

Stories of a Real Man

A Hybrid Autoethnography on My Maleness & Masculinity

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Graduation Thesis

Media Technology MSc Programme

Leiden University

June 2022

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Abstract Masculinity and maleness are highly personal subjects. This hybrid autoethnography uses autoethnographic stories and qualitative interviews with people in my surroundings to research how my personal views on masculinity and maleness were formed and how they relate to those around me and to shared social constructs. The study shows that my views on maleness, as an internal feeling that one cannot attribute to another, and masculinity, as a qualification that lies in the eye of the beholder, were formed by a combination of factors. Three main components are identified: my personality not fitting into the dominant normative narrative around maleness and masculinity while growing up, an upbringing that supported a non-normative understanding of the world, and living in an orchestral subculture that had its own alternative norms. The results of this study are discussed in a scientific context. Additionally, the original methodology and the effects that such a personal study had on me are discussed.

Keywords: Masculinity · Maleness · Autoethnography · Inclusive Masculinity Theory · Thematic Analysis

1 Introduction

“Ivo, you’re a man, do you know why men behave like this?” Questions of male behaviour are very common in everyday life. Whether it is about love, violence, education, sexuality, work, race, (mental) health or representation, it seems impossible to find a topic relating to masculinity that is not food for discussion. However, these questions seldom come with easy answers. Throughout recent years, my interest in the topics of masculinity and maleness has grown. It seems as though, even though I am biologically a man and I do identify and present myself as a man on a social level, other men have a completely different view about what being a man entails. This goes for random men I see on the street

catcalling at women passing by, a type of behavior that I just cannot wrap my head around, but also for men who are close to me and seem to limit themselves to a gender role that I don't adhere to.

During my years of studying, I came into contact with different terms and theories about these subjects. As a musicology student at the Department of Humanities of Utrecht University, gender studies was always quite literally around the corner, and terms like toxic masculinity¹ were not foreign to me. The moment that I had started studying Musicology was just a few months after I had started identifying and came out as a bisexual² man. Somehow, at this time, I seemed to be the only openly bisexual man in my surroundings. This came with one huge benefit, people had very few expectations of what I was supposed to be. Against this background, I started to notice more and more when people did have expectations about specific gender roles.

A few years later, during the master phase of my studies, my circle of friends (most of them fellow orchestra members) led me to an art workshop festival, Buitenkunst, where I attended a writing workshop, which focused on writing things other people did not want you to write about. It triggered something in me and the next day I decided to attend another workshop, which centered around things that you would not want to write about yourself. To me it worked as a kind of knowledge-gathering that I had not experienced before as a scholar and a scientist. This is what led me to the concept of autoethnography.

1.1 My Masculinity & Maleness

Opening a scientific paper in the personal way I have done above is highly uncommon outside the field of autoethnographic studies. However, for the purpose of this research, I do believe it is fitting. The question that this research is built around is how my personal views on masculinity and maleness were formed and how do they relate to those around me and to shared social constructs. This question is highly personal, yet it also functions on a more general level. The interaction between the forming of individual ideas on masculinity and broader social constructs is an understudied area. However, it could potentially bridge the gap between the high-level academic discourse and the everyday life of men and those around them.

In my view, masculinity and maleness form a spectrum. Maleness centers around an internal feeling of being a man. Therefore, maleness is not something

¹ Toxic masculinity is a term used for a culture of masculinity that leads to behavior that is toxic for the men who are part of this culture. The most extreme example is that of men who drive themselves into suicide, because talking to a therapist would be seen as emasculating.

² The term bisexual is sometimes seen as loaded, since it can be seen as implying a binary view on gender. My personal preference is to use the definition as given by Robyn Ochs: "I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge that I have in myself the potential to be attracted – romantically and/or sexually – to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree." (Ochs, 2014) Truthfully, I was not aware of this definition until recently.

that we can easily attribute to others, and for me my feeling of maleness does not effectively depend on the opinion of others. In more simple terms: I am a man, because I feel that I am a man. However, the concept of being a man can not exist without its social context. Masculinity, on the other end of the spectrum, is more complex. It can be described as a broad category of traits and behaviors that are considered typical towards men in a specific culture. However, I do see clear differences between my own classification of masculinity and that of the society I live in. Masculinity lies to a far bigger extent in the eye of the beholder. For me personally, the behavior and the traits that I display are not masculine, they're Ivo-like, notwithstanding the fact that I consider myself male and that others still might label them as masculine.

1.2 Researching the Origin of My Views

This hybrid autoethnography³ is divided into three parts. The first, autoethnographic, part focuses on my active memories of experiences relating to my sense of masculinity and maleness, which I wrote down in the form of stories. The stories function as starting point of my research, to dive deeper into my own sense of maleness and masculinity, and to provide the themes that the second part of the study will focus on.⁴

The second part takes the form of qualitative interviews with a selected group of people who are close to me and people who have impacted my views from more distance. The interviews focus on their views on masculinity and maleness, and on how this relates to me and the themes from the autoethnography. The interviews are structured in such a way as to give the interviewees the opportunity to express their own thoughts first, before moving into a more structured form to make sure that all themes that were extracted from the autoethnographic stories are covered.⁵

The third part of this research is about combining the knowledge gathered from the first two parts, to form a theory and investigating how this theory relates to existing scientific frameworks about social constructs of masculinity.⁶

As a whole, this research serves as a case study to show how views on masculinity and maleness are formed. It is highly specific and personal, but both the methodology and the content can serve as a way to explore the plurality of masculinities that exist in the world and see how individuals have and live their own masculinities in the group structures that have been the focus of masculinity studies so far.

³ Hybrid, because it combines a classical autoethnography with qualitative interviews.

⁴ These autoethnographic stories are written in Dutch, my primary language, to make sure that they are not limited by language knowledge. These stories are provided appendix A. See also sections 4.1 (method) and 5.1 (analysis).

⁵ See sections 4.2 (method) and 5.2 (analysis).

⁶ See sections 4.3 (method), 5.3 (analysis) and 6.1.

2 Masculinity Research

The field of men and masculinity studies is historically closely connected to feminism and follows a number of phases that relate to the waves of feminism. Edwards (2006) has summarized the three phases of critical studies of masculinity until the early 2000's. After his book, the emergence of several theories that try to "name" different masculinities has led to what can be described as a fourth phase. Below, the four phases are described.

The first phase in the 1970's coincided with the second wave of feminism and focused on the idea of masculinity as a social construct that was formed by socialisation, sex role learning and social control. Part of this wave was the interest for documentation of limitations and harmful effects these processes had on men in terms of psychological and physical health.

The second phase came in the following decade and led to the deconstruction of the sex role paradigm, as it was often seen as falsely implying a leveled playing field between the sexes and theoretically flawed since it since it did not allow for a plurality of masculinities. The new paradigm did give space to this plurality in which the idea of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987) played a central role. In this idea, a hegemonic group of white, Western, middle-class, and heterosexual men and masculinities, was seen to have a dominant role in society, marginalizing not only other genders, but also other men and masculinities.

The third phase, that followed in the late 1990's and early 2000's, while harder to define, can be seen as a product of post-structuralism and is highly interdisciplinary. This phase was formed around a concept of gender in terms of normativity, performativity, and sexuality and put an emphasis on representation and historical developments in masculinities and identities.

More recently, different theories have emerged that focused on what Waling (2019) refers to as "naming" masculinity. Coles (2008) argues that men, who don't have the opportunity to gain from a hegemonic form of masculinity, use "mosaic masculinities" in which they pick elements from other forms of hegemony to strengthen their own position.

Anderson (2009) coined Inclusive Masculinity Theory (IMT), referring to the changing dynamics that were observed among groups of young men, that were inclusive towards non-heterosexual men and were more emotionally intimate than was common in the past. Along with IMT, Anderson introduced the concept homophobia, describing the fear of socially being perceived as gay, and describing homophobic cultures as those that combine antipathy towards gay men with the awareness of their existence and the belief that gender and sexuality are conflated. In such homophobic cultures a hegemonic masculinity will establish itself by restricting the behaviour of men through social norms as described by Connell.

Bridges and Pascoe (2014) coined the term hybrid masculinities to refer to the use of selected feminine elements or elements from marginalized masculinities by privileged men, not only as a performative act, but also to form their own identity.

Berggren (2014) uses a poststructural approach to describe how masculinity should be considered as something “sticky”, in the sense that it does impact and form men, but it is one of many social discourses positioning men in the world they live in. Thereby, it places more emphasis on the lived experiences of individuals.

All these frameworks have their impact on the field of masculinity, but the topics of study still centralize around classical topics of criminality, homophobia, sportsmanship and fatherhood, with a focus on groups of men in society.⁷ Furthermore, the prominent frameworks do face critique, especially since most of them leave little to no space for the lived experiences of individuals and all of them seem to neglect the concept of agency (Waling, 2019). Therefore, Waling proposes a re-evaluation of men of masculinity studies, returning to feminist theorizing, and moving away from “naming” masculinities and putting forward a more complete picture that does not frame men as complete victims, products, or promoters of masculinity.

3 Autoethnography and Grounded Theory

This study takes the form of a hybrid autoethnography, as it uses the results from autoethnographic research based on multiple short stories to guide a series of qualitative interviews. It uses inductive reasoning to come to an answer to the research question and relates that answer to existing theories about maleness and masculinity.

3.1 Autoethnography

The term autoethnography has been used in different contexts since its first formal appearance in the 1970’s. Early researchers (Hayano, 1979; Heider, 1975) used the term to identify ethnographies written by insiders of a culture, with critics, in the 1970’s and -80’s pointing out that all ethnographic work is a form of self-ethnography (Goldschmidt, 1977). This evolution in thinking about ethnographic research led to a situation where many different applications and meanings are used (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008). The autoethnographic part of this study uses a method similar to that used by Janelle Ward (Ward, 2019) that falls into the broad definition given by Adams et al. (Adams et al., 2017), who describe autoethnography as a combination of the principles of autobiography and ethnography.

3.2 Grounded Theory and Thematic Analysis

The methodology used in this paper, relates to the field of grounded theory. Grounded theory is a way of structurally evaluating qualitative data to reach

⁷ As is illustrated by the majority of the work published in *NORMA: International Journal for Masculinity Studies* <https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/rnor20>, *Men and Masculinities* <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/jmm> and *The Journal of Men’s Studies* <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/men>.

a conclusion. It does so by using ‘open coding’, going through the data word for word to identify codes that are then combined into overarching concepts and categories. However, I did not choose to use ‘open coding’ as a way of extracting information from the personal stories and the qualitative interviews in this research. The reason for this lies in the choice for a very personal or maybe even self-centered approach, that does not offer a level of objectivity that grounded theory presupposes. However, what is borrowed from grounded theory is the form of inductive reasoning to arrive at overarching themes, and the combining of these themes to form a theory. It could therefore be seen as a form of inductive thematic analysis. (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Ralph et al., 2015)

4 Method

This research takes the form of a hybrid autoethnography and is, as previously explained, divided into three parts: An autoethnographic section focusing on my own experience of masculinity and maleness, a series of qualitative interviews focusing on the views of those around me, and the forming of a theory based on the thematic analysis of the other two parts to allow for an embedding into existing scientific frameworks. A schematic overview of this method is shown in Figure 1.⁸

4.1 Stories / Autoethnography

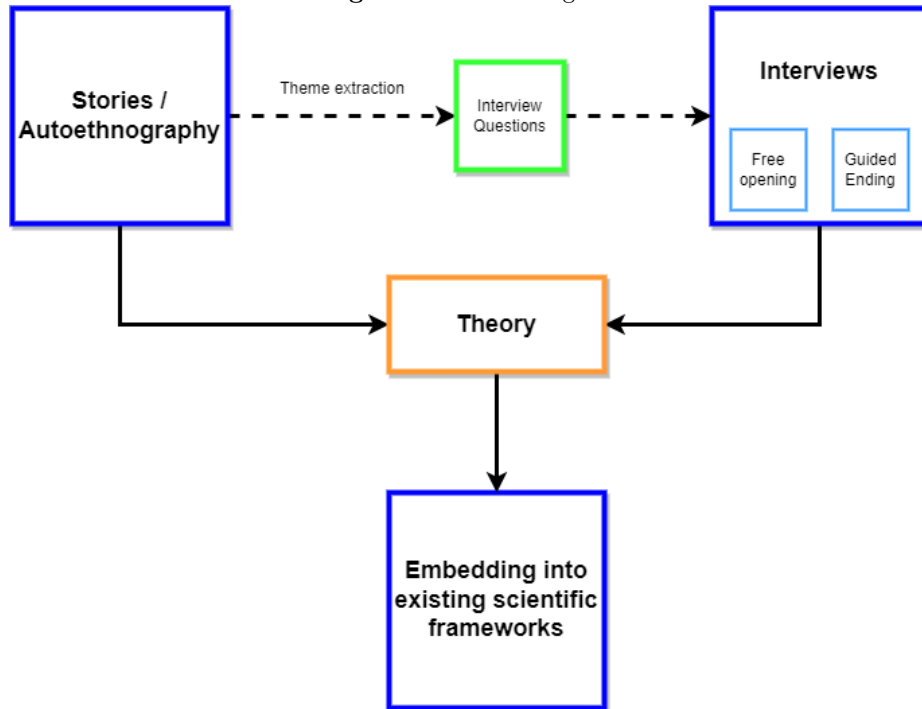
The autoethnographic part of this research is meant to gain an insight into my own sense of masculinity and maleness. This insight into the what of these personal views is fundamental to the understanding of how they were formed. The autoethnographic part of the research consists of three short stories that are formed around active memories relating to masculinity and maleness. I chose the literary form of short stories in my primary language, Dutch, to remove limitations in my expression. This literary form also offers the freedom to alter some recognizable features about others, as to protect their privacy. English translations by the author are provided in the Appendix and when the stories are quoted in the analysis.

