

***SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS  
IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION BEHAVIOUR***

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**“I HAVE THE BOWED LEGS OF A FAILED  
FOOTBALLER”: AN INTERPRETATIVE  
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF BULGARIAN  
MEN’S UNDERSTANDINGS OF GENDER,  
AND MASCULINITY IN THE UK<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** *This article used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to examine how individuals living in London and Edinburgh, and originating from Bulgaria, a former meeting point of East and West, understood masculinity and gender. The experience examined was that of being a Bulgarian man in the United Kingdom. The analysis illustrated three themes. They were that Bulgarian men interviewed spoke of doing what they thought was right while adhering to social norms, to conceiving of their bodies as partially an expression of their masculinity, and to the importance that they attached to collective structures. These results indicated some similarities with earlier studies done in the United Kingdom, especially Scotland.*

**Keywords:** masculinity; gender; Bulgaria; phenomenology.

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*Contribution:*

**Peter Pangarov** – Extract of the Master Thesis of the author, Research, Analysis and Results.

**Billy Lee** – Supervisor, Editor, Provider of the information basis of the analysis, preparation of the text for submission.

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## INTRODUCTION

Masculinity, a social construction, is the adherence to a male gender role (Forbes et al., 2001). The associated concept, gender, is distinguished from biological sex, as actions, roles, and expectations that a society deems masculine or feminine, and how these are embodied by men or women (O'Neil, 1981).

Hegemonic masculinity is the dominant form of masculinity upheld by a given society and is particular to a culture and time (Lavant, 1996; Alexander, 2003; De Visser, Smith & McDonnell, 2009). This masculinity is believed to be endorsed by the dominant social group, typically the middle-class, heterosexual, native people of the culture. It is not fixed or essentially characterised by biological features, but changes as the relationship between masculine and feminine changes through sociocultural developments (Alexander, 2003). Masculinity consists of practices through which men and women engage with each other, and these practices constrain how men construe their bodily experience, personality and societal role (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Care by men of their body has been construed, until recently, as a feminine characteristic and thereby socially undesired (Courtenay, 2000). Men's bodies similarly have been construed as simple and straightforward in comparison to women's bodies, the latter construed as complex and requiring care (Farrimond, 2011). Men's self-care of their bodies has been re-interpreted more recently as reflecting an entrepreneurial attitude and thereby re-construed as a masculine quality (Crawshaw, 2007).

Previous qualitative research indicated that hegemonic masculinity in the United States was characterised by the following themes: *No Sissy Stuff* (men should not be feminine), the *Big Wheel* (men should garner respect due to their achievements), the *Sturdy Oak* (men should never display weakness), and *Give 'Em Hell* (men should search for adventure and accept the possibility of violence) (Brannon & Juni, 1984). This masculinity is characterised by stoicism, self-reliance, alexithymia, aggression, dislike or disdain for

women, detachment from family life, neglect of physical and mental health, and loathing towards homosexuality (Sullivan et al, 2015). Men who subscribe to this type of masculinity may experience it as antithetical to help-seeking (Good, Dell & Mintz, 1989). Help-seeking conflicts with traditional masculinity because qualities such as expression of emotion, introspection, intimacy, and vulnerability are excluded as feminine (Brooks, 1998; Levant, Wimer & Williams, 2011). Masculine norms are the product of male socialisation during childhood and adolescence (Levant, 1990). Many boys have been socialised by parents and grandparents from a generation that has culturally endorsed traditional values influenced by the historical events of the war and post war periods (Levant, 1990; Clayton & Humberstone, 2006). Men socialised during the post-war period may be seen as emotionally inexpressive (Levant, 1996). Aspects of hegemonic masculinity such as the engagement in sports and a reduced sense of bodily dissatisfaction may be beneficial as engagement in sports and less awareness of bodily imperfection are correlated with improved mental health (Jeanes & Magee, 2011; Blashill, 2011).

