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## Men at Peace: A creative ethnography

Henriette Blecher  
*SAE University College*

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*Men at Peace*

Dissertation

Henriette Blecher

SAE MCI

00024

## Abstract

Men at Peace is a creative ethnography aiming to facilitate a functional bridge between polarising gender assumptions around communication and to communicate this bridge using poetry.

Using an ethnographic approach underpinned by feminist gender theories, this project is a study of masculinities in contemporary Australian society. Stories of men's experiences were gathered and then transformed into randomised five-lined cut up poems to reveal and understand social, emotional, spiritual, cultural, relational, and material realities of men. The stories men told during this ethnography supported the heteronormative understanding of masculinities that reinforced the narrative that "real men" should not express a wide spectrum of emotions. The data showed that men were both aware of their own gender conditioning and felt limited by it. Most importantly, the data also showed men harboured a strong desire to usurp these limiting gender norms and talk openly about their feelings.

In response to this conflicting desire, ethnographic findings were presented through ethnographic poetry. Ethnographic poetry is poetry used to express research findings and the experiences of the researcher in the field. With the opportunity for data presentation and commentary of collective voices from the field, poetic expression offers possibilities for creative views of problem solving, entertainment, social commentary, gender discussion, storytelling, subjective interpretation, and the capacity to see creative expression as an alternative way of representing social issues. Ideally, this will inspire others to feel safe to share their stories pertaining to gendered experiences and inspire the facilitation of creative expression for individuals or groups of people. This discussion has an impact on future attitudes toward gender norms and ideas of healthy masculinity.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### ***Men at Peace: A Creative Ethnography***

Please view ethnographic poetry through the links below:

Instagram: @menatpeace

Link to appendices:

[Redacted]

Men at Peace is an experiment in the practice and theorisation of creative ethnographies through the research focus of masculinity. A creative ethnography is an ethnography with a creative outcome or a creative way of expressing research findings from the field. There are some broadly accepted cultural norms surrounding gender binaries. One of these generally accepted norms is that men struggle with the healthy expression of a broad range of emotions. Cultural norms have impacted the ability of

men to express emotions and that this has had a detrimental effect on their well being. Talking and expressing creatively can help develop emotional intelligence and to create deeper understanding around mental health. Healing interactions through talking can happen creatively through avenues such as storytelling, writing, and poetry. Psychological frontiers acknowledge creative expression as a therapeutic way of approaching mental health. Creative writing; particularly poetry, is a way for researchers or ethnographers to express their complex and multi-layered experiences in the field.

### **Research Question:**

How can poetry be used as an ethnographic practice and research method to address issues of mental health and healing in relation to the difficulties men have in the healthy expression of a broad range of emotions?

Currently, through media and popular culture, we can see a surge of men asking ‘how can we change the definitions of manhood?’ (Katz, 2015). There are many men working to debunk central myths and social maps of western masculinity and how these myths and maps affect the emotional quotient of society (Horsburgh, 2014). Conversations around stepping out of the ‘man box’ are slowly becoming familiar in social discourse. The term ‘man box’ in itself is a colloquial term that is becoming part of the discourse around gender awareness. The ‘man box’ is a set of often destructive and prescribed behaviours, emotions and character traits associated with “being a man” (Pozzobon, 2011).

Men working in initiatives aligned with improving male mental health often called “Men’s Work”, are talking about how they have, after introspection and self-awareness around gender theory and their gender conditioning, understood what gender performance was and how this performative sense of survival blocked them from true self-expression (Spence, 2015). It is natural, appropriate, and accessible for men to be representative in

“Men’s Work” but *Men at Peace*, an ethnographic inquiry into masculinity by a female researcher, from a feminist perspective will represent and contribute great value in communicating gendered points of view unavailable to male researchers. When considering the harmful systemic origins of male mental health from a feminist perspective, our human psychological dysfunctions become less about gender binaries at the core and become more about gender binaries at the symbolic and operational level. If silence from victim, perpetrator, and bystander are a form of consent and complicity in gender violence against women (Katz, 2015), does that attitude of harmful complicity work similarly for systemic social and patriarchal violence against men, regardless of their privileges?

*Men at Peace* is the result of an ethnography focussed on Australian masculinities and male mental health. The digital platform consists of a website and an Instagram account. These channels operate to promote and optimise discussion opportunities through observation and engagement with men’s voices represented through poetry and poetry from the research field or ‘ethnographic poetry’. There are choices for engagement within this platform. Viewers can choose to read the content and let the function of the poetry enlighten an exploration of the ethnography. Viewers can access the instagram account which has verbatim quotes from the interviews and pictures of the cut and paste poetry. If a male reader would like to interact or engage with the project more deeply, there is an ability to book an interview or make discussion opportunities available. The intent for these layers of engagement is to provide accessibility for people to interrogate gender and question the various contexts that influence gender norms and masculinity. Ethnographic poetry as a creative aspect of this work allows the experience of research data to reach numerous facets of the viewer’s inner world. Poetry as an intimate bridge of meaning-making allows observations from the field to be open to further interpretation. Poetry as creative inference suggests to readers that there are creative ways to explore authentic

expressions of self and gender; that creative explorations of gender may invite more accessibility into an internal inquiry about socialised aspects of the self.

The main function of the Men at Peace website is to showcase ethnographic poetry from the researcher's and the research subject's perspective. As a writer, poet, body work therapist, and group work facilitator; someone who is deeply invested in the potential of the written word and its embodied resonance, creatively presenting the ethnographic research data from Men at Peace through poetry appealed to my scope. The Men at Peace website is available to anyone who is interested in reading poetry or gender research through a creative lens. The website includes access to this dissertation, and the opportunity for further discussion, conversation, interview, and collaboration.

Ethnographic poetry is a relatively new academic avenue. Many researchers have found poetic expression a worthy and effective way of communicating their data and experiences from the field. The poetry is relevant specifically to my explorations in gender through this ethnographic interview process, and the two associated case studies; choir singing through a QLD music festival research opportunity, and dancing; through 'Manspoitation', an experimental dance project commenting on gender and dance. Non-linear and creative ways of expressing commentary on masculinity appealed to a more rhizomatic attitude toward gender (Grosz, 1993). Poetry in its potency and ambiguity suits an interpretative exploration of gender. Literary work usually centres on more cerebral, psychological, or individualistic points of view. Through ethnographic poems, the trained observer or researcher is in the world or field, feeling and engaging as a part of it and not apart from it, often trying to relate across human differences (Weeber, 2020). Ethnographic poetry possesses an unusually deep engagement with the world and its human and non-human inhabitants in all of their diversity. The ethnographer is usually immersed in a particular field of interest or research which creates a kind of inextricable experience for the poet and reader. The immersion is translated through the poetic work.

This dissertation expresses how *Men at Peace* is a creative ethnography inspired by the principles and potentiality that the wider creative industries offer. It shows how the creative industries can offer creative avenues for masculinities focussed storytelling avenues.

In the literature review, theoretical paradigms are explored and explained, illustrating how this ethnography was positioned and then infer its resulting developments. In the methodology, ethnography, and reflective creative ethnography is explained and outlined in relation to *Men at Peace* and gender research. In chapter 4 'Ethnographic Poetry, Voices from the Field', ethnographic poetry is explored and discussed in a deeper way, associating the function of ethnographic poetry with the development of *Men at Peace* and how ethnographic poetry can enhance research and vice versa. Chapter 5 'Reflections From The Field' is a more personal reflection on the research process. While *Men at Peace* was not an autoethnography, there were deep reflective processes around gender inference, especially being a female researching and commenting on masculinity. The final chapter 'Into The Future', is a conclusion, remarking on how the research experience has informed potential professional opportunity and allowed a deeper understanding or framework for my existing professional endeavours and projects.