From these stories, a number of themes was selected through thematic analysis, as mentioned in section 3.2. This means that I identified interesting features (codes) in the stories and combined them into themes. The amount of themes was not preset, as it should emerge from the process of analysis.⁹ These themes form the basis for the interview questions in the next section and the combined thematic analysis in section 4.3.

⁸ I purposefully entered the first two phases of the research without diving too deep into existing theories about the subject matter, to not fall into the trap of writing towards a specific theory. Therefore, the order of the presentation of knowledge in this paper, does not reflect the order in which I encountered it in my research.

⁹ See section 4.3 for more detail.

Figure 1. Method diagram



4.2 Interviews

The qualitative interviews form the second part of the research. The interviewees were selected as to include at least a family member, a friend, and a more distant influential person in my life. The number of interviewees was kept to a maximum of five as to be in balance with the autoethnographic part of the research, which was intended to be the focus of this study. Participants were interviewed one-on-one by the student researcher. The interviews could have taken place either at Leiden University, but the four interviewees who participated all chose their home or a public location that was more convenient to them. The interviews were recorded in the form of an audio-recording.¹⁰

Interviewees got the opportunity to first express their own thoughts about the subject of masculinity and maleness, by answering questions about whether and why they consider themselves male and/or masculine, whether or not that matters, and which factors contribute to their views on maleness and masculinity. After this more open part of the interview, I took the lead to cover not only

¹⁰ For a full description of the measures taken to ensure the well-being of the interviewees, see section 4.5

questions left open by the interviewee, but also their views on the themes that emerged from the autoethnography.

4.3 Theory Formation through Thematic Analysis

In the final part of the research, the inductive thematic analysis of the autoethnography was combined with an analogous analysis of the interviews as discussed in section 3.2, to form a theory about how my views on masculinity were formed. This theory was then compared to existing scientific frameworks about masculinity and maleness.

This means that both the stories and the interviews were subject to an inductive thematic analysis in which they were reviewed for emerging patterns. After transcription of and familiarization with the data, I identified interesting features (codes) in the data, and collated data relevant to each code throughout the entire data set. These codes were combined into themes, which were reviewed for correctness with regards to the codes and the extracts they refer to. These refined themes it was possible to form an overarching theory cf. Braun and Clarke (2006).

The theory formed on the basis of the thematic analysis, was then compared to existing scientific frameworks on maleness and masculinity. This will be further discussed in section 6.

4.4 Related Publications

Along with this academic paper, the stories and interviews produced in the research are published on platforms meant to reach a wider audience. The stories will be published in written form and might be read at public events, whereas the interviews (in redacted form) will be published as a podcast series.¹¹ This is done for two reasons. First, masculinity and maleness are highly discussed in public debates, but contributions in this debate often assume a very one-sided view on masculinity. Through the publications linked to this research, the public debate can become fuller and more open towards individual differences. Second, this research is based on an artistic form of research, that in its basis is structured towards publication. To leave the publications purely in the academic domain, would be a waste of a chance to potentially bridge the gap between high-level academic discourse and the everyday life of men and those around them, especially those who are struggling with their own maleness and masculinity.

4.5 Ethics Considerations

This study was approved by the Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Science at Leiden University. Specifically the privacy of the interviewees was considered, since participants were recruited from my personal surroundings and the personal connection was key to the research, leading to a situation where

¹¹ This podcast was canceled after my graduation. For an explanation see Appendix E

absolute data anonymization was not fully possible. Furthermore, participants were asked about their views on masculinity and maleness, which can be a very personal subject and might lead to emotions or conflicts with others.

To ensure the well-being of the interviewee, interview locations were selected to be comfortable and quiet, and to offer privacy during the interview. The interviewees were provided with a non-alcoholic beverage. Interviewees were requested to reserve 120 minutes of their time, as to provide enough time for the briefing, interview and debriefing, which in total was meant to take 60-90 minutes, and still leave space for a break if needed. The interviewees were explicitly instructed that they are allowed to pause or discontinue the interview at any time without providing a reason, and that they have the right to remove (parts of) the interview from the record or put it under embargo.

To ensure the privacy of the interviewees, the raw audio recordings of the interviewees were kept in a SURFdrive cloud environment¹² only accessible to me and my thesis advisors as were all other files containing private information of the interviewees. Interviewees received a transcript of the interview, to allow them to indicate precisely which sections they would like to remove from the record or put them under embargo. The podcast episodes are published only after explicit consent by the interviewees.¹³

With the use of the above-mentioned measures, I believe to have minimized the mental and physical burden and the privacy risks for the interviewees, while collecting a set of data that could not be collected in a less intrusive manner. Furthermore, while the public sharing of personal data is highly uncommon in research and does come with ethical challenges, it is in my opinion a fundamental part of this project. The combination of my personal stories and the podcasts in which I engage in conversation with others are a form of artistic presentation of the results of this research and make the project far more valuable to society. The disclosure of the identity of participants is important, since the interviewees are not randomly selected members of society, but people who were selected especially due to their relationship to me. Removing this information from the podcasts or other publications, would inherently make them less valuable. However, any publication of an interviewee's personal data will be retracted upon request of the interviewee.

5 Analysis

In the process of this study, two kinds of data were gathered: autoethnographic stories and qualitative interviews. Both of these were analyzed using a thematic analysis as described in sections 3.2 and 4.3. The stories give an insight in important factors in my views on masculinity and maleness, and give a few clues towards how these views were formed. On the other hand, the interviews give a stronger insight into the formation of my views.

¹² This environment is provided by Leiden University

¹³ This podcast was canceled after my graduation. For an explanation see Appendix E

5.1 The Autoethnographic Stories

The autoethnographic stories, that can be found in Appendix A, formed the starting point of my research. The three stories (“Anton”, “Leuven” & “De man op straat”) depict scenes from my life that I judged as important in the development of my sense of masculinity and maleness. The scenes were sometimes altered to ensure the privacy of others. All stories have Anton as their main character. Therefore Anton can be seen as a representation of me, the author. However, the story “Anton” takes elements from both my life and that of the person I was dating, and combines them into two fictional characters (the ego and Anton). For the purpose of this research, it is not important to identify which elements refer to me or the other. The analysis of this body of work, was done in two iterations: a thematic analysis to identify the main themes for the interviews and a retrospective analysis to dive into how the stories can be read to answer a part of my research question.

SPOILER ALERT: I strongly recommended to read the stories, which are provided in Appendix A, before continuing to read the analysis. The following paragraphs contain quotations from and plot summaries of the stories.

The thematic analysis of the stories resulted in a detailed and relatively nuanced depiction of my personal views on masculinity and maleness. The story “Anton” shows a rebellion against patriarchal family structures as a central theme throughout the story. The story “Leuven” has two parts, in which the first one puts more emphasis on vulnerability, whereas the second part lays more importance on the subject of sexuality and promiscuity in connection to internalized homophobia. The story “De man op straat” focuses on performativity in the form of a display of toxic masculinity.

A detailed thematic analysis for each story can be found in Appendix A. Here, only the results of the analysis are presented. Overall, the thematic analysis of the stories results in the following list of themes, ordered in my own subjective ordering of importance:

- (Resistance against) Patriarchal Family Structures
- Toughness, Vulnerability & Emotionality
- Performativity & Appearance
- Homophobia
- Sexuality & Promiscuity
- Fatherhood

The retrospective analysis took place after the interviews were performed. In this analysis I reviewed the stories to see how they can be related back to the question of this research. A central lesson taken from the combined stories, is that my views on masculinity and maleness are to a large extent formed by a resistance against dominant normative ideas in the society that I grew up in. However, in adulthood I started to surround myself more and more with people whose views on these topics were similar to mine.

The story “Anton” works on two different levels. On the one end, there is the early relationship between the “ego” and Anton. As both characters are partially based on me, I can say that the tension between the urge for physical closeness and the wish to communicate emotional baggage is based on one of my early experiences of dating men. It relates to a sex-first-talk-later attitude, that is prominent in the “gay scene” in Amsterdam, and is at conflict with more traditional views on sexuality.

In the story, Anton decides to be open about his past. He shares how his parents had very different views on the upbringing of their son, with his father having more normative and patriarchal views and his mother being more liberal in that respect. This is a situation that is similar to mine when I was growing up.¹⁴

“Mijn moeder troostte me vroeger altijd, mijn vader niet. Die was alleen streng. Bij mijn vader moest altijd alles. Doordeeweeks en op zaterdag moest hij altijd werken, dan had hij geen tijd voor ons, en op zondag moesten we mee naar de kerk. Hij had eigenlijk nooit vrij als wij er waren. Nee, zijn vakantiedagen waren voor hem. We moesten altijd “gezellig” samen eten. Dan mocht je altijd pas voor de tweede keer opscheppen als iedereen klaar was. Dan werden er zogenaamd diepgaande gesprekken gevoerd over politiek, die eigenlijk slechts een samenvatting van het NRC waren.”

“My mother always used to comfort me, my father didn’t. He was just strict. My father always told us what we had to do. During the week and on Saturdays he always had to work, then he didn’t have time for us, and on Sundays we had to go to church. He was never really off when we were there. No, his vacation days were his. We always had to have a “nice” meal together. You were only allowed to take a second plate when everyone was done and dinner-talk consisted supposedly in-depth conversations about politics, which were really just a summary of the NRC newspaper.”

We see a conflict developing. Anton is caught in the middle between two very different world views. While the story focuses mostly on the complicated

¹⁴ Throughout this reflection, I will keep referring to Anton as a third person. The reason for this lies in the fact that this character is not based solely on me, as is mentioned above. However, while reading this paper, you are free to consider Anton’s views as mine, for the sole purpose of simplicity.

relationship between Anton and his father, we see in the short facets in between that he does get another example of how things could be. Anton tries, not necessarily consciously, to live his life according to the expectations set by his father, but this results in loneliness, depression, and at the low-point of the story even suicidal thoughts.

“Op een gegeven moment kreeg mijn zus ook ruzie met mijn vader. Toen hebben we met zijn drieën pizza gegeten aan de Oudegracht in Utrecht, zogenaamd om het uit te praten, maar bij mij kwam toen het besef dat het nooit goed ging komen. Ik ging weer terug naar Amsterdam. Ik weet nog dat ik bij mijn flat de brandtrap opgeklommen ben tot de bovenste verdieping. Ik wilde toen echt dood. Ik wist helemaal geen andere uitweg meer.”

“At one point, my sister also got into an argument with my father. Then the three of us went for pizza on the Oudegracht in Utrecht, supposedly to talk it out, but that dinner was the moment I realized that it was never going to work out. I went back to Amsterdam. I remember climbing the emergency stairs to the top floor of my apartment building. I really wanted to die then. I didn't know any other way out.”

This moment shows an interesting shift. In describing his struggle with sharing his true feelings with others to a person that he is on a second date with, Anton shows a lot of emotional growth. This results in less performative and more openly emotional behavior. After this low-point, the story turns and Anton becomes more and more independent. The clashes with his father intensify, but we also see how Anton turns into the person telling the story.

I think that experiences like the one described in this story, taught me the value of being honest about your own emotions. I have learned throughout different experiences that sharing my innermost thoughts and struggles gave me so much peace of mind that I stopped caring about whether other people judged my sometimes very emotional openness as masculine, because I knew what keeping these emotions to myself had done to me.