Bulgaria is a culture characterised by collectivism (Davidkov, 2004). Men display a desire to care for their family, romantic partner, and the community. Bulgarian masculinity can be contextualised in reference to the 'nation building' projects that successive Bulgarian governments engaged in from 1878 onwards (Mircheva, 2011). The pre-World War I governments presented the heroes and soldiers of the War of Liberation from the Ottoman Empire as examples of Bulgarian masculinity. Veterans embodied masculine heroism, but had suffered terrible injuries and were often unable to take care of themselves (Goncharova, 2011). Representations of masculinity paradoxically were men who had to be taken care of, rather than men who could take care of others. Representations shifted as governments from 1918 to 1944 emphasised physical education which reflected a nationalist sentiment to strengthen the 'national body,' to promote traditional gender

roles, and to achieve a national rebirth after the traumas of the war (Mircheva, 2011). The socialist era brought forth new representations of masculinity in the form of the partisan fighting against fascism or the worker building towards communism (Stojanova, 2011). The post-socialist period was marked by a transition from a state driven masculinity to one represented in popular culture. The literary figure Bay Ganyo, an arrogant trickster, dressed in roughly made traditional clothes and sporting a big moustache to go with his lack of manners, became a popular and cynical representation of Bulgarians in the turbulent 1990's (Stojanova, 2011).

The way the 'lived body' and its appearance is experienced and understood by particular individual men in the context of their lifeworlds provides an insight into how hegemonic masculinity is sustained and changes over time. Physical well-being, especially a muscular appearance, is a symbol of masculinity in American and European cultures (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This displays a man's ability to work and the attainment of a muscular appearance has become a goal in itself (Beagan & Saunders, 2005; Gill, Henwood & McLean, 2005). Men who display care for their clothes and attire report that their mood is impacted by those decisions (Frith & Gleeson, 2004). Clothes serve as a means by which men can change the way that their bodies are perceived by others, and thereby feel accepted or more comfortable in society (Frith & Gleeson, 2004). Specifically, these relationships can be understood through the concept of 'intercorporeality' as proposed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The concept that the experience of an individual is mediated both by their bodily apperception, and how their body is apprehended by others shows the intertwining of the lived body with the social world (Merleau-Ponty, 2012).

A previous study of masculinity in the United Kingdom by O'Brien, Hunt and Hart (2009) conducted 15 focus groups (59 participants overall) in Western Scotland. The participants ranged from age 15 to 72, were representative of the socio-economic classes from the area, and included heterosexual and

homosexual participants. Participants were asked how their masculinity impacted their health-related behaviours. The study revealed participants knew that masculine activities like drinking to excess were detrimental, but that they continued to do so to express their masculinity. Men who were part of groups where health was a shared value felt less pressure to express their masculinity in ways that were detrimental to their health. As men got older, and had families, they paid more attention to their health. This prompted the men to discuss whether their responsibility to take care of their families, a masculine attribute, was not stronger than engaging in other 'masculine behaviors,' indicating a shift in masculine priorities as they aged. Participants noted bodily imperfections, their belly, or health scares, as providing an impetus to change their behaviour and move away from traditional norms. There was an awareness even among more traditional men that society was moving past an older more dated type of masculinity.

For this study a sample of Bulgarian men were asked about how their understandings of gender and masculinity impacted their experience of being a Bulgarian man in the United Kingdom. The importance of this study is twofold: Research on gender, and masculinity has historically focused on Western individuals. Non-Western studies have emerged in the past 15 years. What remains absent from the existent literature is how individuals living in the borderlands of East and West understand these concepts (Kesküla, 2018). Borderlands are places that have historically straddled the boundaries of the East and West. Southeastern Europe, colloquially known as the Balkans, of which Bulgaria is a part, is a prime example of a region that has been understood historically as both Western and Not-Western (Todorova, 1997). Its inhabitants have been conceived of as Other, and not Other (Neuberger, 2004). The concept of the 'lived body,' one's experience of one's body, is employed as a tool to accomplish and contextualise this enquiry. The participants were Bulgarian men living in the UK and so were living in a culture other than their culture of origin. Second, men are three

times more likely to commit suicide (Office of National Statistics [ONS], 2013), and yet less likely to seek treatment for psychological distress (Galdas, Cheater & Marshall, 2005; Johnson et al., 2012). They are more likely to suffer from substance abuse, homelessness and incarceration (Jones & Pleace, 2010; Sullivan, Camic & Brown, 2015). The seriousness of this challenge for men, and absence of Balkan voices further motivates this study.