## Literature Review

### ***Men at Peace: An Ethnography of masculinities from a feminist Perspective***

*“Then feminism came along. It was absolutely necessary and there was no negotiation. Men went along with it because they had to. It didn’t mean it changed your view of women. It meant you kept your mouth shut (Dalton, 2018).”*

A feminist post-structural understanding of gender is considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones. In her book *Imaginary Bodies*, Moira Gatens states that 'the human body is not [...] external to culture or part of an unchanging nature. The human body is always lived in culture, understandings of its workings are themselves cultural productions, and the values and assumptions of culture inevitably find their way into our theorizations' (Gatens, 1996, p. 31). The term is also used more broadly to denote a range of identities that do not correspond to established ideas of male and female, because gender and ideas around gender are subject to changes in cultural understandings of the body as time and events change and influence. This definition sees that the behaviours associated with gender pronouns are socially constructed through sets of beliefs, statements, actions, and words known as discourses that are specific to a community, culture, or society (Pini, 2011). Therefore, “traditional understandings around “masculinity” and “femininity” can be seen as enduring characteristics, encompassing traits, appearances, interests, and behaviours that have traditionally been considered more typical of men or women collectively in their culture (Williams, et al, 2019). This also implies that if gender can be

constructed, it can also be deconstructed. The idea or concept of the body is always changing because culture is always changing (Gatens, 1996).

Judith Butler proposes that gender is in no way natural or stable, but rather is constructed by a series of repeated gestures understood as performative acts (Butler, 1990), in the sense that the essence or identity are sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. The gendered body as performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. Words, actions, and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purpose of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality. (Butler, 1990). Gender is typically interpreted as derived from the body. Biological or anatomical sex is seen as pre-dating culture as an eternal and relatively unchangeable male / female binary. In Butler's and Taylor's analysis, the body is also a gendered performance which is socially constituted as the essence of gender, and then potentially all the more powerful for gender interpretations and realities outside culture (Taylor, 2012). Ontologies of gender are created by social regimes to normalise and limit gender performance or expression in order to benefit the appearance of heterosexuality and gender polarity as a natural state of being (Taylor, 2012) and therefore, 'historically materialising through various corporeal styles that are nothing other than those punitively regulated cultural fabrications embodied or deflected under duress' (Butler, 1990, p. 140), forming another faction of social oppression through gender. These investigations on gender discourse – the ways in which we describe masculinity and femininity and the repetitive bodily enactments are, in essence, an illusion. Further from the binaries and performative aspects of gender, we can inquire into the more rhizomatic and multiplicitous approach to gender as explored by Elizabeth Grosz in her paper on Gilles Deleuze's attitudes to feminism and becoming. 'In conceptualising a difference... the processes of becoming, and the notion of multiplicity, a becoming beyond the logic, constraints and confines of being, and a multiplicity beyond the merely doubling or multi centering of proliferating subject' (Grosz, 1993, p 171). This approach

to gender allows a less binary need to identify and mimics the ambiguous and interpretive nature of poetry.

When exploring masculinities and associated social politics, it is pertinent to understand the heterosexual matrix and heteronormativity. There is a common perception of heterosexuality/homosexuality as being mutually exclusive. Historically, homosexuality is culturally, socially, religiously designated as 'unnatural' or deviant. This naturally invites a binary opposition, creating heterosexuality as 'normal' and therefore 'natural', perpetuating discourses of normativity; natural/unnatural, normal/abnormal binary logic (Taylor, 2012). When the heterosexual matrix is structurally or socially institutionalised, it is called 'heteronormativity'. "Heteronormativity, often created and perpetuated by institutions, makes heterosexuality not only coherent but also privileged" (Berland and Warner, 1998).

This ethnography and related digital storytelling archive *Men at Peace* has been developed through a feminist, post-structural understanding of gender as a framework to understand and communicate masculinities. This understanding and theoretical perspective of gender is located in an assumed heteronormative society. An awareness of the influence of gender construction and gender performance allowed navigation of data and project design by understanding the nuanced differences between spontaneous expressions of individuality and expressions of individuality influenced and conflated by heteronormative gender norms through the concept of gender inference. In gender research, awareness and understanding of gender inference help the researcher's judgement of whether gender is overtly operating through conversational anecdotes in fieldwork. Assumptions of gender inference are often based on general cultural common-sense/ lived experience or on specialised knowledge such as knowledge in gender theory (Wengraf, 2001).

While terms 'feminazi' and 'toxic masculinity' are being commonly misused in popular collective colloquialism, it can be seen that gender stereotypes and their social, cultural, and religious origins have been and continue to be grossly misunderstood. With confusion around the historically evolving definitions of 'feminism', feminist theory and collective discourse around feminist attitudes and agenda are in conflict. The misunderstood focus on harmful, unbalanced, gender-exclusive, or "man-hating" feminism distracts an understanding of feminist theory from the foundational aim of gender equality. This equality-focussed feminism assists the dismantling of dominant patriarchal systemic dysfunction. When gender-exclusive feminism is represented as a collective feminist thought paradigm, there is an emphasis on female-only issues and therefore, the further polarisation and misunderstanding of gender conditioning. The importance of feminism as an equalising paradigm of philosophy or action is paramount to choosing an inquiry of masculinities from a post-structuralist feminist viewpoint. Though feminist theory and pedagogy can be seen as being constantly at a crossroads with the ever-changing social and global perspectives on gender, present-day feminist pedagogy's attitude is intended as emancipatory to all genders in the plight of equality for basic human rights; the opportunity for all in attaining optimal wellbeing (Gur-Ze'ev, 2005). The post-structuralist foundation of researching masculinities for *Men at Peace* is a humanitarian and humanist view of feminism with the intention to understand, discuss, and dismantle social pressures that are negatively influencing men. The feminist underpinning of this research looks toward using critical theory for grounded action toward social and political change (Gur-Ze'ev, 2005). Therefore, the feminist purpose of socially and politically equalising gender does not discriminate between 'male' or 'female' issues if all genders are cohabitating and coexisting co-dependently and interdependently within a society that is still dominated by patriarchal systems.

One example of diverse gender representation advocating for a gender-specific cause would be combatting violence against women. Violence against women is historically a feminist issue represented by female voices. Violence against women represents power

imbalances within gender inequality that perpetuate harm between victims, perpetrators, and collaterally within communities and societies. There are some current attitudes in America and Australia showing the demand for more men to take an active role in dismantling systems, languages, and power structures that enable the perpetuation of violence against women (Katz, 2015). This call to action shows a gender underrepresentation for an issue that, in the majority, affects women. There is growing awareness of intergenerational and collective repercussions of violence against women regardless of the specific gender experiencing the initial and direct harm. When one interrogates their own feminism, they must ask if their expectations of feminist discourses represent social problem-solving and equality for all genders. Even though men have been directly associated with unhealthy patriarchy, the questioning or interrogation of feminism as advocating for equal human rights is pertinent to all genders and should also address systemic issues breeding social and environmental factors that contribute to negative mental health for all across the gender spectrum. The psychological implications that are insidiously imbued in the shadow of gender privilege are addressed in the next chapter. These psychological implications for men are bred by the same inequalities that have systematically upheld the oppression of women. This is why women or feminist ideologies can and should work within the field of masculinities research. Similar to men representing a feminist stance within “women’s” issues or movements, women can represent a feminist voice within “men’s” issues.

A feminist approach in research rapport intends to be created through mutual sharing, minimal power hierarchies, and a feeling of genuine trust between interviewer and interviewee (Thwaites, 2017). Research shows that throughout life, women are more likely to be chosen as confidants than men—by both men and women (Josselson, 2013). This ideal equalising and non-hierarchical structure urges a sophisticated acknowledgment of self in life and in the research field inclusive of understanding gender-related research advantages. Self reflexivity is an important aspect of this process. Self-reflexivity involves an attempt to recognize your own assumptions or

preconceived ideas about the person or narratives that you are about to encounter (Josselson, 2013). Using interview material to learn more about discursive productions and performances (Wengraf, 2001) is the overarching aim of an ethnography but when researching the methodologically elusive such as the emotional experience of gender performance in masculinities, the researcher must tread carefully in the research field (Archer & Erlich-Erfer, 1991). “There is a terrible temptation just to analyse the words. It would be a great mistake to do so” (Wengraf, 2001 p. 47). The experience of ethnographic research means shifting between *looking at* and collecting data to *being in* and engaging in ways of knowing about the worlds and actions of other people (Pink, 2011). Observing rapport or the ‘worlds and actions of other people’ in any research field has the potential to be exploitative. The potentiality for conflict between the widely accepted feminist research aim of equitable power in interviews and exploiting vulnerable internal dialogue in subjects enhances the self-reflexivity allowing for cared-for and empowered research subjects. (Thwaites, 2017).