The story “Leuven” starts with a reference to Anton leaving the wind band of the town he grew up in, because of homo- / biphobic reactions within the group. This memory of the past is placed within a context of Anton finding his place within the social structure of a project orchestra. He is not doing well, and is moved to tears by emotional music, even while performing it himself. Anton opens up to two men that he does not know very well yet. Through this emotional outburst, he seems to be creating his own safe space within this relatively new environment.

Paul en Alex hadden de hele tijd aandachtig geluisterd. Aan het einde van zijn verhaal, gaven ze Anton beiden een knuffel. Paul verzekerde Anton dat hij altijd mocht aankloppen als er iets was en toonde veel begrip voor de situatie. Samen wisten Paul en Alex ervoor te zorgen dat Anton zich weer veilig voelde, ook in deze groep die voor deze tour nog niet een groep was geweest.

Paul and Alex had been listening intently the whole time. At the end of his story, they both gave Anton a hug. Paul assured Anton that he could always knock on the door if there was something wrong and showed a lot of understanding for the situation. Together, Paul and Alex managed to make sure Anton felt safe again, even in this group that hadn't been a group before this tour.

The next morning Anton happens to walk into Ben, and the two of them spend the day together. They both seem to be falling for each other, but they are afraid to admit this. Anton only admits to his feelings, after he finds out that there is a chance that Ben is also attracted to men. Ben reacts positively at first, but then he shuts himself off again, using arguments that hint at a certain amount of internalized homophobia.

I chose the conversation with Paul and Alex as a starting point to this story, because it was one of the few instances where I created a safe space for myself through immediate brutal honesty. In a timeline, the story can be placed roughly a year before the moment where Anton opens up to his date. Like I mentioned in the discussion of “Anton”, this method of fully opening up about my emotions was a way of creating peace of mind for myself.

The two days with Ben relate to the way in which my own bisexuality formed my views on maleness and masculinity. Openly behaving as bisexual is clearly at odds with homophobia. Ben is struggling with this, just like I was at some point. I would say that in the formation of my views, I gradually moved away from homophobic tendencies towards a more inclusive understanding. Interestingly, this progress has led to a viewpoint where a person like Ben feels to be at the beginning of the path that I have already traveled. However, as the ending of the story already insinuates, Ben could just as well be on a completely different path.

The story “De Man op Straat” is about a moment where Anton witnesses a man catcalling a woman on the street. While going less deep into Anton's feelings, it does contain an evaluation of how Anton reacts to this behavior.

Die jongen had de behoefte gevoeld om iemand anders zo te objectiveren, niet voor sociale status, niet omdat het ergens goed voor was, maar alleen voor zichzelf. Dat die jongen zijn gevoel van mannelijkheid vastknoopte aan het intimideren van een vrouw op straat en dat een simpele afkeurende blik van een pannenkoek in sportkleding genoeg was om zijn humeur te verzieken.

That boy had felt the need to objectify someone else, not for social status, not because it was good for anything, but only for himself. That boy had tied his sense of masculinity to intimidating a woman on the street and a simple disapproving look from a pancake in sportswear was enough to ruin his mood.

This story was the last one I wrote in the context of this research and it felt like thematically I had reached a point of saturation. It does not add much that was not already in the previous two stories, but it does show an encounter of the kind that made me realize how different my views are from some others.

5.2 The Qualitative Interviews

The four interviewees had different relationships towards me, the researcher, and as such their interviews focused on different aspects. I chose to interview my mother, to focus on aspects of my youth that might have formed my ideas on maleness and masculinity. The second interviewee is a non-binary friend who I met in the Dutch National Student Orchestra in 2014, where we were in very close contact for a month after which we met a couple of times in the two years after, until we lost contact. We met again at the Nieuw Nijmeegs Kamerorkest in 2022. I chose to interview this friend because we were close during these projects, which made it possible to compare and see a shift, which they also mentioned in the interview. As the third interviewee, I asked a close male friend who I have been in regular contact with since we worked together on the board of the VU-Orchestra in 2016-2017, where we are still both playing, to represent the social group of my close friends. The final interviewee is a conductor, who I worked with in multiple orchestras and who I chose as someone who might have influenced my views from a bit more distance.

A general list of questions and topics, based upon the themes gained from the thematic analysis of the stories, can be found in Appendix C The thematic analysis of the interviews took place in a slightly different fashion than the analysis of the stories, to accommodate for the fact that certain themes were brought up by me, the researcher, and might therefore not be judged with the same importance as themes that were brought up by the interviewee.

The interview with my mother focused mainly on my youth and forming factors in my upbringing. A key insight from this interview was that the resistance against dominant normative ideas, on masculinity and other subjects, was part of the upbringing I received from my mother. She pointed out that my

brother and I were raised in a small, relatively traditional village, but that she always tried to show other, less normative perspectives as part of her upbringing.

A strong factor in my youth was that my brother and I are very different people and many people liked to make a comparison between the two of us. My mother said that one of the key differences between my brother and I, when it comes to masculinity and maleness, is that my brother gave the impression of behaving more normative, while still going his own way, whereas I put little to no effort into creating a more normative impression, leading to more friction with others (mostly teachers), who valued normative behavior.

In the interview, we furthermore discussed how the fact that we grew up in a Dutch town close to the German border, and that we were raised in a German household¹⁵, impacted me in the field of masculinity. My mother pointed out that in principle there is little difference in ideas about masculinity in these two countries, but that the way that friction is handled does differ between the two countries. My mother stated that the Dutch tend to choose a policy of tolerance (“gedogen”¹⁶), but that this often turns into apparent indifference.

The interview with a non-binary friend gave an insight into the development of my views from my early student years until the present. It also highlighted the importance of orchestral subculture in my views.

I spend and have spent a lot of my free time playing the tuba in different orchestras, which came with their own subculture and norms that are different from the rest of society. The formation of these roles can be explained through different factors: Orchestras have strong hierarchies, but these are only active during rehearsals and concerts and do not usually translate to non-musical situations. This leads to interesting social interplay. Furthermore, people tend to identify with the instrument they play, and the orchestra they play in (Cottrell, 2017). On a more elemental level, there is a lot of social bonding happening. This happens during rehearsals and performances, through the social glue that making music together is¹⁷, and during breaks, drinks after rehearsals and concerts, and especially on tours.

Dutch student orchestras tend to have a relatively loose norm when it comes to sexuality and promiscuity. While there are most certainly differences between orchestras, there tends to be very little “slutshaming”, but an active gossip culture is usually maintained. There tends to be a relatively high acceptance towards homosexuality and homoerotic behavior.¹⁸

¹⁵ We always spoke German at home and while we adopted certain Dutch traditions, like Sinterklaas and Queens-day, the dominant culture, delivered through books and television, was German

¹⁶ The subtext is that the same word is used for the Dutch soft drugs policy.

¹⁷ There is much more to say about the evolution of musicality than is relevant towards this paper, but see for example: Savage et al. (2020).

¹⁸ It is hard to judge whether this acceptance is higher than in other university contexts, or just more visible, because of the social nature of these non-professional orchestras.

When it comes to norms of masculinity and maleness, traditional norms of male macho behavior do not apply, but other norms (based on stereotypes about musical instrument groups) do apply. In my case, the stereotype was that of a “koperboer” (a “brass farmer/peasant”), a commonly used nickname for brass players in Dutch orchestras, referring to a stereotype of blunt behavior, drinking lots of beer and being very present in the group.¹⁹ In the interview, the part hyper-masculine and performative aspects of this stereotype were highlighted as something that I struggled with in my early student years. However, the fact that there is usually only one tuba in the orchestra, might have also made it easier to be non-conforming towards this stereotype, just like horn players tend to be less adherent to this stereotype, as there are relatively more women in this section.²⁰

A general lesson from this interview was that this subculture that plays fast-and-loose with societal norms, did give me an opportunity to form my own identity and views on maleness and masculinity. The freedom in this regard was also formed by the fact that I played in a lot of different orchestras, with each their own subculture.

The interview with a male friend brought more attention to the fact that masculinity and maleness are usually combined in the Dutch word “mannelijkheid”, that functions as an umbrella term in this regard. This leads to an interesting juxtapositions where many traits that are considered masculine (and therefore would be called “mannelijk”) do adhere to people that are not male (which also translates as “mannelijk”). This friend pointed out that in his perception, the word “masculiniteit” (the literal translation of masculinity), is mostly used in the academic discourse and implies a reference to toxic masculinity.

Similar to my other friend, he pointed out that student orchestras do tend to have a relatively inclusive understanding of masculinity, even when compared to other student groups. He related this to the fact that there is a lot of socio-economic and -cultural filtering happening before people reach this orchestra. A vast majority of the people in these orchestras study at a university level²¹ and they have been playing their instrument for years. Furthermore, they decided to keep playing their instrument through puberty, which could already be seen as an indicator for a more inclusive view on masculinity, as most instruments in a symphony orchestra might not be labeled as traditionally masculine.

¹⁹ While the term “koperboer” is Dutch, the stereotype is not limited to the Netherlands. An interesting (and amusing) overview of common stereotypes in symphony orchestras can be found in Lipton (1987). However, this does not regard instrument-specific stereotypes, such as “viola players are always late”. However, Langendoerfer (2008) indicates that these stereotypes do not translate into actual differences in personality. At least not in professional orchestras.

²⁰ Overall, most brass players in the orchestras I’ve played in are cis-men, but there tend to be more women in the French horn section than in the trumpet / trombone section. Studies in different countries show similar gender distributions in orchestras (Hallam et al., 2008; Sergeant & Himonides, 2019)

²¹ I mean this to include the Dutch HBO (university of applied sciences) level.

However, he also pointed out that our orchestra is not free from masculine norms and behavior. He gave the example of jokingly talking back to the conductor or commenting on them during rehearsals, which is something that only men seem to do. In line with this he pointed out that this and other types of masculine behavior is most common with the brass, relating back to the stereotype of “koperboeren” that was already mentioned by my other friend.

The interview with my conductor generated less information that was specific to me, as was to be expected, since out of my four interviewees, he was the least close to me. It did focus on shared views on a relatively broad definition of maleness and masculinity. We talked about general orchestral structures and how they used to be more patriarchal than they are now. The conductor pointed out that more and more women are deciding to start a conducting career, even though the field is still dominated by men. He further elaborated on this to say that the behavior shown by conductors is also changing. Conducting is becoming more and more of a social role, moving the place of the conductor from a patriarchal role, to more of a *primus inter pares*.

When it comes to behavior within orchestras, he pointed out that there is a strong difference between student orchestras and professional, and other more mature orchestras. The adolescent orchestra members tend to have a stronger tendency to consume large amounts of alcohol and show other kinds of macho behavior. However, he also noted that an increase in women who voice their discontent with macho behavior, does lead to a decrease in this type of behavior. However, this does not mean that there is a decrease in promiscuity. This is probably connected to the emotional charge that is in the nature of music making and leads to higher levels of arousal.

5.3 Conclusion

This research centered around the question how my personal views on masculinity and maleness were formed and how they relate to those around me and to shared social constructs. The autoethnographic stories showed that my views are based in a resistance against a highly present more normative masculinity. In my youth, I was confronted with patriarchal family structures and normative ideas about how men were supposed to behave. I was adhering to these normative structures on some level, but I did make the conscious decision to leave the town where I grew up when I started studying. This did not immediately lead to changes in my views, but gradual change started after I had reached my low-point when I was nineteen years old. From that point onwards, I started opening up about my feelings and slowly reshaping my views on both a conscious and a sub-conscious level.

The interviews elaborated on the opposition between normative patriarchal structures and looser norms in my youth. This opposition can be explained in part by the fact that I myself do not fit into the normative box created by

these views on maleness and masculinity²², and in part by the fact that this non-normative view was part of my upbringing and the subcultures that I lived in. All interviewees mentioned that they have noticed changes in me throughout time, but that they also saw that some things, especially my emotional nature, were present from the start. Overall, orchestral subcultures played a large role in the formation of my views, especially due to the subtle differences in subcultures between orchestras.

6 Discussion

Autoethnographic approaches are uncommon in most fields and an example of a hybrid approach combining it with qualitative interviews is not something I have seen before. Below, I consider three perspectives to reflect upon this original and highly personal methodology: First, I go into the broader scientific context, to see what knowledge was gained from this research and how the formulated theory about the formation of my views relates to the work of others in the field of maleness and masculinity studies. Second, I will reflect upon the used methodology and the research question to see what lessons can be learned for future implementations of similar methods. Third, as the work is highly personal in its nature, I will reflect on how the work has impacted me personally.