## METHOD

### *Phenomenological Design*

The study utilised Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, 1996). IPA is an idiographic methodology designed to enquire into personal lived experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This methodology was selected because it explicitly attends to research reflexivity, given the researcher's background as a Bulgarian man living in the United Kingdom. Phenomenology's acknowledgement that individuals bring their subjectivity to any task in which they seek a degree of objectivity enables the researcher to acknowledge their subjectivity in the enquiry.

The choice of IPA was further motivated by the methodology's debt to Phenomenological Philosophy, specifically Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. Husserl encouraged philosophers to return to 'the things themselves,' (Husserl as cited in Smith et al., 2009). The return is a return to the experiential content of consciousness. Husserl saw individuals as configuring their experience based on pre-existing understanding. The present research sought to understand how participants configured their experience of being a Bulgarian man in the UK with cultural pre-understandings formed from their culture of origin. Merleau-Ponty's emphasis was on how the lived body delimits the possibilities of the human world (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). A human being is thrown into the world with a body that comes to experience itself as permeated by both the concrete and symbolic. Herein, participants of the study are asked to articulate how they make sense of themselves and their bodies in the relatively unfamiliar lifeworld of the host culture.

### *Procedure*

Participants were recruited through flyers in English and Bulgarian, via word of mouth, social networks, and through Bulgarian business and community organisations in Edinburgh and London. A total of five participants were interviewed. Interviews took place either at a booked private room in the university campus or at an alternative private location for participants unable to travel to the university. Participants were provided with a consent form, information sheet, and a demographic questionnaire in either English or Bulgarian.

The interviews ranged from 25 to 50 minutes in length. Interviews were conducted in either English or Bulgarian depending on the preference of the participant. A semi-structured interview schedule was devised based on previous literature and the aims of the study. The schedule consisted of three broad domains: (1) Hegemonic Masculinity; (2) Managing Masculine Appearance; (3) Individualised Masculinities. The questions on Hegemonic Masculinity sought to explore the participants' understandings of the social norms of masculinity in the United Kingdom and in Bulgaria, and how those norms impacted their lived experience. The section on Managing Masculine Appearance asked the participants how their choices of food, drink (including alcohol), clothing, perceptions about their body, and hobbies were impacted by their understanding of being a man. The questions on Individualised Masculinity enquired into the participants' understandings of how their masculinity was present (if at all) in relationships, family life, help-seeking, understanding of gender roles, and anything about their masculinity that they thought was individual or unique.

### *Participants*

Participants ranged in age from 23 to 45. Participants were all born in the Republic of Bulgaria.

### *Ethics*

The study was approved by the relevant university Research Ethics Review Panel. Data was anonymised and stored in line with the university guidelines.

**Reflexivity**

The first author is a Bulgarian man living in the United Kingdom. The first author was aware that they would bring preconceptions, including that what initially motivated the study was a desire to learn for themselves what it meant to be a Bulgarian man. To address the first authors' preconceptions, the author kept a reflective journal, where they sought to bracket off their own experiences from those of participants. This process enabled the first author to calibrate experiences around each of the interviews, and moderate any strong personal influences from the author. The first author met with the second author throughout the interviews and analysis. This enhanced bracketing was to allow the participants' own understandings to appear in their own light.