As addressed in the Methodology section of this dissertation, an ethnographer must have an awareness and self-consciousness of the influences, affects, and effects of their gender or assumed gender when researching a gender-specific subject such as masculinities. Understanding the social process of gendering that occurs for male research subjects, as a female researcher, I was aware of being sensitive to my own gendering and how it impacts the field and the subjects in the field (Pini, 2011). The gendered researcher and gendered research is a political domain that is explored further in the ‘methodology’ section of this document. When masculine identities are seen as being challenged and there is a sense of anxiety about losing power associated with those identities, hegemonic masculinities are likely to become more visible (Pini, 2011). Through this awareness of gender performativity and the interviewing process; focussing on interpersonal concepts and life events, there is a greater awareness that inspiration for internal reflection may cause anxiety about losing power in a comfortable gender role. If this occurs either explicitly or implicitly, there is a responsibility for ethnographers to understand the psychological implications involved in the ideal of

“shifting paradigms” in gender consciousness. In this sense, *Men at Peace*, an ethnography of masculinities undertaken by a female subject is an active symbol: A woman in a “man’s world”. The embodied researcher-researched symbol as a gendered interaction was used to shed light on the internal dynamics of the social world in question while establishing developmental design possibilities aligned with the attempted understanding of academic insights (Lumsden, 2009).

***Masculinities Heard:***

***Exploring gender; the male as a psychological minority under distress:***

*“My colleague had a friend who attended an event called ‘Manshine’... It was like Woodstock for modern men: 150 blokes deep in the scrub doing workshops on how to be better men. Blokes going deep. If their wives have problems they call their best friend and go for a coffee and spill their guts over raspberry and white chocolate muffins. If these blokes have problems they bury their mobile phones in their duffle bags and escape to the forest to engage their inner animal and crawl around the grass sniffing other men’s armpits. “That’s messed up,” a mate said over beers and Friday night football. “I don’t know,” I shrugged. You know what’s messed up? Twelve dudes on a buck’s night watching a woman shoot ping-pong balls from her backside. Sweaty bear-men stoned on power swapping gropes for roles in shit Ben Affleck films. Big muscle men with “Damage” tattooed across their foreheads strangling their girlfriends. Forty-five Australian men taking their lives each week, three times the suicide rate of women. Six men gone every day. One poor bastard gone every four hours.” (Dalton, 2018).*

These statistics anecdotally mentioned in Trent Dalton’s article published in *The Australian* late in 2018 are a stark and dismal national reality. To quote the Australian Bureau of Statistics ‘Men’s mental health: Let's talk about it’, “It's important to get more men talking about how they're feeling, with suicide being the leading cause of death for

men aged 15 to 44 years in 2015” (ABS, 2016). Years later, this trend remains. Intentional self-harm was the cause most likely to affect males, with 301 male deaths for every 100 female deaths. In 2017, in Australia, 3,128 people died from intentional self-harm rising 9.1% from 2,866 in 2016. Intentional self-harm was ranked the 13th leading cause of death in 2017, moving up from 15th position in 2016. Intentional self-harm is the 10th ranked leading cause of death for males, while suicide does not appear in the top 20 leading causes of death for females (ABS, 2018). This gender disparity within Australian statistical data is at the fore of my research inquiry into Australian masculinities. To depict a more quantitative evaluation of the male mental health statistics, I have added the table for the 'Number of suicide deaths, State/Territory of usual residence' for 2008-2017:

**Number of suicide deaths, State/Territory of usual residence, 2008-2017 (a)(b)**

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
	No.									
NSW	620	623	674	617	727	718	832	829	805	880
Vic	545	576	558	526	514	533	658	668	624	621
Qld	553	525	588	578	631	676	658	757	674	804
SA	175	185	197	212	198	203	243	232	225	224
WA	300	279	313	309	367	336	367	400	371	409
Tas.	73	79	64	74	71	74	69	83	92	80
NT	38	37	45	44	48	33	56	49	46	51
ACT	36	32	41	33	24	37	38	46	28	58
<b>Australia</b>	<b>2,341</b>	<b>2,337</b>	<b>2,480</b>	<b>2,393</b>	<b>2,580</b>	<b>2,610</b>	<b>2,922</b>	<b>3,065</b>	<b>2,866</b>	<b>3,128</b>

As you can see, the general trend is that suicide rates across the board nationally have been rising slowly and inconsistently between 2008 - 2017.

To look quickly at the statistics associated with age range, suicide was the leading cause of death among people aged between 15-44 years in 2017, and the second leading cause of death among those 45-54 years of age. The median age at death for suicide was 44.5 years. This compares to a median age of 81.9 years for all deaths. When questioning the causes and co-morbidities related to these statistics, many were

identified. The document referenced attempts to look at age-related causes. In 2017, approximately 80.0% of intentional self-harm deaths had comorbidities mentioned as contributing factors to death. Comorbidities can be significant etiological factors, providing contextual information regarding circumstances surrounding an intentional self-harm death. Mood disorders, including depression, were the most commonly mentioned condition with intentional self-harm in 2017, being present in 43.0% of deaths. This is followed by drug and alcohol disorders, which include drug misuse, but also acute intoxication, where one's judgement may be impaired by the drug or alcohol present in the system (ABS, 2018).

For clarity of understanding and depiction, attached below is the table for 'Intentional self-harm, top 10 multiple causes, proportion of total suicides, by age group, 2017' (ABS, 2017) showing a quantitative outline for statistical data.

Cause of death and ICD code	5-24 years	25-44 years	45-64 years	65-84 years	85 years +	All ages
Mood disorders (F30-F39)	34.3	43.0	49.0	40.3	26.0	43.0
Mental and behavioural disorders due to psychoactive substance use (F10-F19)	25.9	41.6	26.7	10.1	2.6	29.5
Other symptoms and signs involving emotional state (R458) (c)	20.6	16.9	19.5	16.4	11.7	18.1
Anxiety and stress-related disorders (F40-49)	15.2	19.7	17.9	13.6	9.1	17.5
Findings of alcohol, drugs and other substances in blood (R78)	18.5	17.0	13.7	9.6	7.8	14.9
Schizophrenia, schizotypal and delusional disorders (F20-F29)	3.5	7.9	5.2	2.3	—	5.5
Unspecified mental disorder (F99)	7.2	5.0	4.3	1.8	—	4.5
Malignant neoplasms (C00-C97, D45-D46, D47.1, D47.3-D47.5)	0.5	0.9	1.9	16.1	24.7	3.7
Diseases of the musculoskeletal system (M00-M99)	0.2	1.7	3.3	11.1	15.6	3.6
Personality disorders (F60-F69)	5.4	5.0	2.0	1.3	—	3.5
Chronic pain (R522)	0.5	1.3	3.7	5.3	5.2	2.6
Ischaemic heart diseases (I20-I25)	0.2	0.7	1.8	7.8	16.9	2.3
Chronic lower respiratory diseases (J40-J47)	0.2	0.5	2.0	6.0	9.1	1.9
Diabetes (E10-E14)	0.5	0.6	2.0	5.0	9.1	1.8
Heart failure (I50-I51)	0.2	0.2	1.0	5.0	7.8	1.2
Behavioural disorders usually occurring in childhood and adolescence (F90-F98)	3.7	1.1	0.6	—	—	1.1
Disorders of psychological development (F80-F89)	2.1	0.5	0.1	—	—	0.5

There are many other associated factors that are not diagnosable yet may act as comorbidities such as financial difficulty, grief, major life changes, and relationship distress. These factors may be socioeconomic or psychosocial but are unable to be quantified and relayed in national statistical archives. To address these less 'disease' related factors, the ABS has recently completed a pilot study with the 2017 suicide data where certain psychosocial factors have been coded in as associated factors to the death. This additional data will be released in the future as part of an information paper (ABS, 2017).

