19	“It's difficult to tease apart what aspects of my personal identity might be impacting on people's, yeah, perception of me. And they're kind of maybe seeing me in a certain, in a certain way, if that makes sense.” (THEO)
Masculinity framed as requiring reflection rather than certainty Subtheme 3	1 2	30 31	“Let's say thought provoking, let's say, thought provoking.” (RYAN) “Yeah, my phrase was gonna be thought provoking. Yeah, it's. Yeah, It made me reflect on, I guess the way that I present myself and how that might influence certain social situations, I suppose. And yeah, how I might be more aware of that in the future, I guess.” (ZACHARY)
Is being stereotypically masculine a bad thing? Subtheme 2	2	15	“even I say I'm masculine, but then I also recognise there's lots of negative connotation with that term, yet I don't buy into those. So for example, when Archie was talking about banter in office, I said to myself, well, I have banter in office. But then is that a bad thing?” (NOAH)
Masculinity racialised and pre-labelled as sexist Subtheme 3	2	19	“And I know, and perhaps the rest of you might not experience, that I also experience it because a lot of people immediately assume somebody from my background is sexist.” (NOAH)
Class assumptions Subtheme 3	2	22	“So I think that's another way we're like maybe class and masculinity are slightly overlapping like I think, I think maybe this is my own prejudice, a little bit, but I think of people who are often from quite an affluent background as being have they've done sports, they're very confident and they're, you know, they go for management roles. And I feel like in some ways my view of class kind of contradicts with that.” (KAI)

	2	22	“I would always consider myself working class, but I'm not a bit like what you described before Noah I will get assumed I'm always middle class and I'm always told I'm middle class and and assumed I am, but then I don't.” (REUBEN)
	2	25	“Now I earn more than you know, both my parents ever earned. And I guess, like in lots of ways economically, that would make me not working class. But I hang on to that as an identity thing and maybe do see being middle class as as something that I see quite negatively I think is interesting.” (KAI)
Class and relatability Subtheme 3	2	22	“the people we might be asked to work with and help most of my work would be in working class communities and it would be, I think, a barrier for me if I was presenting in a sort of middle class suited and booted.” (REUBEN)
	2	25	“But I again it's like what you guys are saying about is I feel it's like relatability and understanding for the experiences of some young people that I work with.” (KAI)
Shame attached to perceived class mobility Subtheme 3	2	27	“What is regarded as middle class without feeling ashamed of it? That's the point I was making. I shouldn't be feeling ashamed of having some characteristics which might be regarded as middle class. Why shouldn't I? Because I enjoy the activity. So so that that's the that's the conflict.” (NOAH)
Race as dominant identity axis over gender in school dynamics Subtheme 3	2	27	“And I think when we think about some of the challenges in the schools that I work in, in particularly around kind of like expectations around young black boys and adultification and a lot of the things that we know kind of are negative and are happening. I feel like actually in terms of my me being a man, I would say there are things that much outweigh that around my understanding and how I would make sense of that experience. That actually, you know, that would trump that quite a lot.” (KAI)

Political polarisation shaping gender and masculinity discourse Subtheme 3	2	28	“I guess that sometimes people will say things that perhaps clearly come from a political place. For example, you know particularly right wing around, for example, transgender or or otherwise. But I, yeah, so I just wanted to sort of notice that that is something that seems to come up more than it might have done in the past.” (ZACHARY)
	2	29	“Right, like traditional presentation of what it is to be a man or to be a woman is now linked to whether or not you can go in a bathroom. That's a huge thing, isn't it? That makes us think about what it is that makes you a man or a woman.” (KAI)
Masculinity constructed relationally to femininity Subtheme 3	2	32	“perhaps if you did this again like another one in two years time, as you probably when you write up in your recommendation you might say where this research should go in future is might be to include two female in the group. See what the perception might be. It's good that it wasn't today, because then the focus was very clear. It would be interesting to see how maybe a woman might see the role of masculinity”. (NOAH)
Resisting homogenised “male perspective” expectations Subtheme 2	3	2	“So the idea that actually we don't have to occupy the same spaces as other psychologists and just give a male kind of perspective kind of perspective on that.” (ISAAC)
Difficulty disentangling masculinity from personal identity Subtheme 3	3	5-6	“So I was thinking what is it like to be human in the EP field and what is it like just to be me in the EP field and I suppose I can only react to what it's like to be male by responses that other people might give me in response to seeing me so like my, my identity will be shaped by someone else's responses, and then my response to their responses.” (ISAAC)

Racialised occupational stereotyping Subtheme 3	3	6	“I know other EPs have said this as well. Actually from a South Asian background, or who looks South Asian, where people perceive that you should be like in the IT kind of support or like you've come to fix the computer and stuff like that” (ISAAC)
I'm just me Subtheme 3	3	7	“Perhaps that's the process of this afternoon to tease apart what's me and what's maleness as an EP. It's just so much what I am and and what I've what I am. I don't. There's not sort of a a non male version of me as an EP that that exists out there to know what the difference is if that makes sense.” (LEO)
Masculinity as internalised moral script Subtheme 1	3	10	“whether I like some of the traits around that there is a there is a sense of internalised sense of how I feel as a father, as a husband, my role as a protector, like a breadwinner.” (ISAAC)
Masculinity reframed as energy requiring regulation rather than suppression Subtheme 1	3	12	“There are those dark kind of forces... greed, power, control... we just need to learn ways to tame them more than always think you have to replicate what is more virtuous.” (ISAAC)
Balancing masculinity Subtheme 1	3	11	“So how can you be strong, competitive and yet not be a sore loser. How can you be soft and gentle and yet be tough and hard when you need to be? In what context can you get the balance right? Because if we're constantly telling people that you cannot be this or you have to be this and you have to be there.” (ISAAC)
Coaching/mentoring masculinity rather than therapeutic introspection Subtheme 1	3	11	“Maybe there's a gender that is more likely to do more coaching, mentoring through activity based stuff than they are through sitting down and talking in an internalised way.” (ISAAC)