6.1 Contextualization

Throughout the process of this research, I concretized a lot of my thoughts about maleness and masculinity and on the formation of my views. The autoethnographic stories were fundamental in this process, and formed a way to express a nuanced view about these personal topics. However, through the combination with the interviews, I was able to gather knowledge that was completely new to me, and each interview felt like a piece to the very personal puzzle.

The work thereby functioned as a case study into the complexity of the social construction of maleness and masculinity. Rather than examining these terms at a group level, the work shows how personal they are and how strongly they can differ from one person to another, even if these people seem to be part of the same social group. In this respect it has a broader perspective than earlier autoethnographic accounts in men and masculinity studies (Carless, 2012; Drummond, 2010), which both focused on personal experiences of sportsmen and seemed to base themselves on a more hegemonic masculinity.

The results of this study shows elements that refer to hegemonic (Connell, 1987), inclusive and homohysterical (Anderson, 2009), sticky (Berggren, 2014) and to a less articulated extent mosaic (Coles, 2008) masculinities, but it also shows how all of these theories fail to explain the full picture, a critique that is shared with Waling (2019), in the sense that masculinity does not stand on its own, nor that I am in any way a victim or hegemonic promotor of any form of masculinity.

²² For example: Being attracted to men is not classically labeled as masculine.

Two important factors that are not explained in any of these theories, are my part-Dutch part-German upbringing and the large amount of time I spent in the subculture of orchestras. Research into Dutch cultures of masculinity is rare, but an interesting parallel can be found between the research of Segal (2000) and what came forward in the interview with my mother. Segal conducted interviews in Amsterdam, Utrecht, and Nijmegen, in a period when I was still in the early years of primary school. While these cities are, in my opinion, more progressive than the town I grew up in, Segal, like my mother, pointed out a culture of apparent indifference towards sexual variations.

An interesting account of orchestral subcultures is given by Cottrell (2017) in *Professional Music-Making in London*. As my experience was in amateur orchestras, not all his explanations translate, but I see strong similarities in the role of orchestral hierarchies and sense of identity formation based on musical instrument choice and the humor and stereotypes that come with this.

Overall, the field of masculinity studies is very open to the plurality of masculinities in the world. However, the tendency to look at groups instead of individuals, leaves little room to discover this plurality and how it comes into being. With this in mind, it would be valuable for masculinity research to create space for modes of research that focus on the individual. This type of research could help to fill in important parts of the picture and would bring high-level academic discourses on changes in society closer to the reality of the individual experience.

6.2 Methodological Reflection

To find the answer towards the very personal research question posed in this study, the unusual method combining an autoethnography with qualitative interviews has been proven as effective. The method worked very well in evaluating the influence of and relationship with the views of people around me. Diving deeply into my own views, through the autoethnographic stories, enabled me to identify important themes that formed the basis of the interviews. Building on this, the interviews could identify very specific influences in my close surroundings.

Through the stories and interviews it was also possible to identify elements of shared social constructs, but this part of the question was more difficult to make tangible since these social constructs differ between groups and change overtime. Within the choice of method, I realized in the process that the third story (“De man op straat”), did not add any new themes. This was part of the reason why I decided not to add a fourth story, although I had considered this beforehand. Retrospectively, there would have been space for more interviews, without sacrificing the autoethnographic nature of the study, since the interviews are very much centered around my own person and every interview kept bringing up additional relevant perspectives.

6.3 Personal Perspective

Working on this project has been an amazingly enjoyable experience. That is not to say the project did not give me stress from time to time, but the stressful and difficult moment always brought me into a deeper understanding of the topic I was researching and thereby of myself. Furthermore, the fact that I was working on this project, sparked so many interesting conversations about the topic. To start the project with my own stories was a choice that I am very happy about. It gave me the opportunity to dive deeply into my own experiences, which in a way was a semi-therapeutic experience. Describing these experiences in a way that was both respectful to their core and the privacy of everyone involved, helped me to further understand the topic. Furthermore, the exploration of writing strategies, using the guidance of Boyd (2009) and Percy (2016), functioned as a way to pre-analyze the stories, as I was identifying their central themes subconsciously through the writing process. Because of this way of working, the structured thematic analysis of the stories did not give me new insights personally, but it did function as a quick method to manifest these insights. Furthermore, going back to the stories a second time after the interviews had done, was a good way to look at smaller aspects that played a role.

Interviewing people who are close to me, was special in its own way. On the one hand, the academic approach was a way to start conversations that we never had out loud. On the other hand, each interview did give me specific new insights that I immediately wanted to incorporate into my analysis. It did, sometimes, make things a little more boring. My slightly adolescent narrative that I was an especially rebellious kid when it comes to normative structures, was somewhat shattered when my mom told me that she purposefully introduced non-normative thinking into my upbringing. However, that narrative was a small price to pay for the wonderful conversations and the deeper understanding of myself, that I gained throughout this project. As a personal experience and a research method, I can highly recommend hybrid autoethnographic research.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my thesis advisors, Max and Maarten, for their support throughout this project. It was amazing to work with the both of you and to sharpen my thoughts throughout the many conversations we had. Furthermore, I want to thank everyone who was present at my graduation presentation, especially my invited critics Marthe Visser and Zane Kripe, for the feedback they gave me towards the final stage of this research.

None of this work would have been possible without the help of my interviewees. Thank you! It was amazing to have these very open conversations with you and I am very happy about your honesty and openness in the interviews.

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A Autoethnographic Stories

The autoethnographic stories are presented in Dutch, the language they were written in. The “codes” that were found in the thematic analysis are indicated through the colored boxes in the side-line. The themes that were extracted from each story are explicated below each story.

A.1 Anton

Ik keek in de spiegel. Mijn haar zat netjes, de lok aan de linkerkant viel precies goed. Mijn blauwe overhemd weerspiegelde de kleur van mijn ogen. Ik had mijn tanden al gepoetst, maar controleerde nogmaals of er niets tussen zat. Ik ademde in mijn hand, het rook fris. Ik spoot een beetje van mijn geurtje op en concludeerde dat ik klaar was. Ik ging op de bank zitten en wachtte. Het kriebelde lichtjes in mijn buik, terwijl ik op mijn telefoon keek. “Ik stap nu op de fiets. Ben er met 20 minuten”

Onze vorige date had hij afgezegd - voedselvergiftiging - maar in plaats daarvan hadden we uren aan de telefoon gehangen. Het duurde zo lang dat de batterij van mijn koptelefoon het op een gegeven moment opgaf en ik daarna nog een half uur met mijn telefoon in de hand door de straten van Amsterdam Oost wandelde.

Toen de bel ging, sprong ik op. Ik drukte op de knop om de voordeur open te doen en liep mijn kamer uit richting de trap. Ik keek naar beneden en in de weerspiegeling van het raam op de eerste verdieping zag ik zijn korte blonde lichtjes krullende haar verschijnen. Hij zag mij nog niet en liep tergend langzaam de trap op. Pas toen hij halverwege de trap naar de tweede verdieping was, keek hij op. Er verscheen een glimlach op zijn gezicht en ik voelde het bloed naar mijn gezicht stromen terwijl ik hem zachtjes groette. Ik hield de deur voor hem open en liep achter hem aan naar binnen.

Zijn lippen waren zacht en hoewel het pas onze tweede ontmoeting was, voelde het vertrouwd om ze te kussen. Met allebei een glaasje water in onze hand, gingen we zitten op de bank. Ik nam hem ongegeneerd in mij op. Onder een lichtgrijze trui droeg hij een strakke witte broek die duidelijk maakte dat hij in werkelijkheid veel smaller was dan de loszittende trui deed vermoeden. Hij was dicht tegen me aan komen zitten en ik rook een mengsel van zijn after-shave en shampoo. Ik zette mijn glas naast het zijne op de tafel en legde mijn hand op zijn bovenbeen. Ik bewoog mijn gezicht naar het zijne, maar toen ik hem kustte, voelde ik een zekere aarzeling.

“Ik vond het heel fijn de vorige keer, maar je weet dat ik je nog wat wil vertellen.” Anton fluisterde bijna terwijl hij het zei. “En ik denk dat ik het eerst even moet vertellen, want anders zit het de hele tijd maar in mijn hoofd.” Zijn stem haperde lichtjes. “Lief dat je me zo in vertrouwen wilt nemen.äntwoordde ik. En ik sloeg mijn arm om hem heen zodat hij tegen me aan kwam te liggen.

Hij begon te vertellen over de verbroken band met zijn vader, over zijn oudere zus die hem als kind gepest had, over hoe verdrietig hij was door het verlies van zijn oom en hoe hij tijdens de uitvaart ziek op bed had gelegen in zijn

Thematic Code

Appearance, Sexuality, Promiscuity

Thematic Code

Fatherhood

studentenkamer in complete isolatie, met een angstaanjagend virus in zijn leden dat de hele samenleving had platgelegd. Zijn moeder had getwijfeld of ze het hem wel zou vertellen, zo ziek was hij geweest.

Thematic Code

Toughness vs. Vulnerability

“Mijn moeder troostte me vroeger altijd, mijn vader niet. Die was alleen streng. Bij mijn vader moest altijd alles. Doordeweeks en op zaterdag moest hij altijd werken, dan had hij geen tijd voor ons, en op zondag moesten we mee naar de kerk. Hij had eigenlijk nooit vrij als wij er waren. Nee, zijn vakantie-dagen waren voor hem. We moesten altijd “gezellig” samen eten. Dan mocht je altijd pas voor de tweede keer opscheppen als iedereen klaar was. Dan werden er zogenaamd diepgaande gesprekken gevoerd over politiek, die eigenlijk slechts een samenvatting van het NRC waren.”

Anton viel even stil. Ik keek hem aan en met een blik die net langs mij heen gleed, ging hij verder. “Ik kan me als ik eerlijk ben niet herinneren dat we hebben gelachen.” Ik streelde met mijn hand zachtjes over zijn rug. “Niet dat dat niet gebeurd is hoor, maar ik kan het me echt niet meer herinneren.”

Anton leek even na te denken, ging op zijn rug liggen met zijn hoofd op mijn schoot. Mijn hand legde hij op zijn borst, de zijne erbovenop. “Toen mijn vader en stiefmoeder een nieuw huis kochten, moest ik wel meehelpen met de verbouwing, maar voor mijn zus en mij werd er besloten dat wij samen een kamer op zolder zouden hebben. We hadden twee dezelfde bedden en twee dezelfde bureaus. Die hadden we niet zelf uitgezocht. Vanuit de overloop op de eerste verdieping, liep je zo via de open trap onze kamer binnen. Er was geen deur die ons privacy gaf. Er waren twee gastenkamers, die wel een deur hadden. De ene kamer deed dienst als mijn stiefmoeders bureau, de ander was er echt alleen voor gasten. Daar hing een schilderij aan de muur van een bloemenweide in groene en blauwe tinten. Het had een paar duizend euro gekost, maar dat was het waard, want het paste zo goed in de kamer en mijn vader had al meerdere schilderijen van dezelfde schilder: een klein berglandschap in de eethoek en een enorme bloemenweide in de zithoek. Het was een woonkamer van vermogende mensen, maar toen mijn zus een eigen viool moest kopen, omdat de bruikleen eindigde, was het mijn moeder die de portemonnee moest trekken om het geld aan haar te lenen. Mijn moeders inkomen was veel lager dan dat van mijn vader, maar mijn vader vond dat hij genoeg geld aan ons gaf, hij betaalde immers precies de bijdrage die het Nibud had uitgerekend op basis van zijn inkomen. Het Nibud had ook berekend wat onze moeder moest betalen, dat was nul euro. Ze gaf ons net zoveel als onze vader en als je in het weekend bij haar was, kwam je altijd thuis met bakjes eten voor twee dagen, bij mijn vader was er nooit over.”

Thematic Code

Patriarchal Family Structure

Anton vertelde het allemaal heel klinisch, bijna alsof het niet over hem ging. Ik voelde aan de beweging van zijn torso dat hij inademde om door te gaan met zijn verhaal. “Ik had vaak ruzie met mijn vader.” Zijn ogen werden nu vochtig, maar de toon in zijn stem veranderde niet. “Of, nouja, ruzies. . . Dan kwam ik nietsvermoedend aan bij mijn vader en zodra we aan tafel zaten voor de thee, kreeg ik te horen wat ik allemaal fout had gedaan. Dat ik mijn oma niet gebeld had op haar verjaardag, maar pas de dag daarna. Dat ik mijn bed niet netjes

opgemaakt had, toen ik de vorige keer ‘s ochtends om zes uur de trein moest pakken.”

“Hoe reageerde je dan?”