These possibly unseen and unquantifiable co-morbidities were where the meat of the ethnographic research for Men at Peace was focussed; destructive factors that may fly under the radar. Ethnographic research and sensitive fieldwork inquired and speculatively located some underlying experiential factors that relate to both negative and positive male mental health. There is a philosophical theory associated with the work of Foucault and Chomsky, where one attempts to identify a 'deep structure' which underlies or (as some would argue) generates the 'surface performance' of the things actually said (Cvetkovich, 2007). This identification of a 'deep structure' is the mode of analysis used in regards to the factors relating to male mental health in Australia. As any Australian of any gender knows, the "typical" Australian male's 'deep structure' is often contrasted to or deeply hidden underneath their 'surface gender performance'. Before undertaking research, there was a thematic psychological hypothesis that the social, cultural, and interpersonal conflict between 'deep structure' and surface performance may be the reason that many deaths from intentional self-harm come to the surprise of family members and friends.

Within the philosophical domain of Foucault and Chomsky and the embrace of modern psychology, 'Deep structure' is inextricable to the ability to address mental health. In a mass national cultural structure that accentuates a 'happy go lucky', hard-working, 'tough guy' or light-hearted, larrikin model of masculinity while not historically celebrating, encouraging or educating common discourse around 'deep structure', there

will be a stigma around discussing mental health below the surface performance of personality and gender. The statistics show that a social narrative remains to perpetuate this stigma around the routine and systemic addressing of mental health from early childhood where gender performance is being taught and learned and 'deep structure' is not prioritised, taught, or nurtured.

Ann Cvetkovich argues that the archive can act as therapy; that, in general, 'researchers attempt to identify the systemic nature of discourses which enable certain sorts of things to be said and make other sorts of things difficult to say' (Cvetkovich, 2007, p 176). In the case of this project, the archive can be seen as the website and its representation of experience. The generalised and cliché perception of the Australian male is that the majority of emotionally nuanced experience and deep internal turmoil are the sorts of experiences that are difficult if not abhorrent to speak about. Cliches are often clichés because they resonate with a majority experience and, observing the above statistics proves that the "typical" Australian male may have, when researched, behavioural and experiential correlations with stereotypical cultural perceptions. This trend of adherence to a certain type of masculinity is not limited to Australian men. Many western cultures have been prescribed a set of behaviours and attributes adhered to, to be able to "belong" to their gender. Bill Pozzobon is the Director of the 'SafeTeen Boy's Program', which is an internationally recognised violence prevention strategy based in Vancouver, Canada. Pozzobon describes the risk of leaving the 'man box' or choosing to display individuality over prescribed gender performativity. He says that if men decide to listen to their 'deep structure', focussing on individual needs and expression, they may often receive verbal, physical, and emotional punishment (Pozzobon, 2011). Men staying in the 'man box' or a set of prescribed masculine traits and behaviours usually stems from being dependent on the accepted masculine code for relationship and connection. Individuation away from gender norms often threatens a lack of connection or alienation, threatening an assumed notion of survival within a pack mentality. A healthy self-reflection involves questioning the purpose or intention around

certain gendered behaviours and then creating an individual gender code after leaving or discerning within prescribed gender normative behaviours.

Recent neuroscience confirms the contribution of a safe and empathic relationship and the co-construction of narratives within that relationship promotes neural plasticity and human change. In other more simplistic words, modern psychological and neuroscientific approaches show that talking heals. Is it possible that ethnographic poetry through a digital interface is a place that can foster these safe and empathic relationships through observation and relatable interview accounts? Is it possible that these digital interfaces are places to talk without stretching too far beyond a deeply culturally embedded narrative that says talking about feelings and meaningful experience is not masculine; that receiving informal or professional talking therapy is “weak”? Men at Peace is a place, a portal; a creative digital starting point that may bridge the gap between total aversion to seeking help for mental health issues and opening a door to speaking up about corrosive and hidden issues. This platform exists to create a relationship with self and others; a place where expression and observation may happen in a generally less socially confronting way.

Situating the above national statistics in a philosophical framework is also important. We are in the midst of an ever-evolving understanding of psychophysiological sciences. Psychological nuances and a basic understanding of how trauma affects the individual's behavioural fabric and the wider social fabric is now more accessible to the general public than ever. If we only view physical and emotional trauma in the medical fields, views can become distanced and pathologized. Pathologized trauma has the danger of being hidden. If we situate trauma in a social and cultural framework rather than a medical one, it may be more easily spoken about and approached collectively without shame (Cvetkovich, 2003). The distinction between everyday and catastrophic trauma is tied to the distinction between public and private. Large-scale social trauma is usually public. Individual trauma is usually kept private. Though there are blurred lines between these distinctions, the privateness of this smaller scale individual trauma may become

invisible or normalised as another part of an oppressive and misunderstood psychological approach (Cvetkovich, 2003). Men at Peace is one creative and formal scholarly-informed way in which trauma or trauma-related experiences contributed to mental health issues may be sensitively situated within the larger context of public feelings. A willingness to contribute within a digital interface of 'public feeling' may offer more flexible approaches to the unpredictable linkages among violence, negative mental health, affective experience, and social and political change as well as changing language and vocabulary associated with masculinities, trauma, and mental health. If you're looking for trauma, you might miss what are often more everyday forms of distress and affect (Cvetkovich, 2003) that can accumulate into traumatic events. It is these everyday forms of distress and affects, as well as peace-seeking, conflict management, and self-regulatory mechanisms that have been a focal point in Men at Peace as a research inquiry and through the creative design of the digital archive and ethnographic poetry.

Currently and generally, when people hear the word "gender", they think about women (Katz, 2015). This knee jerk assumptive focus on women's issues as central to the term 'gender' or 'feminism' is an example of one of the ways that dominant systems maintain and reproduce themselves through invisibility. The dominant group in a society is rarely challenged to think about their dominance, which creates a privilege of invisibility (Katz, 2015). Masculinities have become invisible because of long-standing masculine dominant patriarchal structures giving the power differential to men for approximately the past two thousand years. Though this invisibility can be a scapegoat for morally reprehensible behaviours, economies, industries, and systems, this invisibility has also arguably been inverted by silencing men from expressing and articulating the nuances of their socialised suffering because of their privilege. In a study of emotions that were culturally acceptable on the basis of gender, women were socially permitted to feel joy, compassion, sympathy, and fear while men were socially permitted to feel anger, contempt, and pride. This study confirms the social anecdotal evidence that a spectrum of emotions that are generally socially acceptable for women to express became an

emotional funnel system for men, eventuating in anger being the only acceptable and conditioned expression for most negative or challenging emotions (McKelly, 2013). If any culture or peoples are systematically and omnisciently not permitted to express emotions in order to belong, the population will not create intelligence and literacy around their own emotional awareness. If one does not understand their own emotions, they will not understand another's emotions which in turn breeds non-empathetic and potentially collective violent behaviour (Ehrman, 2013).

The conditioning of emotional expression and suppression is paramount to viewing how men deal with conflict. An area of conflict-related destructive experience is in Australians domestic violence statistics. 1 in 6 (1.6 million) women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a cohabiting partner since age 15 compared to 1 in 16 (0.5 million) men having experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a cohabiting partner since age 15. Intimate partner violence causes more illness, disability, and deaths than any other risk factor for women aged 25–44. Although these statistics aren't positive, unlike the deaths from intentional self-harm, rates of partner violence against women have remained relatively stable between 2005 and 2016, (AIHW, 2018). The intergenerational repercussions are worth mentioning; nearly 2.1 million women and men witnessed violence towards their mother by a partner, and nearly 820,000 witnessed violence towards their father, before the age of 15.