**Analysis**

The approach to the analysis followed guidelines from Smith et al. (2009). The convention of left and right-hand margin coding, after reading and re-reading the transcript, was applied. Each interview transcript was treated as a case study and individual themes were derived before moving onto the next case. After all the transcripts had been analysed, and after allowing idiosyncrasies and differences between cases to emerge, the overarching themes across participants were derived.

**Translation**

Of the five interviews conducted, four were in Bulgarian and one in English. The four interviews that were in Bulgarian were transcribed, translated, and then analysed. The researcher decided to translate the interviews by hand with the aid of a bilingual dictionary where necessary rather than relying on online translation software. Bulgarian can be difficult to translate because of how the use of suffixes to words such as 'ra,' or 'я', can change the context of a word, and alter that word's meaning. The tone used to convey a word can slightly but noticeably change its meaning. Here the translator had to refer back to the recording when translating the text. Certain phrases have a specific cultural connotation that non-native speakers are not necessarily aware of, for instance, the phrase, 'Едно Време', can be translated as 'once' or 'before', but whose context when used in everyday Bulgarian refers to life under socialism. The researcher kept a diary when translating, and referred back to that diary when uncertain about a specific passage or its meaning during the analysis.

**RESULTS**

The overarching themes across participant interviews can be found in Table 1. There are three main themes: Walking the Tightrope, The Masculine Body and the Collective.

**TABLE 1**  
THEME TABLE: BULGARIAN MASCULINITY<sup>2</sup>

<b><u>Walking the Tightrope</u></b>	<b><u>The Masculine Body</u></b>	<b><u>The Collective</u></b>
<i>Uncovering the Man in Me</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>Social Comparison</i>
<i>Respect Myself</i>	<i>Social Conceptions of Body</i>	<i>Group Belonging</i>
<i>Old versus Modern</i>	<i>Being Comfortable in your Own Skin</i>	<i>Support</i>
<i>Whatever you do, don't be incompetent</i>		<i>Man of the House</i>
<i>Social Pressure</i>		

<sup>2</sup> Themes in bold and underline. Sub-themes in italics.

### ***Walking the Tightrope***

Walking the Tightrope captures two desires that many participants described: To be who they wanted to be and to be seen as operating within certain social norms.

### ***Uncovering the Man in Me***

The participants spoke of uncovering the man within themselves. They spoke of behaving in a manner that reflected who they were, wanted to be, and the values that they ascribed meaning.

Sasho: This is me. I am a person who is taking the steps to become a man because since I've been here, I've been taking care of myself - that's never been like that before. I'm still at an early stage of uncovering the man in me. I think for now I'm doing well. I'm covering everything. I'm making the money to not stay hungry or on the streets. I get what I can for the person who is with me. [Pauses]. I feel good. That helps me a lot emotionally. That I'm taking care of myself. That I'm building my own life. It gives me a huge, huge emotional boost and before, I emotionally I wasn't doing too well {in Bulgaria}. But from when I'm here {in the United Kingdom} there's a huge difference.

Sasho spoke of uncovering the man inside of him. In taking the journey towards becoming a man, which he equated with taking care of himself and his partner financially, he gained an emotional well-being that previously was absent. Sasho spoke definitively in stating, 'This is me.' He was taking a journey towards manhood but was doing so in a way that he remained loyal to who he thought he was even as he uncovered things about himself that he may previously not have known. The move from Bulgaria to the United Kingdom was not just a physical journey, but also a psychological one.

### ***Respect Myself***

Participants often returned to how their experience of masculinity was shaped by their sense of self-respect.

Hristo: To be a man every person respects themselves. Everyone, everyone, person respects themselves.

Hristo spoke about respect and self-respect. For Hristo, a man has to respect themselves. This excerpt illustrates his conviction that the essential part of masculine experience is self-respect. For Hristo, you cannot be a man without it. He describes the importance of respect and self-respect in his upbringing.

Hristo: I think people need to be respected irrespective of. [Pause]. Respect is really important. I'm happy, I have the type of parents who disciplined me in that way.