“Meestal incasseerde ik het gewoon. Ik gaf eigenlijk nooit een weerwoord.”

“Meestal? Of altijd?”

Anton slikte even. “Toen ik vijftien was, ben ik een keer tegen hem ingegaan. Ik had voor mijn verjaardag geld gekregen van een oudtante voor een nieuwe fiets. Mijn vader vond dat ik dat moest bewaren voor als ik ging studeren, maar toen een half jaar later mijn fiets kapot ging, wilde ik een nieuwe kopen. Die oude fiets trapte altijd al zwaar, dus dit was het moment, vond ik. Mijn vader was het er niet mee eens. Die oude batavus, dat was tenminste nog een ouderwetse kwaliteitsfiets die je eenvoudig zelf kon repareren. Ik ging met een vriend kijken bij de fietswinkel van zijn oom en vond een hele mooie fiets, maar het geld stond niet op mijn rekening, dus ik kon nog niets. Mijn vader besloot na mijn aandringen met mij een fiets te gaan uitzoeken, maar dan wel bij een andere fietsmaker, op drie kwartier rijden. Toen we aankwamen was de winkel dicht en na wat omzwervingen kwamen we uiteindelijk bij de fietsmaker waar ik de mooie fiets had gezien aan. Die had speciaal voor mij een fiets van het model achtergehouden. Eigenlijk waren ze een paar dagen daarvoor uit de aanbieding gegaan, maar aangezien ik al had gezegd dat ik hem wilde kopen, was het geen probleem. Ik zag mijn vader rood aanlopen. We liepen naar buiten en hij proestte boos: “Ik trek een hele dag uit om een fiets voor jou uit te zoeken en dan heb je er gewoon al één gekocht!”

“Maar het was toch jouw geld?”

“Ja, dat zag mijn vader toch anders. Hij heeft me toen bij mijn moeder afgezet, al was dat maar een paar minuten lopen. Ik denk dat we wel een half uur voor de deur in de auto gezeten hebben. Hij was echt heel boos.” Anton was een beetje bleek geworden, ik bood hem een kopje thee aan. Terwijl ik met de waterkoker bezig was, ging hij verder: “Ik heb mijn oudtante verteld dat ik wel die fiets wilde kopen, maar ik was niet helemaal eerlijk over het feit dat mijn vader het er niet mee eens was. Dat was niet handig. De situatie liep nog meer uit de hand. Er waren boze telefoontjes, een verdrietig gesprek met mijn oudtante over dat ik het contact met mijn vader misschien wel wilde afbreken. Het was immers niet voor het eerst dat hij mijn mening negeerde. Er was een hoop mis. Er was een gesprek met mijn stiefmoeder, wat volgde op een boze mail die zij mij had gestuurd. Er was geen gesprek met mijn vader, voor zover ik mij kan herinneren althans. Er veranderde niet zoveel, maar ik had een nieuwe fiets. De oude fiets die mijn vader in tussentijd voor veertig euro had opgeknapt was volgens de fietsmaker vijftig euro waard.”

Ik liep terug naar de bank met twee grote glazen thee in mijn handen. Ik zette ze op tafel en keek hoe Anton rechtop ging zitten en zijn handen opwarmde aan het glas. Zijn breed ogende schouders hingen naar beneden. Zijn ellebogen leunden op zijn dunne, maar gespierde bovenbenen. Ik ging naast hem zitten, sloeg een arm om hem heen en vroeg: “Veranderde er iets na dat moment?”

Thematic Code

Patriarchal Family
Structure

Anton zuchtte diep: “Nee, het riedeltje bleef hetzelfde. Ik maakte een klein foutje en dan kreeg ik weer de volle lading. Ik probeerde om mijn eigen wensen met die van mijn vader te combineren, maar het was niet goed genoeg. Ik was dik, niet zo dik als mijn vader, maar ik moest van mijn vader meer sporten en minder eten. Ik werd gepest op school, had verschrikkelijke docenten, maar het enige wat mijn vader zag waren de steeds minder hoge cijfers en dan kreeg ik weer de volle lading. Ik spijbelde veel, maar dat leek niemand echt te boeien. Ik was verward door mijn gevoelens voor meisjes en jongens. Ik liet me niet zeggen wat ik moest doen, maar kon mensen laten geloven dat dat wel zo was. Ik had geen zelfvertrouwen. Ik vereenzaamde. Ik ging studeren wat mijn vader wilde dat ik deed. Ik had weinig vrienden. Ik werd depressief.”

Thematic Code

Appearance

Anton nam een slok van zijn thee. Ik kroop weer iets dichtert tegen hem aan. “Op een gegeven moment kreeg mijn zus ook ruzie met mijn vader. Toen hebben we met zijn drieën pizza gegeten aan de Oudegracht in Utrecht, zogenaamd om het uit te praten, maar bij mij kwam toen het besef dat het nooit goed ging komen. Ik ging weer terug naar Amsterdam. Ik weet nog dat ik bij mijn flat de brandtrap opgeklommen ben tot de bovenste verdieping. Ik wilde toen echt dood. Ik wist helemaal geen andere uitweg meer.”

Thematic CodeKeeping Emotions
Inside

“Je bent niet gesprongen, toch?”

Nee... nee, maar ik heb er lang gestaan, alleen. Ik heb wel geprobeerd om aan mijn vader uit te leggen hoe het met me ging, een paar maanden later. Toen gaf hij me een knuffel, maar er veranderde niet zoveel. Hij bleef een klootzak. Ik werd voorzitter bij mijn studievereniging, maar mijn vader onthield dat ik secretaris was. Toen ik uiteindelijk aan het einde van dat jaar stopte met mijn studie, kreeg ik van mijn vader weer de volle lading. En dat terwijl het juist beter met me ging door die keuze.”

“Hoe ging je coming out dan?”

“Ja, toen ik erachter kwam dat biseksualiteit bestond, werden dingen heel snel duidelijk. Ik kwam eerst uit de kast voor vrienden en toen voor mijn moeder en mijn zus. Mijn vader heb ik het wel verteld, maar dat was eigenlijk in hetzelfde moment toen ik ook het contact heb afgebroken. Mijn vader had toen een mail naar me gestuurd. Eigenlijk was het een soort van opsomming van alles wat ik fout deed in het leven. Hij wist het echt op te schrijven alsof ik de klootzak was in onze relatie. Ik was het nergens mee eens en kon eigenlijk elk punt weerleggen. Dus toen heb ik hem een mail teruggestuurd waarin dat stond en ook gezegd dat ik een tijd lang geen contact meer wilde hebben. Dat was echt een opluchting.”

Thematic CodeSexuality &
Homophobia

Ik gaf Anton een knuffel en hij legde zijn hoofd weer op mijn schoot. “Heb je daarna nog wel contact gehad?” “Ja, een paar keer wel. Mijn stiefmoeder heeft nog een keer een boze mail gestuurd. Toen heb ik nog een keer het hele verhaal uitgelegd. Ze reageerde eerst begripvol en er volgde een beetje toenadering, ook met mijn vader, maar toen we voor de 80e verjaardag van mijn oma allemaal samen zaten, werd ik in een soort raar toneelstuk gedwongen waarin alles weer perfect moest lijken. Dat probeerde ik te negeren, maar vervolgens verschenen ze ook onaangekondigd bij de verjaardag van mijn zus en moest ik hetzelfde nog eens doormaken. Ik werd er fysiek misselijk van.”

Thematic Code

Performativity

“Dus de tactiek van je vader was gewoon om te doen alsof alles oké was? Je moet er maar op komen.” “Ja, dat hebben we in de jaren daarna nog een paar keer herhaald, maar ik ben er wel beter in geworden om niet op dezelfde plekken te zijn als hij.”

Ik wist niet goed wat ik moest zeggen en liet mijn hand over Antons rug strijken. “Probeert hij nog vaak contact met je te zoeken?” “Elk jaar op mijn verjaardag. Dan stuurt hij vaak een foto uit mijn kindertijd met een tekst over hoe lief ik was toen ik klein was.”’

Thematic Code
Patriarchal Family
Structure

The central theme in this story is (the resistance against) a patriarchal family structure. Furthermore, there is a strong emphasis on toughness, vulnerability, and emotionality. Performativity and appearance play a small role and the themes homophobia, sexuality and promiscuity, and fatherhood are also referred to.

A.2 Leuven

“Hee Anton!!” Anton keek verbaasd op toen hij in de grijze betonnen entreehal van het conservatorium vier bekende gezichten zag.

“Wat doen jullie nou in Leuven?” vroeg hij.

“Saskia had ons uitgenodigd voor jullie tour en aangezien Tim sinds een paar jaar in Brussel woont, zijn we hier maar naartoe gekomen. Hoe is het?” antwoordde Rianne.

“Ik ben doodmoe, en heb denk ik het virus dat door het orkest gaat, opgelopen, maar het gaat.”

“Ja, is het een leuke tour?”

“Heel erg leuk”

“En kom je nog een keertje weer meespelen in Glanerbrug?”

Anton was al bang dat die vraag zou komen. Zijn oude dorpsharmonie had hij een paar jaar eerder verlaten, vooral vanwege de reacties op zijn coming out. De jonge garde die hier nu stond was er wel prima mee omgegaan, maar hij ging dit deel van zijn leven liever uit de weg.

“Eerst maar eens deze tournee overleven” grapte hij “En mijn rokkostuum zoeken, want ik heb geen idee waar die gebleven is.”

Anton liep verder door de donkere kantine naar het gedeelte van het gebouw dat ooit als klooster gebouwd was. In de oude kerkzaal, die nu dienst deed als kleedkamer, wurmde hij zich door de massa van orkestleden tot hij onder het orgel de rolkar zag waar alle paktassen op lagen. Zijn paktas lag twee meter verderop op de grond naast een rommelige stapel van tassen die al van de kar waren gehaald. Met zijn paktas in zijn hand baande hij zich weer een weg door de menigte en liep hij naar de andere kleedkamer aan het einde van de gang. Daar was het leeg. Terwijl hij zich omkleedde voelde hij zijn maag samentrekken. Hij rilde, terwijl het zweet over zijn rug liep.

Anton liep via een deur aan de achterkant van het lokaal naar buiten en kwam op een binnenplaats waar de groen uitgeslagen kiezels afgewisseld werden door onkruid dat ertussen groeide. Hij probeerde rustig door te ademen. Zijn gedachten gingen heen en weer tussen de matige gesteldheid van zijn lichaam en de herinneringen die de mensen van zijn oude harmonie naar boven brachten. Hij keek op de klok, zocht iemand die hem een paracetamol kon geven en liep naar het veel te krappe podium in de kleine zeshoekige zaal.

Tijdens het spelen voelde hij de laatste beetjes energie uit zijn lichaam trekken. In de pauze rende hij naar de wc. Het hielp een beetje, maar de tweede helft van het concert was zwaar. De zwaarmoedige en fysiek uitdagende muziek vroeg alles wat hij op dat moment kon geven. De tranen biggelden over zijn wangen in de laatste twee delen. Tijdens het applaus vroeg hij de bastrombonist om zijn tuba voor hem op te ruimen en via een kleine deurtje aan de achterkant van het podium vertrok hij naar de kleedkamer, waar hij languit op de grond ging liggen.

Na een kwartier kwamen Alex en Margot, orkestchef en secretaris in het bestuur, samen binnenlopen. Ze vielen stil toen ze de huilende Anton op een tafel zagen zitten. Alex liep op hem af en sloeg een arm om hem heen. Margot

bood aan om thee te halen en vroeg of er een specifiek iemand was waar Anton mee wilde praten. Anton vroeg of ze Paul, de dirigent van het orkest wilde halen.

Paul was een grote kale man van in de vijftig. In zijn dagelijks leven dirigeerde hij de Marinierskapel en je kon aan hem zien dat hij geen moeite had gehad om de militaire training te doorstaan. Toch was hij geen harde man. Hij was, in de drie weken die ze nu samen waren, uitgegroeid tot een vaderfiguur voor het hele orkest. Paul ging altijd voor het allerbeste resultaat, maar als je na het concert beteuterd keek, omdat je solo niet zo mooi was als de dag daarvoor, wist hij je ook direct weer op te beuren.

Toen Paul bij Anton en Alex was komen zitten, begon Anton te vertellen: over zijn jeugd, over hoe hij gepest was door zijn broer, over de vechtscheiding van zijn ouders, over hoe hij zelf het contact met zijn vader afgebroken had, over hoe hij in het eerste jaar van zijn studie zelfmoordneigingen had gehad, over zijn coming-out. Hij vertelde hoe het onverwachte overlijden van Daniel, de dirigent van het orkest waar hij normaal gesproken in speelde, hem geraakt had. Het was een enorme klap geweest. Daarvoor had hij zes jaar lang elke week een repetitie onder leiding van Daniel gehad. De band was niet altijd even goed geweest, maar toen die constante factor wegviel, had Anton een week lang elke dag gehuild.