Economic restructuring influencing male participation Subtheme 3	3	16	“The big changes that have taken place in the economy and society and how that's impacted on children growing up in our world and and on the jobs that we choose to do, and as we've reflected, there are very few, well, a small proportion, sorry of men kind of wanting to train as educational psychologists.” (MARCUS)
Critical reflexivity towards profession-level assumptions Subtheme 3	3	18	“Now I do think there's almost like a dogma around like attunement to feelings is inherently good. Trauma is inherently bad. Avoiding stuff is inherently like it just feels like that there's certain kind of firmly held beliefs at the moment in the profession around attachment trauma, attunement to feelings, which are not seen from a critical lens like even neuroaffirmative I'd argue”. (ISAAC)
Uncertain attribution of experience (gender vs personhood) Subtheme 3	3	18	“I don't know if that's my maleness. Kind of being critical of that, or if it's just me just being critical overall, like just applying critical kind of lens to that overall.” (ISAAC)
Masculinity as culturally variable and socially constructed Subtheme 1	3	26	“ It's really weird, like the whole maleness. And, like, you know, if you like in April I went, I went with my family to Pakistan. And you see a completely different arrangement, you know. Like although people will be like they probably describe themselves as socially conservative Muslim, probably like homophobic kind of culturally and and yet the, the, the kind of you see kind of a lot more hand holding like people sitting on their knees but actually so you know there's there's a whole thing around and kind of like kind of what what is to be a feminine male and like, how is that represented and what do you see when you see that like it's really weird?” (ISAAC)
Reflexive spiralling beyond “surface” masculinity	3	29-30	“you put a group of psychologists, male or female in the room and you, you end up having a far more existential discussion, potentially even about the validity of the research. A lot of what the conversation over the last 90 minutes seems to have related to is, you know,

Subtheme 3			broadly is there such a thing as masculinity is a such a thing as kind of stable personal traits with it all situationism” (LEO)
Participants challenging research assumptions Subtheme 3	3	30	“we've moved away a bit from the very level one, I don't want to call it superficial because that's not fair, but the level one question about what's it like being a male as an EP, which makes lots of assumptions about what it is to be male and what it is to be an EP and instead slightly picked apart the just the whole premise of masculinity and and the questions about it.” (LEO)

Appendix U: Reflexive Theme Development Memos

Example Extract 1

As I begin moving from codes towards themes, I am noticing a shift in the kinds of questions I am asking myself. I feel less focused on individual extracts and more drawn towards what seems to be happening across the dataset as a whole. I keep asking myself what I think is going on across the groups, and whether there are broader patterns beginning to form between the different discussions. It feels like I am moving away from description and further into interpretation, although I am conscious of wanting to stay grounded in the data and not move too quickly into abstraction. I am starting to see codes less as isolated fragments and more as interconnected pieces that may cluster around broader organising concepts or shared meanings. I am finding myself testing out possible links between codes, then returning to the transcripts to see whether those connections genuinely hold across the dataset.

Example Extract 2

I am noticing that 'male minority status' keeps appearing across multiple codes, although not always in the same way. Some extracts seem to focus more on experiences of visibility, standing out, or being noticed in particular professional contexts, whereas others appear more connected to wider ideas around authority, leadership, credibility, and advantage. At the moment, I feel uncertain about where these belong analytically, and I initially keep grouping them together because they seem related on the surface. However, the more I revisit the transcripts, the more I'm beginning to feel that participants may actually be describing two different processes. One feels more relational and experiential, connected to how masculinity becomes visible within interaction, while the other seems more structural and tied to broader gendered power dynamics. Separating these apart feels uncomfortable right now because I am worrying about fragmenting the data too much, but it is also beginning to clarify the distinctiveness of the developing themes.

Example Extract 3

As the themes are beginning to take shape, I am becoming more aware of how my own perspectives may be shaping what I am drawn towards analytically. I am noticing myself repeatedly returning to ideas around ambivalence, reflexivity, and the relational negotiation of masculinity, which probably reflects aspects of my own experience as a male TEP. I can feel myself naturally gravitating towards quotes that emphasise uncertainty, negotiation, and relational positioning, perhaps because these feel more familiar or personally resonant. I wonder whether I am giving less attention to extracts that speak more directly to male advantage, authority, or structural privilege. I am finding myself repeatedly returning to the transcripts to check whether the themes are genuinely emerging from the quotes I am seeing, rather than simply aligning with my own values, assumptions, or preferred ways of understanding masculinity.

Appendix V: Ethics Approval Letter

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
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Billy Stephens

By Email

03 April 2025

Dear Billy,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: *'Professional Identities and Masculinity: The Experiences of Male Educational Psychologists When in Role'*

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

Please be advised that any changes to the project design including modifications to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC for review.

Failure to obtain prior approval for such changes may result in academic and/or research misconduct.

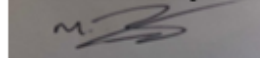
If you have any further questions or require any clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Franklyn



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cc. Course Lead, Supervisor, Research Lead

Appendix W: Artificial Intelligence (AI) Declaration

In line with Tavistock guidance, approved AI tools were used to support proofreading, language clarity, sentence refinement, and formatting during the preparation of this thesis. All conceptualisation, analysis, interpretation, and writing presented is my own original work.