The systems and institutions that produce men who are violent against women are the same systems and institutions that produce men who are violent against other men. It is useful to think about the boys who are being profoundly affected by adult men's violence and how they've been influenced and conditioned by this violence. The current global statistics show that this is the first generation where boys will have less of an education than their fathers and that boys have fallen behind girls in education results in all of the 70 most developed nations. The rate of boys who are out of school is higher across the board than girls who are out of school (UNESCO, 2018).

Young girls who experience and witness male violence against women are also educated to expect or perpetuate gender-related victimhood (Katz, 2015). People who, as children, witnessed partner violence against their parents were 2–4 times as likely to experience partner violence themselves, as adults (AIHW, 2018). Family and domestic violence can have far-reaching consequences. It is a leading cause of homelessness for women with children (AIHW, 2018). These national crises of domestic violence take a financial toll on national health expenditure. In 2015–16, the financial cost of violence against women and their children in Australia was estimated at \$22 billion (AIHW, 2018). Instead of simplifying gender violence or male violence against women and seeing men as perpetrators and women as victims in a victim/ perpetrator duality, it is important to focus on all people as social and collective bystanders to systemic violence that breeds intimate partner violence and other kinds of male violence against women and men (Katz, 2015).

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare acknowledges the gaps in research regarding the health statistics of male suicide and violence against women. There is an acknowledgement that in order to fill these research gaps they must analyse and use existing data (further analysis at local geographical levels), share existing and unpublished data across government agencies while protecting individual privacy, develop a common and consistent definition of domestic violence (or set of definitions), improve identification and measurement across data sets, and to enhance data collection to better understand people at risk and the services they need. To use and increase the use of data linkage and use longitudinal surveys to better understand pathways and outcomes for victims and perpetrators (AIHW, 2018) is vital in realising all of these research gaps.

To fill these research gaps, these strategies need in-depth fieldwork and ethnographic interview methods undertaken. Men at Peace could work independently within and parallel to, particularly, the last two strategies; ‘enhancing data collection to better understand people at risk and the services they need and use and increasing the use of

data linkage and longitudinal surveys to better understand pathways and outcomes for victims and perpetrators' (AIHW, 2018). If qualitative ethnographic data collection can increase linkage to better understand pathways and outcomes for victims and perpetrators, then projects like Men at Peace can be seen as a creative process of qualitative male experience as a helpful resource within this arena.

The aim of using independent research projects such as *Men at Peace* as a resource for social and national problem solving is optimal and ideal. I am aware that psychopathological research has provided insight into the complexity of mental health issues and the interpersonal contact processes with which many perpetrators struggle. I acknowledge that without formal psychological background, creatively informed ethnographic research has limitations of which can continue to be alleviated through auditing, collaboration, and professional consultative advice. As an independent researcher with anecdotal methodology, the national-scale problem-solving capacities of this research are limited and impossible without further research opportunity, collaboration, and application. Within these limitations, strength is perceived in the potential consistency and longevity of this website as a moveable creative project where together, over time, men will be creating new languages of relational discursiveness while reflexively observing their place within the self, other, and the collective.

## Methodology

Ethnography has a lot to offer the creative arts and vice versa, as evidenced by the growing field of design and design-related research informed by the methods and practices of anthropology. Within this emerging interdisciplinary space, the creative industries, design community and the anthropological community now have an opportunity to ask questions together (Annechino, 2013). Through ethnographic poetry, the effects of data collection in relation to gender research can be seen as an anthropological link to the influence of ethnography on creative design and interaction methods.

The primary methodology used in this research is ethnography which includes several interrelated methods. Ethnographies or 'field work', is the study of the culture or social organisation of a particular group or community, a research undertaking where researchers immerse themselves within the field they are researching to collect data before data analysis and coding. Instead of research participants coming to the researcher, the researcher enters into the world of the research participants, seeking to gain a more realistic, authentic, and in depth understanding of a particular group. Ethnography refers to the gathering of data from within the group and then development of analysis of specific peoples, settings, or ways of life (Calhoun, 2002).

Meaning is not only thought or created by an intentioned activity, it is created and understood through mundane and habitual acts of unconscious and subconscious motivation. This is what, as ethnographers, we observe as behavioural and idiosyncratic mechanisms of meaning; what people say or do when they perceive no one to be interrogating or investigating their experience (Badewi, 2013). It is argued that one of the best ways to collect qualitative data or seemingly immeasurable non-numerical data is through an ethnographic research methodology.

### Initial Data Collection

The selection criteria for interview participants for Men at Peace were randomised and spontaneous. Most participants were from the East Coast of Australia- primarily Sydney, Northern Rivers, Brisbane, and some outlying locations. This selection was based upon recommendations and word of mouth suggestions for men who would be interested in being involved in this research project. Because of randomised selection, there was limited accessibility to a diverse range of men and masculinities and I was unable to interview a population representative of the diverse race, culture and, religion identities present in Australia.

Throughout the development of Men at Peace, the ethnographic process has been informed heavily by the ideologies established through the literature and by the research field through creative and reflective practice. In the case of this research method, the ethnography was a mixture of anecdotal conversational data collected in fieldwork and a more formal collection of data through a series of one on one semi-structured interviews. Some of these interviews included photographic documentation of the subjects and others did not. All interviews were recorded with an audio recording device and then later transcribed for coding, analysis, and creative representation through ethnographic poetry. The ethnographic data collection also

included one semi-structured all-male discussion group, using research questions as an impetus for discussion. This discussion group later in the project consisted of ten men being recorded answering and discussing the research interview questions. I was present at the beginning and the end of this discussion group but there was no formal facilitation in the duration. The transcription of this recording is available in the appendix.

The ethnographic research was undertaken through the willingness of random interview subjects to engage and contribute to the research. Usually, there was a personal interest demonstrated by the subjects in male mental health and masculinities. This interest enthused potential and eventual subjects to contribute. There was no consistent method in how these research subjects were found. Usually, the method of finding subjects was via word of mouth throughout established relational networks. These networks expanded as interview subjects referred and recommended men they thought would be interested in the research project or interested in the interview process.

There are big differences between gathering data, observing and understanding language, and observing and understanding what is meant beyond language. The 'Beyond language' is described above when mentioning 'behavioural and idiosyncratic mechanisms of meaning which can be very useful in understanding a social setting or culture. An ethnography seeks to understand such cultures and social settings through informed and deep inquiry and observation. Ethnographic research explores what people do and what people say they do; behaviours and the perceptions of those recognised or conscious behaviours (Calhoun, 2002).

Oftentimes, ethnographers use their ethnographic findings or data to create social commentary. In the structure and construction *Men at Peace*, ethnographic findings and data have been used to inform the public through a creative outlet of ethnographic poetry. When men expressed certain potencies or when potency was felt within me as the researcher regarding their masculinities, these gendered expressions were inferred into the poetry. For *Men at Peace*, the ethnographic process has a more implicit

purpose of creating social change through creative expression. Not only does this provide information and affect, but shows a way in which people are able to express their story or what is important to them. This data has informed 'masculinities' in order to observe a demand for a viewable public display of the "private" or intimate discussion among men in an accessible way.

## Immersion Techniques

Immersion is a key component of an ethnographic research methodology (Taylor, 2011). The ethnographer must immerse themselves in a culture or a group of people in order to collect data for research purposes. Through the ethnographic process for Men at Peace, enquiring into the male experience in order to create a storytelling through poetry, cultural texts (interviews, field notes of my iterations with men, and a transcript and recording of an all-male group discussion) have been collected and analysed to find and create new meaning in existing cultures or commonly accepted cultural texts and discourses. Fieldwork immersion enables the researcher to access meanings and understandings of particular social words. In ethnographic research, this is mainly done by accessing what people say about their social world. One way of accessing these realities is through an interview in which the bulk of my primary data came from before running a prototype discussion group with ten men.

There are certain primary functions within an ethnography; to investigate and evaluate (Pini, 2005) An ethnographer evaluates their investigation and therefore finds knowledge for a knowledge gap or a solution for their problem. This understanding and speculation have been informed through my ethnography. Investigating involves interviewing, studying, and observing while evaluating involves finding patterns and understanding meaning from investigations. These functions could also be called 'fieldwork' and 'data analysis'. Poetry seeks to find patterns and understanding meaning, so as a creative ethnography, writing poetry was a natural way of evaluating,

and evaluating naturally led to writing poetry. Levels of sophistication around knowledge and understanding of the gendered experience have changed presentation perspective and have been elevated through and between the investigation and evaluation processes. This influence is discussed in the reflective section of this dissertation.