Paul en Alex hadden de hele tijd aandachtig geluisterd. Aan het einde van zijn verhaal, gaven ze Anton beiden een knuffel. Paul verzekerde Anton dat hij altijd mocht aankloppen als er iets was en toonde veel begrip voor de situatie. Samen wisten Paul en Alex ervoor te zorgen dat Anton zich weer veilig voelde, ook in deze groep die voor deze tour nog niet een groep was geweest. Anton was lichamelijk nog steeds een wrak, maar hij kon weer rustig zijn spullen inpakken en hij stapte in de bus naar het hostel. Daar ging hij direct op bed liggen. Tien uur later werd hij pas weer wakker.

Twee van zijn kamergenoten waren nog aan het snurken, de overige drie bedden waren leeg. Toen Anton zich in de badkamer stond te scheren, kwam Ben, een violist, de kamer binnenlopen. Hij vertelde dat ze net te laat waren voor het ontbijt, dus besloten ze de stad in te trekken op zoek naar iets te eten. Niet veel later hadden ze allebei een goed gevulde pannenkoek voor zich met daarnaast een kop koffie. Ben had een lichte huid en donker krullend haar, waar hij duidelijk niet al te veel aandacht aan besteedde. Hij deed een bachelor Natuurkunde in Nijmegen en vertelde met zijn koffie in zijn hand vrolijk over zijn strijkkwartet.

Een tafel verder zat een stelletje klef elkaar te voeren. Ben grapte of Anton ook een hapje wilde en toen ze een uur later hetzelfde stelletje tegenkwamen, nadat ze de trappen van de toren van de bibliotheek beklommen hadden, grapte Anton dat ze eigenlijk de ideale romantische date als uitje gekozen hadden. Ze trokken de hele middag samen op.

's Avonds hadden ze met het hele orkest afgesproken in een biercafé aan het centrale plein. De jongens stonden in een groepje te praten over hoe leuk het kon zijn om ongemakkelijke gesprekken te voeren. Anton vertelde:

“Uit wetenschappelijk onderzoek blijkt dat 10% seks heeft gehad met zowel mannen als vrouwen, maar ruim de helft van de mannen met biseksuele gevoelens

Thematic CodeAppearance,
Toughness vs.
Vulnerability**Thematic Code**

Vulnerability

Thematic CodeInclusive
Masculinity**Thematic Code**Inclusive
Masculinity

heeft daar nog nooit met iemand over gepraat. Dus als je ervan uitgaat dat er toch nog een hoop tussen praten en seks in zit en aangezien we ook weten dat seksualiteit een glijdende schaal is, kun je eigenlijk alleen maar concluderen dat toch zeker de helft van de mannen toch in meer of mindere mate op mannen vallen. Dus... “

Thematic Code

 Inclusive
 Masculinity

Anton keek Ben strak aan “hoe staat het met jouw biseksuele gevoelens?”

Ben glimlachte even licht ongemakkelijk, maar herpakte zich al snel.

“Ik ben nog nooit verliefd geweest op een jongen, maar ik zou eerlijk gezegd inderdaad niet durven uitsluiten dat het ooit zou kunnen gebeuren.” Anton dacht even een lichte twinkeling in de ogen van Ben te zien en besloot erin mee te gaan.

“Nou in dat geval!” zei hij, terwijl hij overdreven flirterig een arm om Ben heen sloeg. De groep moest hartelijk lachen. Het gesprek ging weer verder. Anton betrapte zichzelf erop hoe hij soms stiekem naar Ben keek.

Ook de rest van de avond bleven Anton en Ben een beetje rond elkaar hangen. Af en toe maakten de jongens grapjes over hoe romantisch hun “date” was geweest en flirten ze overdreven met elkaar. Een uurtje later nam Thomas, een altviolist die in het strijkkwartet van Ben zat, Anton apart. Hij viel direct met de deur in huis:

“Dus, hoe zit het tussen jou en Ben?”

Hij was bloedserius en wilde weten wat Anton van plan was met zijn beste vriend.

“Wat zou er zijn tussen mij en Ben?” antwoordde Anton, in het poging het gesprek een beetje te sturen.

“Nou, jullie hangen al de hele avond om elkaar heen en raken elkaar steeds aan. Ik denk dat er iets is.” “Ja, oké, we zitten al de hele dag flirterige grapjes te maken, maar dat zijn echt alleen grapjes. Jij weet toch net zo goed als ik dat Ben helemaal niet op mannen valt?”

Anton blufte, omdat hij wist dat Thomas het gesprek eerder op de avond gemist had.

“Nee, ik weet dat hij nog nooit op een man verliefd geworden is, maar het zou toch altijd nog eens kunnen gebeuren.”

Anton reageerde bewust verbaasd. Hij moest nu glashard liegen. “Nou, volgens mij zoek je er teveel achter. We zitten gewoon te geinen. Ik in ieder geval wel en Ben volgens mij al helemaal.” Anton dronk zijn glas leeg en liep richting de bar.

“Jij nog eentje?”

Rond half twee liepen Anton en Ben met een groepje van acht terug naar het hostel. De twee waren overduidelijk als enigen niet dronken en liepen daardoor al snel voorop. Anton keek regelmatig om naar de groep die steeds verder achter hen liep, zijn hart klopte in zijn keel. Toen ze bijna bij de stationstunnel waren, die uitkwam bij het hostel aan de andere kant van het spoor, hadden ze zoveel afstand dat hij zeker wist dat de rest ze niet zou horen.

“Weet je,” zei Anton “ik zou het misschien niet zo erg vinden als je op mannen zou vallen.”

Hij keek Ben nauwelijks aan terwijl hij het zei. Even was het stil.

“Ik denk ik ook niet.”

Anton keek op. Hij zag een licht verlegen glimlach op het gezicht van Ben en dezelfde twinkeling in zijn ogen die hij eerder op de avond ook al dacht te hebben gezien. Anton glimlachte terug.

“JONGENS, WACHT EVEN!!!” Ilse, een klarinettiste, riep vanaf de andere kant van het stationsplein en liep op de jongens af. “Laten we even op de rest wachten voor we de tunnel ingaan. De eerste twee tortelduifjes zijn we al kwijt, die bleven bij de eerste hoek al hangen.” “Ach, de helft van het orkest staat nog in het café, dus die komen wel thuis.” antwoordde Anton.

Jurjen, Thomas en Fieke kwamen er ook aanlopen en met zijn zessen liepen ze de tunnel in. Ben en Anton liepen zwiingend voorop. Pas toen ze de galmende tunnel uit waren, durfde Anton weer iets tegen Ben te zeggen:

“Ik ben hier niet zo’n ster in.”

“Weet ik, maar dat geeft niet.”

“Zullen we kijken of we zo in het hostel een rustig plekje kunnen vinden, zodat we nog even kunnen praten?”

Ben antwoordde instemmend. Ze liepen met een flink tempo naar het hostel zodat de rest niet op het idee zou komen om bij ze te komen zitten, maar toen ze binnen waren, bleek dat alle gemeenschappelijke ruimten afgesloten waren. Ze konden niet anders dan naar de kamer gaan. Er was nog niemand in de kamer, maar Jurjen kon elk moment binnenkomen, dus Ben en Anton besloten hun tanden te gaan poetsen en te gaan slapen. Toen ze allebei klaar waren om naar bed te gaan, was Jurjen er nog steeds niet.

“Ik denk dat Jurjen aan het regelen is.” zei Ben

“Ja, hij wel.” antwoordde Anton iets te snel.

Ben kon de grap wel waarderen.

“Mag ik je misschien een knuffel geven?” vroeg Anton voorzichtig. Ben knikte. Anton liep naar hem toe en ging naast hem op bed zitten. Hij sloeg zijn armen om hem heen en trok hem dicht tegen zich aan. Bens hand streelde zacht over Antons rug. Na enkele minuten fluisterde Ben:

“Ik denk dat ik nu nog niet verder wil gaan.”

De volgende ochtend was Anton gespannen. Hij had met Ben afgesproken dat ze samen op pad zouden gaan. Ze ontbeten in het hostel en trokken met een groepje naar de botanische tuinen net buiten het stadscentrum. De tuinen werden afgesloten door een hoog oud hek. Daarin was een grote poort aangebracht, gebouwd van baksteen met grote natuurstenen blokken op de hoeken. In het natuurstenen fronton stond met grote letters KRUIDTUIN en daaronder JARDIN BOTANIQUE. De poort kwam uit op een breed zandpad met aan beide zijden grote kegelvormig gesnoeide struiken. Enkele tientallen meters verder kwam het brede pad uit op een zessprong. Een wegwijzer met tientallen pijlen wees naar de verschillende tuinen en kassen. Met een mix van volwassen interesse, kinderlijk enthousiasme en een vleugje brak ochtendhumeur, verspreidde de groep zich over het complex. Het prille voorjaar liet een veld krokussen fel paars uitslaan. Via vele kleine paadjes vonden ze de ingang van één van de kassen, waar de gangpaden volstonden met planten die in de zomer buiten konden staan. Wanneer je

Thematic Code

Vulnerability

Thematic Code

Promiscuity,
Sexual
Experimentation

tegenliggers tegenkwam, moest je proberen een hoekje te vinden waar je elkaar net kon passeren. Na ruim een halfuur in de tuinen zag Anton een kans om even met Ben te praten. Hij vroeg hem of hij nog een beetje had kunnen nadenken over zijn gevoelens. Ze slenterden over een grindpad en Ben antwoordde dat hij het niet zag zitten.

Thematic CodePromiscuity,
Homohysteria

“Tijdens zo’n tournee is alles zoveel heftiger en dan lijkt het misschien wel leuk, maar over anderhalve week zit ik weer in Nijmegen en jij in Amsterdam. En ik wil niet iets voor anderhalve week.”

Anton keek een beetje bedrukt, maar hield zijn mond. Hij was het niet met Ben eens. De afstand was wat hem betreft geen probleem, maar hij voelde dat het zinloos was om nu druk te zetten en besloot zich weer in de groep te mengen.

The central theme in this story is vulnerability, especially in connection to inclusive masculinity. In the second part of the story, sexuality and promiscuity in connection to (internalized) homohysteria plays a role. Throughout the story appearance plays a small role.

A.3 De man op straat

Het was koud. Anton voelde de wind langs zijn benen schuren. Het sportbroekje dat hij aanhad deed weinig om zijn lichaamswarmte vast te houden. Het bezwete shirt dat hij aanhad voelde nog kouder. In de haast om op tijd bij de training te komen, had hij zijn jas en joggingbroek thuis laten liggen en in de laatste paar minuten van zijn fietstocht naar huis begon hij behoorlijk spijt te krijgen. De zon had, in het uurtje dat hij binnen was geweest, plaatsgemaakt voor grijze wolken.

Het was rustig op straat. Bij het oversteken van het laatste kruispunt voor hij thuis kwam, hoefde hij niet te stoppen. Voor hem reed een jongen van in de twintig op een scooter. Iets verderop liep een vrouw van middelbare leeftijd met haar boodschappentassen naar de auto. De jongen droeg een hoodie en een joggingbroek en had pikzwart haar. Hij boog af richting de vrouw met haar boodschappentassen. Het leek alsof hij de weg wilde vragen, maar net toen Anton vlakbij kwam, zei de jongen: “Hey Beautiful”. Antons mond viel open en hij hief zijn hand op in een gebaar van verbazing. De jongen keek om en leek geschrokken toen hij Anton zag. Boos riep hij: “Jij moet niet praten, pannenkoek.” Anton reageerde droog: “Ik zeg toch niets.”

De jongen hief zijn wenkbrauwen op en zijn ogen spuwden vuur. Anton twijfelde of hij snel genoeg het hek voor de fietsenkelder kon openen en weer sluiten voordat de jongen bij hem zou zijn. De jongen was op een redelijke afstand, maar Anton wist dat het elektronische slot van het hek niet snel genoeg zou reageren. De jongen met de scooter maakte een rare bocht, maar reed toen door. Anton hield zijn sleutel tegen het elektronische slot. Zijn ogen zochten naar de vrouw die was lastiggefallen, maar ze was al verdwenen. Het geluid van de scooter werd langzaam overstemd door het andere verkeer.