His understanding of being a man is a discipline based on developmental experiences, where not only was he taught to be respectful to others, but he also internalised how he had to behave towards himself.

### ***Old versus Modern***

Participants spoke of the modern, the present, and old, and how the social representation of masculinity has changed, and the impact that had on them.

Sasho: They're a little different based on those before say 15-20 years ago. I, in principle, maybe keep to the older ideal because it feels more logical to me. So according to it, the Bulgarian standard of a man is you have, the typical handyman as they say in England. To understand everything. To fix your own car. To fix [pause] um maybe for example something in your apartment. To get by on your own, and not to rely on another person who might understand more than you do to get what needs to be done, done. And also in addition to those obligations to have a stable job that lets you help your family, and eventually to support your family with that salary.

Sasho does not say why 'the older ideal' is more logical, but that it feels that way. The type of masculinity that makes sense to

him is that of a self-sufficient man that can take care of themselves and their family. He speaks of an individual responsibility 'not to rely on another.' This traditional standard of Bulgarian masculinity is contrasted with the modern:

Sasho: Ohhh.. The new style in Bulgaria to be a modern man and to be thought of as a man, uhh, you have act out lot of complexes even if you don't have them you have to pretend you do to be a part of modern Bulgarian society. Obviously, you have to be interested in expensive cars. In clubs. To repeatedly throw stacks at the club. It's something I'm not down with, you know. That's one of the main reasons that lead me to come here {the United Kingdom}. It's here too, you know, that standard, but it's not as prevalent and not as many people adhere to, to that standard. That appeals to me and makes me feel better here than in Bulgaria.

The 'Ohhh,' sets the tone for the whole extract. It displays Sasho's feelings about the modern standard of masculinity before he even verbalises it. The modern Bulgarian man is a man who is very individualistic, indulgent, and inauthentic. Sasho rejects that new identity. He emphasises that his experience of this type of masculinity is one of the reasons he left Bulgaria. It is a type of masculinity that he found alienating.

### *Whatever you do, don't be incompetent*

Vasil: I think based on, err, the circle of friends that I have so the, the, circle I have that are from, from, Western society tend to be quite open and seek feedback, while I think in Bulgarian culture I think it's a bit you don't want to be seen as incompetent.

Vasil captured a recurring motif, the worry about how you will be seen, and whether others will think you are incompetent or not. Participants worried, or were concerned, about being seen as incompetent and that incompetence would mean that they were seen as a lesser man.

Hristo: No. Honestly, it's not always comfortable. I try to figure it out myself and not ask. That's something, something, that that they've told me in school here in Scotland the more that you ask raise questions the better, for help is something that I don't like to ask. To beg. If we're talking about help when you study and you need help then it's very hard for me to ask for help. I feel uncomfortable. I am not sure how it'll be seen. Maybe I don't know. In other cases, I don't have a problem. At work and so on.

Hristo's answer indicates his discomfort and fear around admitting that he needed help. He describes asking for help as 'to beg.' This language reveals a link between his understanding of asking for help and shame, in his mind becoming a beggar. This sense of shame around asking others, and worrying about how they will see him is localised to his studies. This shame is significant because at his work, he is part of a team of individuals that work together, and each person needs to be on the same page, but in his studies, he is by himself and carries that tension alone. In this extract, Hristo spoke initially about one thing, and then switched to something else. This darting way of speaking embodies the uncertainty of how Hristo worries about how he will be seen, as when he says "maybe I don't know".

### *Social Pressure*

The need to conform to social pressure was reflected by some of the participants. This played a prominent role in what it meant to be a man, and how a man ought to act in society.

Konstantine: It is for the man to keep their word, err, to respect his family, to respect his friends, to respect, err, every single individual, to conform with expectations, the norms that are established in the environment, to keep those.

Konstantine highlights traditional qualities associated with masculinity. He combines those with a need to conform to norms and expectations. Masculinity and his sense of



what it means to be a man is mediated by social pressure and the environment around him.