In regards to ethnographic 'immersion', ethnographic research involves seeking to understand parts of the world directly through the people who live in them, investigated from the "inside" in the context of everyday life. Ethnography can be done undercover or transparently and self referentially with everyone knowing the researcher's intention. The researcher is able to represent themselves contextually or create/enhance parts of them that will draw out the information they need or they can blend in. In this way, the researcher understands themselves as affecting and effecting the culture in which they're investigating. An important part of researching ethnographically is understanding your own context and culture and how your own culture creates meaning or represents and influences the intended research. There are reflexive questions that need to be asked as part of this such as; how the researcher is perceived and what that means. Such questions are:

- **What do I as a researcher represent?**

A female in a polarised climate regarding gender, representing a bridge between the polarities. It can also represent triggers of misunderstanding.

- **What context am I bringing to the culture that I am investigating and how does this effect the existing culture?**

The context I am bringing is complete ignorance of having lived a male experience. This effects the field by inviting the men to bring me out of the dark by authentically communicating their experience for further awareness and neutralising some of the polarisation

Ethnographic immersion takes time. Time is a necessity in ethnography. Taking time allows a certain and slow evolving literacy of culture. A literacy of culture is needed so that the researcher can become somewhat unnoticed or culturally sensitive and therefore trusted, approachable, and able to receive and be privy to more information through the openness and willingness of the field. This evolution of cultural literacy requires time. This amount of time for authentic immersion differs for every type of research impetus field experience. The time it takes for authentic immersion as gravitas to the data and to the presentation of the findings varies between research projects. An ethnography is a combination of participation and observation. This mixture of active and passive observation is most clearly and naturally experienced through true immersion. It is useful to note that complete participation comes with the risk of losing objectivity while complete observation is a research possibility but may lack the reliable data analysis that becomes the meat of a mixture between participation and observation. The fine mix between participation and observation is why an ethnographic researcher must stay self-aware, self-reflexive, remaining aware of their own context and the interaction between the researcher and the field.

After timely and authentic immersion is achieved, the possibilities in observing and recording the idiosyncratic or unspoken domains of the culture are greater. This is due to the comfortability of the subjects within the field. With integrity and trust-building with trust-building relying on a researcher's integrity, the researcher is able to become more invisible which means the subject will become less self-conscious about being "watched" and start to behave "normally" or less performatively within their setting, allowing for field observations of unspoken phenomena to be more accurate. If an interview is being used as a data collection method, trust-building can happen before or throughout the interview process. Understanding interview techniques and ways in which those techniques can benefit the researcher in drawing out the information and experience of the interviewee is helpful when formulating questions in a way that encourages psychological trust and openness in the interviewee (Rogers, 2007). Decoding this subjective, varied, and oftentimes unspoken language means paying

attention to negations, revisions, and smokescreens that may mask feelings and experiences that cannot be articulated. In the realms of nuances of observing unspoken behaviours, there are certain attitudes and techniques that the interviewer can foster throughout the interview process. It is recommended that the interviewer pays special attention to the imagery mentioned in the interview and recognise that a lot of what is important cannot be put into words (Josselson, 2013).

The participant may offer an image or a metaphor in their narration or explanation. It is important these images or metaphors are not overlooked. It is useful for the interviewer to pay special attention to these images and metaphors to draw out a further narrative. A way in which they can pay this attention is by repeating the image or metaphor in a reflective and inquiring tone or asking the subject for more thoughts about it. This is a way of gently inquiring into the subconscious. Images and metaphors can contain revealing experiences that are not easily rendered in linear speech or recollection (Josselson, 2013). A researcher may find that their attention is being redirected at certain points during an interview. It is advised that if you are becoming confused by unrelated details or distractions that are hard to organise or digest, it is helpful to pay attention to the patterns in these distractions and redirections. There could be a lot of rich and layered meaning in these redirections, distractions and gaps in narration. As an ethnographer, it is responsible methodological etiquette to pay attention to what is not being said or to what does not make sense.

When approaching the 'How' of researching, deeper levels of understanding afforded by prior knowledge can be found, knowing the lingo or native speak of field participants and thus being 'empirically literate' (Roseneil, 1993). Closer and more regular contact with the field; more detailed consideration of the social actors at the centre of the cultural phenomenon make access to, and selection of, research participants easier and better informed; quicker establishment of rapport and trust between researcher and participants; and more open and readily accessible lines of communication between

researchers and informants due to the researcher's continuing contact with the field. (Taylor, 2011). As a researcher, and indeed as a cultural participant, one can never assume totality in their position as either an insider or as an outsider, given that the boundaries of such positions are always permeable (Taylor, 2011). Ethnographers must always observe themselves as humans in the sense of subjectivity and biases being unavoidable. With an awareness of that bias, an ethnographer can observe and analyse research interactions in a more meaningful and helpful way.

### Self-reflexive Field Notes

There is a definite non-linear humanness involved in ethnographic research. This can both enhance or hinder the potential meaning in the field which is why self reflection as an ethnographer is important. The importance of understanding the meaning and symbolism experienced as a gendered person undertaking gender-related research is done through autoethnographic awareness.

Because of the possible gender politics between the researcher and the field in *Men at Peace* as an ethnography, the benefits of undertaking self-reflexive field notes through poetry in the form of an autoethnography has been an exploration of the research itself and the presentation of us. There has been a reflexive shift within the social sciences to include autoethnographic considerations for enhanced recognition of the role of gender and emotions in the research process (Lumsden, 2009). This means that when undertaking research in the field, it is now more commonly acknowledged that gender affects the field and the researcher-researched relationship. This acknowledgment is positive in the case of fieldwork within masculinities such as *Men at Peace*. Due to the rich, layered, and varied experience of human life, it is possible that the researcher may elicit specific behaviours in the research field for reasons unknown to the researcher.

More specifically, acknowledging the common heteronormative and polarised discourses across the gender spectrum, women may trigger specific behaviours in male-dominated settings or in male subjects (Lumsden, 2009). Part of self-reflectivity means that the researcher has to acknowledge the influence of their social position within the interaction, seeing that they are a part of the social world being studied. By reflecting on this influential position as well as monitoring emotions and actions as a researcher, ethnographers can assist to shed light on the internal dynamics of the social world in question. Experienced ethnographers are known to record their thoughts on issues such as rapport, surprises in the data obtained, their own performance as an interviewer, comparisons between interviews, and difficult moments in the interview process (Pini, 2011).

## Interviews

Interview locations were something considered in the vantage point. The gendering of a place may effect the neutrality of the interview context and therefore the ability for the subject to open up and let go. The gender connotations of places or spaces are subjective but some contexts are generally assumed to be more masculine than feminine or vice versa. For example, in Australia, pubs and sporting arenas may have more of a masculine presence. On the other hand, depending on the gender roles within a home, a subject's home may be a masculine arena where the vulnerability could be difficult to achieve. As a female researcher, it is important to be aware that the home as an interview space could be more of a feminine space. This femininity or personally intimate space could also limit the ability for a man to open up and express his truth openly and vulnerably due to fear of being judged by a 'female' or a feminine space. These spatial or aesthetic limitations can be noticed and create affect both consciously and unconsciously.