Anton kon het gevoel van onbehagen niet echt achter zich laten. Hij wist dat dit zo vaak voorkwam dat elke vrouw in zijn omgeving ermee te maken had gehad, maar hij had het zelf nog nooit zo gezien. Hij kreeg enigszins medelijden met de jongen. De jongen van wie hij niet mocht praten. De jongen die het nodig vond om een vrouw die alleen over straat liep lastig te vallen. De jongen die alleen op de scooter zat, zonder vrienden in de buurt waar hij indruk wilde maken. De jongen die toch vast niet serieus geïnteresseerd was in de vrouw die qua leeftijd zijn moeder had kunnen zijn.

De jongen had gedacht dat niemand het zag. Toen Anton door zijn aanwezigheid die bubbel brak, was de jongen boos geworden. Zijn moment was verstoord, niet met woorden, wel met een zichtbare uitdrukking van verbazing. De jongen wist allang dat wat hij deed niet oké was. Anton had het slechts bevestigd.

Anton vond hem zielig. Die jongen had de behoefte gevoeld om iemand anders zo te objectificeren, niet voor sociale status, niet omdat het ergens goed voor was, maar alleen voor zichzelf. Dat die jongen zijn gevoel van mannelijkheid vastknoopte aan het intimideren van een vrouw op straat en dat een simpele afkeurende blik van een pannenkoek in sportkleding genoeg was om zijn humeur te verzieken.

Thematic Code

Patriarchal Structures, Machoness, Performativity

Thematic Code

Performativity, Toxic Masculinity / Homophobia

Anton parkeerde zijn fiets in de fietsenkelder, liep weer naar buiten om via de trappen aan de buitenkant van de flat naar de tweede verdieping te lopen. Hij keek uit over de straat, voelde de koele wind langs zijn benen en liep naar binnen.

The central theme in this story is performativity in connection to toxic masculinity / homophobia. This is further connected to machoness and patriarchal structures in society.

B English Translations of the Stories

This appendix contains the autoethnographic stories translated into English. The translation was done by the author and can contain subtle differences from the original Dutch.

B.1 Anton

I looked in the mirror. My hair was neat, the lock on the left side fell just right. My blue shirt reflected the color of my eyes. I had already brushed my teeth, but checked again to make sure there was nothing between them. I breathed into my hand, it smelled fresh. I sprayed on a little of my cologne and concluded that I was ready. I sat down on the couch and waited. It tingled slightly in my stomach as I looked at my phone. “I’m getting on my bike now. Be there in 20 minutes.”

He had canceled our previous date, food poisoning, but instead we had talked on the phone for hours. It took so long that at one point the battery of my headphones gave up, and I walked the streets of Amsterdam East with my phone in my hand for another half hour after that.

When the bell rang, I jumped up. I pressed the button to open the front door and walked out of my room toward the stairs. I looked down and in the reflection of the second floor window I saw his short, blond, slightly curly hair appear. He didn’t see me yet and walked up the stairs agonizingly slowly. Only when he was halfway up the stairs to the second floor did he look up. A smile appeared on his face and I felt the blood rush to my face as I greeted him gently. I held the door open for him and walked in after him.

His lips were soft and although it was only our second meeting, it felt familiar to kiss them. With both of us holding a glass of water, we sat down on the couch. I took him in unabashedly. Under a light gray sweater, he wore tight white pants that made it clear he was actually much narrower than the loose-fitting sweater suggested. He had come to sit close to me, and I smelled a mixture of his aftershave and shampoo. I placed my glass next to his on the table and put my hand on his thigh. I moved my face to his, but when I kissed him, I felt a certain hesitation.

“I really liked it last time, but you know there’s something else I want to talk to you about.” Anton almost whispered as he said it. “And I think I should tell you first, because otherwise it’s just in my head all the time.” His voice faltered slightly. “It’s sweet that you want to confide in me like that.” I replied. And I put my arm around him so that he lay against me.

He began to talk about the broken bond with his father, about his older sister who had bullied him as a child, about how saddened he was by the loss of his uncle and how during the funeral he had been lying sick on his bed in his dorm room in complete isolation, with a terrifying virus in his members that had flattened the entire society. His mother had hesitated to tell him, that’s how sick he had been.

“My mother always used to comfort me, my father didn’t. He was only strict. With my father, everything always had to be done. During the week and on

Saturdays he always had to work, then he had no time for us, and on Sundays we had to go to church with him. In fact, he never had time off when we were there. No, his vacation days were for him. We always had to have “cozy” meals together. Then you were always not allowed to serve for the second time until everyone had finished. Then there were supposedly in-depth conversations about politics, which were really just a summary of the NRC newspaper.”

Anton fell silent for a moment. I looked at him, and with a look that just slipped past me, he continued. “I can’t remember, if I’m honest, that we ever laughed.” I gently stroked his back with my hand. “Not that that didn’t happen, you know, but I really can’t remember.”

Anton seemed to think for a moment, lying down on his back with his head on my lap. My hand he put on his chest, his on top of it. “When my father and stepmother bought a new house, I did have to help with the remodeling, but for my brother and me it was decided that we would have a room together in the attic. We had two of the same beds and two of the same desks. We had not chosen those ourselves. From the landing on the second floor, you could walk right into our room through the open staircase. There was no door to give us privacy. There were two guest rooms, which did have a door. One room served as my stepmother’s office; the other was really there for guests only. There hung a painting on the wall of a flower meadow in shades of green and blue. It had cost a few thousand euros, but it was worth it because it fit the room so well and my father already had several paintings by the same painter: a small mountain landscape in the dining area and a huge flower meadow in the sitting area. It was a living room of wealthy people, but when my sister had to buy a violin of her own because the loan ended, it was my mother who had to lend the money to her. My mother’s income was much lower than my father’s, but my father felt he was giving enough money to us. After all, he was paying exactly the contribution the national budget advice institute had calculated based on his income. The institute had also calculated what our mother had to pay, which was zero euros. She gave us as much as our father and if you were with her over the weekend, you always came home with food for two days, with my father there was never any left over.”

Anton told it all very clinically, almost as if it wasn’t about him. I could feel by the movement of his torso that he was inhaling to continue his story. “I often had arguments with my father.” His eyes were getting moist now, but the tone in his voice didn’t change. “Or, well, arguments. . . I would arrive unsuspecting at my father’s house and as soon as we sat down at the table for tea, I was told all the things I had done wrong. That I hadn’t called my grandmother on her birthday, but only the day after. That I hadn’t made my bed neatly when I had to catch the train at six in the morning last time.”

“How did you react?”

“Most of the time I just went with it. I never actually gave a rebuttal.”

“Most of the time? Or always?”

Anton gulped for a moment. “When I was fifteen, I went against him once. I had gotten money for my birthday from a great-aunt for a new bicycle. My father

thought I should save that for when I went to college, but when six months later my bike broke down, I wanted to buy a new one. That old bike always pedaled heavily, so this was the time, I thought. My father didn't agree. At least that old bike was an old-fashioned quality one that you could easily repair yourself. I went with a friend to take a look around at his uncle's bike store and found a very nice bike, but the money wasn't in my account, so I couldn't do anything yet. After my insistence, my father decided to go pick out a bike with me, but at a different bike shop, three quarters of an hour away. When we arrived, the store was closed and after some wandering we finally arrived at the bike shop where I had seen the beautiful bike. The owner had held back a bike of the model especially for me. Actually, they had gone off sale a few days before, but since I had already said I wanted to buy it, it was no problem. I saw my father turn red. We walked out, and he cackled angrily, "I spend a whole day picking out a bike for you, and then it turns out you just bought one already without consulting me!"

"But it was your money, right?" "Yes, but my father thought differently. He dropped me off at my mother's then, even though it was only a few minutes' walk. I think we sat in the car in front of the door for half an hour. He was really very angry." Anton had turned a little pale; I offered him a cup of tea. While I was busy with the kettle, he continued, "I told my great-aunt that I did want to buy that bike, but I wasn't completely honest about the fact that my father didn't agree. That wasn't helpful. The situation got even more out of hand. There were angry phone calls, a sad conversation with my great-aunt about how I might want to cut off contact with my father. After all, this was not the first time he had ignored my opinion. There were a lot of issues. There was one conversation with my stepmother, which followed an angry e-mail she had sent me. There was no conversation with my father, at least as far as I can remember. Not much changed, but I had a new bike. The old bike my father had refurbished in the meantime for forty euros was worth fifty euros, according to the bike shop."

I walked back to the couch with two large glasses of tea in my hands. I set them on the table and watched Anton sit up straight and warm his hands on the glass. His broad-looking shoulders hunched down. His elbows leaned on his thin but muscular thighs. I sat down next to him, put an arm around him and asked, "Did anything change after that moment?"

Anton sighed deeply, "No, the routine stayed the same. I made a small mistake, and then I got the full load again. I tried to combine my own desires with my father's, but it wasn't good enough. I was fat, not as fat as my father, but my father told me to exercise more and eat less. I was bullied at school, had terrible teachers, but the only thing my father saw were the increasingly low grades, and then I got the full load again. I played truant a lot, but no one really seemed to care. I was confused by my feelings for girls and boys. I didn't let people tell me what to do, but I could make people believe that I did. I had no self-confidence. I was lonely. I went to study what my father wanted me to do. I had few friends. I became depressed."

Anton took a sip of his tea. I crawled a little closer to him again. “At one point, my sister also got into a fight with my father. Then the three of us had pizza at the old canal in Utrecht, supposedly to talk it out, but for me that was the moment I realized that it was never going to be okay. I went back to Amsterdam. I remember climbing up the fire escape at my flat to the top floor. I really wanted to die. I didn’t know any other way out at all.”

“You didn’t jump, did you?”

“No. . . no, but I stood there for a long time, alone. I did try to explain to my father how I was doing, a few months later. Then he gave me a hug, but nothing much changed. He remained an asshole. I became president of my study association, but my father remembered that I was secretary. When I finally quit my studies at the end of that year, my father gave me the full load again. Even though I was doing better because of that choice.”

“So how did your coming out go?”

“Well, when I found out about bisexuality, things became clear very quickly. I came out first to friends and then to my mother and my brother. I did tell my father, but that was actually at the same time when I also broke off contact. My father had sent an email to me. It was a kind of summary of everything I did wrong in life. He really knew how to write it down like I was the asshole in our relationship. I didn’t agree with anything and could actually refute every point. So then I wrote him back saying just that and also that I didn’t want any more contact for a while. That was a real relief.”

I gave Anton a hug, and he put his head back on my lap. “Did you have any contact after that?” “Yes, a few times I did. My stepmother sent another angry e-mail. Then I explained the whole story one more time. She reacted understandingly at first and a little rapprochement followed, also with my father, but when we all sat together for my grandmother’s 80th birthday, I was forced into a kind of weird play where everything had to seem perfect again. I tried to ignore that, but then they also showed up unannounced at my sister’s birthday, and I had to go through the same thing again. It made me physically nauseous.”

“So your father’s tactic was just to pretend everything was okay? You just have to figure it out.” “Yeah, we repeated that a few more times in the years that followed, but I got better at not being in the same places he was.”

I wasn’t quite sure what to say, and let my hand stroke Anton’s arm. “Does he still try to contact you often?” “Every year on my birthday. Then he often sends a picture from my childhood with a text about how sweet I was when I was little.”

B.2 Leuven

“Hey Anton!!!” Anton looked up in surprise when he saw four familiar faces in the gray concrete entrance hall of the conservatory.

“What are you guys doing in Leuven?” he asked.

“Saskia had invited us to your tour and since Tim has been living in Brussels for a few years, we just came here. How is everything?” replied Rianne.

“I’m dead tired, and I think I caught the virus that goes through the orchestra, but I’m fine.”

“Yeah, is it a fun tour?”

“A lot of fun.”

“And are you coming to play again in Glanerbrug anytime soon?”

Anton was already dreading that question. He had left his old village wind band a few years earlier, mostly because of the reactions to his coming out. The young people standing here now had been fine with it, but he preferred to avoid this part of his life.

“First let’s survive this tour” he joked, “and find my dress suit, because I have no idea where it went.”

Anton continued walking through the dark cafeteria to the part of the building once built as a monastery. In the old church hall, which now served as a dressing room, he wriggled through the mass of orchestra members until he saw, under the organ, the rolling cart on which all the garment bags were stored. His garment was laying two meters away on the floor next to a messy pile of bags already removed from the cart. With his garment bag in his hand, he made his way through the crowd again and walked to the other dressing room at the end of the hallway. There it was empty. As he changed his clothes, he felt his stomach contract. He shivered as sweat ran down his back. Anton walked out through a door at the back of the classroom and entered a courtyard where the greenish pebbles were interspersed with weeds growing between them. He tried to breathe calmly. His thoughts went back and forth between the mediocre state of his body and the memories brought up by the people of his old wind band. He looked at the clock, started looking for someone to give him a paracetamol, and walked to the far too cramped stage in the small hexagonal hall.