Vasil: That's where I think as a man society puts these impossible kind of expectations on your shoulders when you, err, even when you, err, you start when you're 10,12 years old, men are trained to support a family right?

For Vasil, there is an expectation from society that is unattainable, boys are trained or told to meet these standards, and men strive for things that they may deem impossible.

### ***The Masculine Body***

Participants spoke of how beliefs about their body impacted their understanding of masculinity.

#### *Health*

Participants spoke of how their bodies indicated health or its absence.

Konstantine: Err. I can't say. I'm trying to be active but I don't have pretences about my body. Or that I've got to be muscly something like that. Sport is more of a necessity for the upkeep of a certain, err, healthy condition of the body, err, than showing masculinity.

Konstantine speaks of the importance of physical activity for health, which for him is more important than showing masculinity. His bodily sense-making is tied into sports and utility, rather than pretences and appearances.

Sasho: Well, [laughs] because I've never had a belly before [laughs] and for a year or two I've had a belly since I started living a more stationary type of life. I got a license. So on. I stopped moving. Before I engaged in a lot of sports. 12 years I was an active sportsman, ping-pong player, and just always moving. I was involved with that professionally. I stopped all of a sudden. I started driving more instead of cycling or running. And slowly, slowly my belly appeared under my t-shirt and I dislike my belly, but everything is temporary.

Sasho speaks of how his body reflects his current lack of health. He identified as a sportsman, and now his body reveals to him his different, stationary existence.. The belly is the visible symptom of how he "stopped all of a sudden" and can no longer claim the identity of a sportsman.

### ***Social Conceptions of Body***

In his interview, Vasil touches on his experiences of how others perceive him, and how their impression of his body shapes their initial views of him.

Vasil: That's the first thing they see not your mind your body right. They make judgements based on that. That expectation you want to, that you want to put forward in the beginning is based on your body, so yeah.

Others see and make judgements about him as an individual based on his body, and how he presents it. He says "they make judgements based on that". The perception he attributes to "they" goes beyond how he is perceived as a man, but who he is overall.

### ***Being Comfortable in Your Own Skin***

Hristo: I am happy I was born the way I am. I wouldn't change that.

Hristo is comfortable in his own skin. He says 'I am happy' reinforcing his sense of security in the body he was born with.

Dimitar: What don't I like? [Pause]. I rarely, think, because it's hard to change when I was younger. I didn't like my ears because they're way too big [Laughs]. [Pause]. I have the bowed legs of a failed footballer [Laugh].

Dimitar's comfort with his body is displayed through self-deprecation and humour. He indicates how he felt his ears were too big, but with age has found it funny instead of problematical. The comment about his legs reflects the importance sport held for him when he was younger, and a humorous sense of disappointment that he never made it as a footballer.

### *The Collective*

Participants saw themselves as being part of a collective and many ascribed to practices and customs that defined their belonging to something else.

### *Social Comparison*

Asked if there was anything atypical they did that made them feel like a man, responses were indicative of being part of a collective.

Dimitar: I'd be very surprised if there's something I do that other men don't do.

Sasho: A strange question. Uh. I don't know if I have an exact answer because I've never thought of myself as something more than other men or something less because every masculine individual has pros and cons. Uh. I think I'm more okay than some men because I don't use alcohol as much. I have qualities that make me more okay, but others have qualities that make them more of a man than me in a concrete situation. Overall, I think according to me, statistically, I'm a standard young man who's finding themselves and their profession.

Sasho has never thought of himself as more or less than other men. Even when he spoke of characteristics he thought were positive, he used the neutral phrase, 'more okay.' His sense of masculinity is rooted securely in being just one man amongst other men..

### *Group Belonging*

Interactions with others sustained how some participants experienced themselves as men. This was especially true for romantic relationships and family.

Sasho: Lately when I come home and it's new for me but at home there's an interaction from the female gender which most of the time when I come home, she's home and the way she greets me makes me feel like a man and then I spend most of my spare time with her that really helps me.