To understand how the subject perceives the gendering of space, the interviewer must track both feeling and the cognitive aspects of the interview experience in order to try to understand the experience from the participant's point of view. Through this empathic analysis, the interviewer encourages deeper and more extensive elaboration of the participant's experience (Josselson, 2013). Through the understanding of a subject's deeper experience, the interviewer will be able to organise the interview in a more neutrally gendered space in order for information to be divulged without an unconscious opposition to the gendering of the interview context. Sometimes, this empathetic read of a person's psychological assumptions and comfortability means that the researcher will have to enhance or constrict certain parts of their gender or personality. Some researchers have been known to perform multiple gender identities in the context of the interviews (Pini, 2011). This may also happen subconsciously. If gender performances are manipulated, enhanced, or constrained too much, then who is the one conducting the research? These questions are all a part of conducting an ethnography. Where does the authenticity of researcher identity lie and how does this authenticity affect the gendered triggers, interactions, and purpose of autoethnographic findings? If collecting and analysing research data is developing, constructing, or deconstructing a 'model' of some aspect of reality that will be found to be in accordance or in contrast with 'the facts' about the questioned reality, how are a researcher's actions and my performative gender-confirming or falsifying the field in question (Wengraf, 2001)?

Ethnographic analysis of research material is a thorough and detailed process the researcher undertakes in order to understand or make meaning of the data collected during the fieldwork. Many subjective meaning-making factors need to be taken into consideration during the analysis stage of ethnographic research. Due to the ongoing subjectivity of making meaning from others' experiences, an ethnography needs to continue during the analysis stages and even after the conclusion of the research. The relationship between beliefs, opinions, knowledge, and behaviour is not straightforward (Gillham, 2001). Various techniques can help within this data analysis such as language

and thematic patterning and external review bodies. What makes the data analysis of qualitative data different and more complex than quantitative data is that the essential character of writing up interview data is to weave a narrative which is interpolated with illustrative quotes (Gillham, 2001). Because the collection and analysis of interview data is infused with personal meaning and shorthand, abstract words mean different things to different people so that interpretation is speculative and subjective, even between researcher and research subjects. A statement like 'He's very aggressive' is open to a wide variety of interpretations; only by asking for an example of the 'aggressiveness' can you determine how it is being used (Gillham, 2001).

Sending interview subjects their transcripts can be one way in which the interviewee has power over their own meaning-making. As they read their transcript, they are able to see how their experiences and beliefs, through spoken word, were translated to the page and therefore, if needed, communicate their questions or concerns with the interviewer. As well as involving the subject, various analysis techniques can be used to provide sophisticated analysis. An understanding of the different levels of inference within the content analysis and meaning-making is useful. If a meaningful analysis of what people have said is to construct categories that bring together what they have expressed in different ways, the researcher has to make judgements and observations about latent meaning, i.e. what they 'meant' by what they said (Gillham, 2001). To be respectful to the subjects within the field during an ethnography during all stages of research, the ethnographer must have an ethical framework that they are associated with/ working within/ understand implicitly.

Ethical considerations are paramount within an ethnographic undertaking. The importance of these ethical considerations must be addressed the importance of ethics within the field. A structural understanding of power implies that power can be equalised out or used for the enhancement of research. A post-structuralist understanding sees power as inherent in all social relations and balances the structuralist tendency to see

power as harmful with a view of the 'positivity' of power; that is, its capacity to produce things. Therefore, a power dynamic can be manipulated or used in constructive or destructive manners which means the ethical frameworks available make the researchers self-aware of how this power differential can operate. There is always a power of choice available for both the interviewer and the interviewee. The power of choice within informed consent and, like other domains of consent, is given throughout the whole interview process in order to continue with the research. Along with implicit nuances of consent, alleviating the unconscious and unknowable hypotheses of power differentials and unintentional damage done through fieldwork, formal informed consent is available through means of paperwork and organisational representation. These ethical consent structures are based on a criterion that to avoid harm is a basic ethical principle and that inflicting harm is unethical and contrary to the rights and welfare.

Sometimes, the researcher must sensitively ask provocative questions that put pressure on the subject to dig deep in order to divulge their internal world. This may mean that some of the questions urge the subject to talk about an upsetting event. Because an interview is seen to be a 'safe context', this means that through being upset and distressed, the subject is not provoked in a harmful manner but a constructive and meaningful manner. The balance of this perceived "harm" requires experience, time in the field, tact, and external references and mentors to provide advice in order to intentionally manage the interview with the ability to answer questions of how and why certain questions and answers are relevant to the research.

The ethnographic process throughout Men at Peace was an intended experience of deep, respectful immersion where self-reflexively within the field of 'masculinities' or 'The Australian male' was upheld for research integrity. Because this field has such varied contexts from individual to individual, there was diligence within the autoethnographic considerations to be able to understand how personal context

(including, and especially gender) and the shared context of the interview space  
(including the gendered nature of a space) affected the information being divulged.

## Chapter 4

### **Ethnographic Poetry: Voices from the field**

Having run a monthly poetry/spoken word event for three years @thetempleofwords, and more recently, smaller scale monthly embodied writing workshop for women, I have realised that the capacity of the creative spoken and written word, particularly through the immersive and affective abstraction of poetry has proved rich for therapeutic potential.

I positioned the cut up poetry to parallel my poems from the ethnographer's perspective. Having both sides of the research experience being represented through poetry shows a balance between the perspectives of the observer and the observed, symbolic of the mutuality of the field itself.

*“Like being in an interview, I know when I am in a poem. Fieldpoems have recognizable borders, textures, and turns of phrase: a lozenge of light moving across a person’s face; a repeated allusion in conversation; a stack of live crabs on a scale, too many legs; a child disappearing into the dark doorway of a house. Poems, more so than prose, often resemble everyday speech and experience in their playfulness, rhythm, sonics, and allusions. The signs are always there, if I am looking for them” (Zani, 2019)*

It took many months to iron out the creases in aligning the creative outcome of this masters project with the theoretical academic frameworks. Starting as a digital storytelling platform with the capacity for users to interact with and add to an archive of perspectives of masculinities, Men at Peace, in this format, slowly became something too big for my digital design skill set and not appropriate for my creative scope. I changed my data representation to a creative ethnography through ethnographic poetry.

Although I deleted chapters from the dissertation relating to creative digital storytelling archive; *'Rethinking the archive: memory and movement between the living and the dead'*, *'Curation: cultivating expressive empowerment'*, and *'Digital Storytelling through gendered design: An accessible, democratising and educational archive'* (Appendix), they are still relevant to informing this creative ethnography within the broader importance of collective memory making through real life and digital creative archives. The exploration of these theoretical frameworks have helped inform and crystallise the development of ethnographic poetry.

With ethnographic poetry as a more distilled focus within academic data representation, I desired to use poetry from the field to communicate my experience as a researcher, including the participant's experiences as the research subjects, and to be able to present the data creatively in a way that would evoke an emotional response or surprise from the viewer. Ideally, user or viewer interactivity was something that I wanted to include in this presentation. Poetry generated from the field; both from the direct experience as an ethnographer and from poetry generated by randomly choosing from quotation samples from the interview data became a way of translating the deep immersive experiences from the field and what the men were trying to communicate.

After Trump was elected in 2016, I found an HTML with a poetry generator using quotations from Trump speeches. The user presses the button 'Generate Poem', and basic coding using content from Trump speeches formulates a poem.

Here are three examples from three different clicks of the generator HTML

<https://www.trumppoetrygenerator.com>;

*"This process has been a total sham  
I think I could have stopped it*

*Down on 7-Eleven, down at the World Trade Center, right after it came down*

*My fingers are long and beautiful*

*I try so hard to be his friend*

*I buy a slightly smaller than large glove, OK?"*

...

*"I won't do anything to take care of them*

*They're rapists*

*My fingers are long and beautiful*

*Some people would say I'm very, very, very intelligent"*

...

*"MAKE AMERICA RICH AGAIN*

*A lot of bad 'dudes' out there!*

*To make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive*

*I've never used an ATM*

*If the birds don't kill it first*

*Hillary, get on with your life" (Author unknown, 2017)*

As seen in the above examples, there is one line repeated in two of the poems. This same line, within the different context, creates a different meaning; a completely different poem. Meaning making through poetry is already subjective. When randomised, the chance of verbatim quotes being put into multiple sets of meanings creates curiosity of how we make meaning of speech, conversation, and how our words create meaning in regards to the context of other's words and the environment of a textual context.