As he played, he felt the last bits of energy draining from his body. At intermission, he ran to the bathroom. It soothed him a little, but the second half of the concert was heavy. The heavy and physically challenging music demanded all he could give at that moment. Tears were rolling down his cheeks in the last two movements. During the applause, he asked the bass trombonist to pack away his tuba for him, and through a small door at the back of the stage he left for the dressing room, where he sprawled out on the floor.

After fifteen minutes, Alex and Margot, orchestra manager and secretary on the board, walked in together. They fell silent when they saw the crying Anton sitting on a table. Alex walked up to him and put an arm around him. Margot offered to get tea and asked if there was anyone in particular Anton wanted to talk to. Anton asked if she would get Paul, the conductor of the orchestra. Paul was a large, bald man in his 50s. In his daily life he conducted the Marine Band

and you could tell by looking at him that he had had no trouble getting through military training. Yet he was not a hard man. He had become, in the three weeks they were now together, a father figure to the entire orchestra. Paul always went for the very best result, but if you looked dismayed after the concert because your solo was not as beautiful as the day before, he also knew how to cheer you up immediately.

When Paul had joined Anton and Alex, Anton began to talk: about his childhood, about how he had been bullied by his brother, about his parents' rough divorce, about how he himself had broken off contact with his father, about how he had been suicidal in his first year of college, about his coming-out. He talked about how the unexpected death of Daniel, the conductor of the orchestra he normally played in, had affected him. It had been a huge blow. Before that, he had had rehearsals under Daniel's direction every week for six years. The bond had not always been good, but when that constant factor was gone, Anton had cried every day for a week.

Paul and Alex had listened intently the whole time. At the end of his story, they both gave Anton a hug. Paul assured Anton that he could always knock on his door if there was anything and showed great understanding. Together, Paul and Alex knew how to make Anton feel safe again, even in this group that had not been a group before this tour. Anton was still a wreck physically, but he was able to calmly pack his things again, and he boarded the bus to the hostel. There he went straight to bed. Ten hours later, he woke up.

Two of his roommates were still snoring; the other three beds were empty. As Anton stood in the bathroom shaving, Ben, a violinist, entered the room. Ben told him they were just late for breakfast, so they decided to go into town in search of something to eat. Not much later, they both had a well-filled pancake in front of them with a cup of coffee next to it. Ben had fair skin and dark curly hair, which he obviously didn't pay too much attention to. He was doing a bachelor's degree in Physics in Nijmegen and, with his coffee in his hand, was happily talking about his string quartet.

A table over, a couple was feeding each other clumsily. Ben jokingly asked whether Anton wanted a bite from his breakfast, too. And when they ran into the same couple an hour later, after climbing the steps of the library's tower, Anton joked that they had actually chosen the ideal romantic date for this day. They hung out together all afternoon.

In the evening, they had agreed to meet up with the whole orchestra at a beer bar in the central square. The boys stood in a group talking about how fun it could be to have uncomfortable conversations. Anton said:

"Scientific research shows that 10% have had sex with both men and women, but over half of the men with bisexual feelings have never talked to anyone about it. So if you assume that there's still a lot in between talking and sex and since we also know that sexuality is a sliding scale, you can really only conclude that surely at least half of men are still attracted to men to a greater or lesser extent. So..."

Anton looked at Ben sternly "What about your bisexual feelings?"

Ben smiled slightly uncomfortably for a moment, but quickly recovered.

"I've never been in love with a boy, but I would honestly indeed not dare to rule out the possibility that it could happen." Anton thought for a moment he saw a slight twinkle in Ben's eyes and decided to go along with it.

"Well, in that case!" he said, putting an arm around Ben exaggeratedly flirtatiously. The group laughed heartily. The conversation continued again. Anton caught himself watching Ben secretly a few times.

Even the rest of the evening, Anton and Ben continued to stay close to each other for a bit. Occasionally the boys joked about how romantic their "date" had been and flirted excessively with each other. An hour later, Thomas, a viola player who was in Ben's string quartet, took Anton aside. He immediately asked: "So, what's the deal between you and Ben?"

He was dead serious and wanted to know what Anton was up to with his best friend.

"You think there's something going on between me and Ben?" replied Anton, trying to steer the conversation a bit.

"Well, you guys have been hanging around each other all night and touching each other all the time. I think there's something there." "Yeah, okay, we've been making flirty jokes all day, but those are really just jokes. You know just as well as I do that Ben isn't into men at all, right?"

Anton bluffed, knowing Thomas had missed the conversation earlier in the evening.

"No, I know he's never fallen in love with a man before, but it could still happen." Anton responded deliberately surprised. He now had to lie convincingly. "Well, I think you're looking for something that isn't there. We're just joking around. At least I am, and I think Ben is all the more so." Anton drained his glass and walked toward the bar. "You want another one?"

Around 1:30, Anton and Ben walked a group of eight back to the hostel. The two were obviously the only ones not drunk and were therefore soon in the lead. Anton regularly looked back at the group walking farther and farther behind them, his heart pounding in his throat. When they were almost at the station tunnel, which ended at the hostel on the other side of the tracks, they had so much distance that he was sure the rest wouldn't hear them.

"You know," Anton said "I maybe wouldn't really mind if you were into men." He barely looked at Ben as he said it. For a moment, they both fell silent.

"I guess I wouldn't either."

Anton looked up. He saw a slightly shy smile on Ben's face and the same twinkle in his eyes that he thought he had seen earlier in the evening. Anton smiled back.

"GUYS, WAIT UP!!!" Ilse, a clarinetist, called from the other side of the station square and walked toward the boys. "Let's wait for the rest before we enter the tunnel. We already lost the first two lovebirds, they got stuck at the first corner." "Oh well, half the orchestra is still at the café, so they'll get home." Anton replied.

Jurjen, Thomas and Fieke joined them and the six of them walked into the tunnel. Ben and Anton walked silently ahead. Only when they were out of the echoing tunnel did Anton dare say something to Ben again:

Thematic Code at this.”

Vulnerability “I know, but that doesn’t matter.”

“Shall we see if we can find a quiet place in the hostel, so we can talk for a while?”

Ben replied in agreement. They walked to the hostel at a brisk pace so that the rest would not get the idea of joining them, but when they got inside, they found that all the common areas were closed. They had no choice but to go to their room. No one was in the room yet, but Jurjen could come in any minute, so Ben and Anton decided to brush their teeth and go to sleep. When they were both ready to go to bed, Jurjen still wasn’t there.

“I think Jurjen is making out with someone,” said Ben

“Yes, HE is.” Anton replied a little too quickly.

Ben could appreciate the joke.

“Could I perhaps give you a hug?” asked Anton gently. Ben nodded. Anton walked over to him and sat down next to him on the bed. He put his arms around him and pulled him close to him. Ben’s hand gently stroked Anton’s back. After a few minutes, Ben whispered:

“I don’t think I want to go any further just yet.”

The next morning, Anton was tense. He had agreed with Ben that they would go out together. They had breakfast at the hostel and headed in a group to the botanical gardens just outside the city center. The gardens were enclosed by a tall old fence. Within it was a large gate built of brick with large stone blocks at the corners. The natural stone pediment read in large letters KRUIDTUIN and below it JARDIN BOTANIQUE. The gate opened onto a wide dirt path with large cone-shaped pruned shrubs on both sides. A few dozen meters further, the wide path ended at a six-way intersection. A signpost with dozens of arrows pointed to the various gardens and greenhouses. With a mix of mature interest, childlike enthusiasm and a touch of hungover morning humor, the group dispersed around the complex. The early spring had a field of daffodils turning bright purple and the through many small paths they found the entrance to one of the greenhouses, where the aisles were filled with plants that could be outside in the summer. When you encountered people coming from the other direction, you had to try to find a corner where you could just pass each other. After more than half an hour in the gardens, Anton saw an opportunity to talk to Ben for a moment. He asked him if he had been able to think a little more about his feelings. They strolled along a gravel path, and Ben replied that he didn’t think it would work out.

“During a tour like this everything is so much more intense, and then it might seem like fun, but in a week and a half I’ll be back in Nijmegen, and you’ll be in Amsterdam. And I don’t want something for a week and a half.”

Anton looked a little depressed, but kept his mouth shut. He didn't agree with Ben. The distance was not a problem as far as he was concerned, but he felt it was pointless to put pressure now and decided to rejoin the group.

B.3 The Man on the Street

It was cold. Anton felt the wind scraping along his legs. The sport shorts he was wearing did little to retain his body heat. The sweaty shirt felt even colder. In the rush to get to his training on time, he had left his jacket and sweatpants at home, and in the last few minutes of his bike ride home, he began to feel quite regretful. The sun, in the hour he had been inside, had given way to gray clouds.

The streets were quiet. Crossing the last intersection before he got home, he didn't have to stop. Ahead of him rode a boy in his twenties on a scooter. A little further ahead, a middle-aged woman was walking to the car with her shopping bags. The boy was wearing a hoodie and sweatpants and had pitch-black hair. He made a turn toward the woman with her shopping bags. It looked like he wanted to ask for directions, but just as Anton got close, the boy said, "Hey, Beautiful." Anton's mouth fell open, and he raised his hand in a gesture of surprise. The boy turned around and seemed startled to see Anton. Angry, he called out, "You shouldn't be talking, idiot." Anton responded dryly, "I'm not saying anything anyway."

The boy raised his eyebrows and his eyes spewed fire. Anton doubted he could open and close the gate in front of the bicycle basement fast enough before the boy would catch up to him. The boy was a reasonable distance away, but Anton knew the electronic lock on the gate would not respond quickly enough. The boy with the scooter made an odd turn, but then drove off. Anton held his key against the electronic lock. His eyes searched for the woman who had been harassed, but she was already gone. The sound of the scooter was slowly drowned out by the other traffic.

Anton couldn't really put the feeling of unease behind him. He knew this was so common that every woman around him had had to deal with it, but he had never seen it like this himself. He felt somewhat sorry for the boy. The boy who had said he was not allowed to speak. The boy who felt it necessary to harass a woman walking down the street alone. The boy who was alone on the scooter, with no friends around whom he wanted to impress. The boy who surely wasn't seriously interested in the woman who could have been his mother in terms of age anyway.

The boy had thought no one noticed. When Anton's presence broke that bubble, the boy had grown angry. His moment had been disrupted, not with words, but with a visible expression of surprise. The boy had known all along that what he was doing was not okay. Anton had merely confirmed it.

Anton felt sorry for the boy. That boy had felt the need to objectify someone else like that, not for social status, not because it was good for anything, but only for himself. That boy tied his sense of masculinity to intimidating a woman on the street. A simple disapproving look from an idiot in sportswear was enough to ruin his mood.

Anton parked his bike in the bike basement, walked back outside to walk up the stairs on the outside of the apartment to the second floor. He looked out over the street, felt the cool breeze along his legs, and walked inside.

C Interview Questions & Themes

Three out of the four interviews, took place in Dutch. Therefore, the interview questions are written down in Dutch. For the fourth interview a German translation was made on the spot by me, the researcher. The first part of the interview was meant to let the interviewee disclose their views. For the second part of the interview, a list of themes was given. All these themes should be covered at the end of the interview.

Algemene vragen

Wat is voor jou mannelijkheid en masculiniteit? Geef een definitie
Wijk je daarmee af van de norm in jouw omgeving?

Zie jij jezelf als mannelijk / masculien?
Wat draagt daaraan bij?
Doet het ertoe?

Thema's

- Patriarchale constructen
- Sexualiteit en promiscuïteit
- Vaderschap
- Uiterlijk
- Emotionaliteit
- Performativiteit
- Homohysterie

D Interview Transcripts

To protect the privacy of those involved, the interview transcripts are not incorporated in the public version of this thesis. For questions regarding the interviews, please contact the author directly.

E On the podcast

In the initial setup of this research, my plan was to use parts of the interviews in a podcast, in an attempt to make my research more accessible and valuable to a broader audience. I had planned to produce and publish this podcast in the months after my graduation. However, shortly after my graduation, I became the victim of a traffic accident. Due to the consequences of this accident, my work regarding my graduation project became delayed by several months.

In this period, life moved on for many people and a situation evolved where it was no longer possible for all people involved to give their full consent to the use of their interviews in a podcast. Unfortunately, this means that I am no longer able to produce the podcast as it was intended earlier, and I decided to cancel this part of my project.