Sasho's relationship with a woman and the home atmosphere are a part of what gives him a sense of his masculinity. This provides him with emotional well-being. Konstatine feels like a man when he is with his son:.

Konstantine: Something that makes me feel like a man in my spare time is to do things with my son. For example, err, all the spare time that I have I try to spend with him. Err. To go somewhere. Maybe us two. To teach him to ride a bike. To go play sports in the park. To take him to football or another sport. Err.

These interactions with his son affirm his role as a father. This masculinity derives from teaching sporting activities and trying to spend quality time being a father to his son.

### *Support*

When participants sought help, they did so from their family or close friends. Konstatine articulates the social benefits of help-seeking:

Konstantine: Always. Whenever when I can get something and I can get help from someone who knows it or is tied to that problem. Because it's more personal and you can learn more than spending time doing a lot of research and getting to the same outcome. I've always tried to get help from a friend or someone close. Since they've gone through or met that type of problem.

Konstantine is a man who is very open to help-seeking, though he sought help within the confines of those that he knew, and whose opinion he valued. He emphasises getting help with a personal touch, and trying to learn something from an individual that he already knew. Understanding that they have experienced the same type of problem provides him with a valued sense of unity and collective spirit.

### *Man of the House*

On the matter of gender roles around work, the participants experiences are reflected by the theme we have called the Man of the

House. The participants did not reject the notion of “women’s work”, but re-framed their household contributions as universal work, as simply necessary to daily living.

**Dimitar:** I worked with people who had a farm, horses, etc. Their general attitudes in the family were the man works hard. They go to the field. They dig. They drive the tractor. Deal with the horses. The woman stays at home. She has to cook. [Audio Unclear] the cheese, milk the cows. They have certain roles regarding their genders that need to be done.

Dimitar touched on the need for gender roles in the agricultural environment in which he worked where a division of labour between the genders was upheld: the man of the house did the physical and outdoor labour, the woman ‘stays’ indoors and ‘has’ to cook. Later in the interview he would contrast these with his current experiences in the city where gendered roles are not upheld.

**Sasho:** Okay as an example. I don’t think I do women’s work, because that type of work needs to be done. Someone has to do it, that. The woman more of the time or her life does it. Or the opposite it could happen to any woman that she’d need to kneel and repair her car on the way or to try, or the opposite for me clean the house or to wash the dishes. For me work is to be done. Not be broken into men’s and women’s work. Here, since I’ve been here in the United Kingdom, I’ve seen a lot of women in work clothes, at the construction sites, which in addition corresponds to my views that work is there to be done irrespective of whether you are a man or a woman.

Sasho clarifies how ‘work is work’ and ‘work is to be done’ whether by a man or a woman. The community needs to pull together. He was inspired by seeing women at work at a construction site in the UK, and that experience continued to inform his understanding of the collectivistic ideal, after leaving Bulgaria.

## DISCUSSION

### *Context*

Based on the interviews, it appears that masculinity in Bulgaria is in transformation, captured by the sub-theme ‘Old and Modern.’ Participants living abroad, adhered to the ‘Old Style’, and based their sense of masculinity on adhering to a role within society, being part of the group, and not individuating themselves more than is permissible. Interestingly, none of the participants embodied the characteristics that Sasho ascribed to the ‘Modern’ style. This ‘Modern’ style may be less prevalent than the ‘Old,’ or less so than Sasho believed. Drawing from Merleau-Ponty: “The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 407) echoes participants’ experiences of their body-world as inseparably intertwined. Vasil’s reflection that others apprehended his body before his mind echoes Merleau-Ponty’s concept of intercorporeality (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). Their bodily wellbeing and condition frames and limits their experience of the world, as the culture and lifeworld also frames and limits the possibilities of their experience..

Participants affirmed collectivism at the heart of the life in Bulgaria they had left (Davidkov, 2004). They articulated an affection and sense of duty of care for their family, partners, and community. They rejected notions that men ought to maintain a distance from family life or withhold emotions. These understandings are at odds with ‘No Sissy Stuff,’ the traditional norm that engagement in family life is feminising (Levant, 1996). In their interviews, Hristo and Konstantine particularly, indicated that men should give respect to others, and receive it from them in exchange. Their interviews indicated a sense of feeling duty-bound to do so. This contrasts with ‘the Big Wheel’, that men should garner respect for themselves through achievements. Participants affirmed the importance of self-reliance, while acknowledging their weaknesses. Some of the participants indicated that being overly self-reliant or stoic without being able to ask for help was not conducive to wellbeing. They were, on the whole, more comfortable seeking

help from support structures relative to what would have been expected had they operated within more traditional norms (Good et al., 1989). They did not express a tendency for risk taking, or violence, which may characterise more traditional hegemonic masculinities..

An emphasis on health and its manifestation through the body was integral to the participants' accounts of masculinities. In contrast with prior studies in the United Kingdom, participants did not speak of bodily care as feminising (O'Brien et al., 2009). In their own way, each participant stressed the necessity of bodily care to assist good functioning in daily life (O'Brien et al., 2009; Courtenay, 2000; Farrimond, 2011). These responses are comparable to an extent with those of participants from an earlier study of Scottish masculinity, who prioritised health especially as they became older and had families. (O'Brien, Hunt & Hart, 2009). One difference is the Bulgarian participants in this study were younger and valued their physical health from the outset. However, this may be due in part to their being émigrés and thus more vigilant in general, compared with the study of the Scots who were indigenous.

### **Limitations**

The researcher was a Bulgarian man living in the United Kingdom and brought their own foreunderstandings and potential biases to the analysis. This researcher also acted as translator for four interviews that were conducted in Bulgarian. The act of translation can be a form of interpretation. This doubly necessitated the use of close word for word translation deviating only when absolutely necessary (colloquial phrases or those whose use would be different for a native speaker instead of an outsider).

Participants had all completed, or were in the process of completing at least a portion of their post-secondary education, and, as such, were from an educated minority (National Statistical Institute, 2011). None were from any of the ethnic minority groups that comprise a seventh of the Bulgarian population. Bulgaria is a multi-ethnic country, comprised predominantly of three ethnic groups, Bul-

garians, Turks, and Roma. Possible identities include "Bulgarian and Turkish", "Bulgarian Turk", or "Turk living in Bulgaria" to give just a few examples. The participants all identified themselves as Bulgarians.

The definitions of gender and masculinity employed by the researchers were gender-normative. This choice was reflective of a broader gender-normative literature base on masculinity within the United Kingdom and Bulgaria. The definitions, therefore, are not reflective of work in gender studies that partition gender into gender identity, gender expression, and sex assigned at birth. Gender identity is an individuals' experience of their gender as male, female or other (transgender, bigender, genderqueer, gender fluid, etc.) (Bocking, 1998). Gender expression is how an individual chooses to express their gender, i.e., external representation of their gender (Ruble, Martin & Berenbaum, 2006). Sex assigned at birth, is the sex an individual is assigned at birth (male, female, intersex), i.e. the sex an individual is assigned by another individual vs themselves (Grumbach, Hughes & Conte, 2003). The analysis does not capture the nuances between gender identity, expression and sex assigned at birth, and did not ask how the Bulgarian men made sense of these nuances.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The men articulated a sense of masculinity mediated by their bodies, and their understandings of collectivism. This was sometimes a balancing act between what they wanted, and what they thought acceptable in the host culture. This study suggests inroads for further investigations of Bulgarian masculinity, including indigenous scale construction and cross-cultural comparisons. Further work on the indigenous psychology of this region is required prior to cross-cultural work to avoid the potential fallacies of ethnocentrism. A follow-up study to validate some of the constructs deployed in the interview schedule could be a step to developing a Bulgarian masculinity scale as part of promoting men's mental health.

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