In the example of the ‘Donald Trump Poetry Generator’, there seems to be an underlying intention to create humour through abstract or absurd political commentary by using direct quotes that have already created social and political commentary and sometimes upheaval. The user is able to automatically subvert the creation of Trump’s speeches into a randomised poem that, in itself, layers his quotes into fiction and then into another re-contextualised meaning. The political meaning-making available in this poetry generator is expansive. The reading of these self generated poems provokes thought through unintentional groupings of language and speech.

Data from ‘Men at Peace’ is shown through the processed randomised poetry that I generated manually using samples of interview data. These poems enable the potential for expanse of meaning-making and social commentary through observations of gender experience. This experience is represented by the verbatim quotes of anonymous interview material from Men at Peace and is a creative way of engaging with data without reading long form interviews. Unlike the obvious potential for humour in the Trump poetry generator, these poems offer or provoke other unexpected responses. Below are a selection of examples of poetry created from the interview data of Men at Peace.

*When you allow a bit off the pressure valve*

*It was more like a habit*

*So some winters are bleak like that one was. Some are cosy*

*Cooking on the fire for months and months*

*I don’t know how to describe that*

...

*I have gone back and given myself advice*

*The more churches I sat at, the more lost and confused i became*

*Which again harkens back to our origins*

*I am wearing this black suit in the middle of a hot day*

*To try and preserve our sense of dignity*

...

*I've gotten scared and held off - pulled them in to a point and then held them off*

*Men often... when anger... when the only permissible way to express anger and sadness through violence*

*Just being active and out there*

*Maleness almost like a gradient between hot and cold*

*'Ok i found the answer and now i am going to sleep'*

...

*If she is being a drama queen like... get out of the fucking room*

*Her experience of me doesn't fundamentally change who I am*

*The primary school warned the high school about me*

*So largely, that question in unanswered*

*No one is going to take this moment from me*

....

*It puts you in a pretty raw state when you're actually seriously contemplating killing yourself*

*They're talking about almost a chaotic unintelligent coming together of things*

*There is this block of baby boomer generation... some kind of block*

*I can build myself a shelter if i need to*

*It's like 'come on you guys, take the next step !'*

...

As seen above, the randomisation of quotations from the data affects responses unique to the reader. Each poem has a different mood; some obviously specific to a gendered experience, and some not.

In the case of these poems created randomly from interview data, *Men at Peace* as an exercise in field poetry allows diverse voices from the field to be expressed without representative bias from the researcher. Randomisation of the interview quotes through five-lined poems places these voices to speak for themselves amongst others instead of the researcher observations being completely central to the presentation of the data. The opportunity to read randomised poems and poems directly from the ethnographer's experience provides an intimate observation of the field, its participants, and the relationship between researcher and the field. The boundaries between the two types of poetry are obvious. One represents the observer or ethnographer and the other represents the research subjects. In addition to this, there is a symbolic effect of the data from individuals represented through a poem where their words can unite collectively with others' to create one piece of writing, essentially representing a social whole between various points of view.

An example of an ethnographic poet is the American anthropologist Renato Rosaldo, who has done field research among the Ilongots of northern Luzon, Philippines, and is the author of *Ilongot Headhunting: 1883-1974: A Study in Society and History and Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. In his work, Rosaldo has used poetry to communicate his time in the field. After his wife died suddenly and tragically in the field, Rosaldo explored the relationship between bereavement and rage in his canonical essay, 'Grief and a Headhunter's Rage' and his book *The Day of Shelly's Death; Notes on the Poetry and Ethnography of Death*. In the centre of this text are a collection of poems of which received attention for the delicacy of bridging anthropology

or field work with poetic expression. His collection of ethnographic poetry received praise from poetic and anthropological fields. (Franco, 2013).

*“This text is revolutionary; it presents another way, a new way of making poetry matter.” (Author Unknown, LARB, 2019)*

In his collections, Renato Rosaldo tells the story of grief by transforming it into a multidimensional event made from culturally diverse voices. He uses ethnography, and poetry and creates his experience into something that is visceral and intellectually accessible to his readers (Franco, 2013). Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, coeditor of *Words in Motion: Toward a Global Lexicon*, says of his text, “I was swept into an unexpected open space, where telling matters. Anthropologists and poets alike will be inspired and moved.” (Franco, 2013).

Rosaldo’s is but one in the growing field of ethnographic poets or researchers who communicate their findings through poetry. With Amanda Gorman reciting her poetry ‘The Hill We Climb’ at Biden’s inauguration in January 2021 (CNBC, 2021), poetry as a representation of broad social and political importance was highlighted through the online viral sharing and media attention of her recital. We saw yet another modern example of the masses connecting with significant historical events through poetry.

There are stark similarities in the way poets and ethnographic fieldworkers behave. Both are invested in observing and absorbing their surroundings. Both have an intense desire to understand facets of human nature. Both know that there is interweaving information beyond matter and beyond superficial understanding of our social realities. Inherently, both are seeking expression, communication, and answers from their work.

## Chapter 5

### **Reflections and results: The Field and the Creative Process**

With the view of creativity and the creative process being ongoing and perpetually unfinished, this reflection will offer a current view of Men at Peace as an ethnography leading into the creative development of semi-structured facilitation of creative expression of experience.

Men At Peace is a creative ethnography framed by poetry and creative expression as therapy. The creative process is forever being informed by the audience or the observer. The continual development and reflection of Men at Peace as a creative ethnography includes speculations of ideal future visions about how the outcomes and responses to this creative ethnography will serve social change in regards to the freedom and democratic expression of gender identification and experience.

If an ethnography is seen as a departure from alterity (Taylor, 2011), then I see Men at Peace as a paradox of suspending gendered alterity through the interview process, while addressing the culturally reinforced polarities of gendered experience.

My impetus for embarking on this research project was to inspire social change through creative expression and storytelling. This social change happens through creating a public awareness of similarities between self and others in social settings. Seeing self in others requires the researcher to first embrace the fractured and broadening landscape of the postmodern (Taylor, 2011). This acceptance of a bricolage of multiple realities within one social reality is paramount in order to unify the pieces of individuation within gender conditioning. As a researcher, I have had to mediate myself through the above-mentioned paradox of ethnographic research; being other while investigating a unified field of potential “sameness” or commonality of gender conditioning.

Most qualitative investigations are excursions in hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the science of meaning-making and knowledge production that involves reading a text or studying a field so that layers of intention and meaning can be understood (Josselson, 2013). *Men at Peace* is based on a long-lasting subconscious inquiry that has more recently driven both the research and development of the creative project of digital storytelling.

Some reflective processes used in my ethnography to interrogate my own intentions and approach within this process were instigated through questions such as, 'What of your own life experience are you bringing to the study?', 'How do you expect to feel about the people you will talk to?', and 'How do you expect them to feel toward you?' These reflective questions floated between my conscious and my subconscious. They helped me to position my self in the research field and assist a greater understanding of influences, limitations, and opportunities I have offered and been offered in the research field. The question regarding feelings of researcher / researched inspires the associations gender identifications may have toward each other.

It is the literacy of our feelings and emotions in relation to the digital that can potentially make a difference to the political (Karatzogianni & Kuntsman, 2012). I also see this relationship as valid within embodied spaces. The more emotionally aware we are, the more we can understand where the origins and nuances of this emotional awareness come from. The origins of emotional nuances can be diverse and difficult to understand but oftentimes, this awareness sheds light and creates space to see through the social and cultural conditioning as an impetus to emotional reaction and response to the environment.

My emotional process as a researcher have created more awareness of my own prejudices and discrimination. Within the social sciences, there is a growing emphasis on autobiography and personal narratives, allowing the researcher to locate themselves

within the research (Lumsden, 2009). Through my creative, poetic, and emotional responses to subjects in the field, I was able to speculate on gender conditioning for females and views toward the “other” or men. Emotional awareness must exist in mutuality between researcher and research subjects for the wealth of information to be available, translatable, and digestible to others. The relatability of information must first be represented between the researcher and the researched. There was an implicit unspoken understanding between myself and research subjects that we, as gendered beings, represented a collective and polarised conditioning.

“If your data presentation isn’t giving/telling a history, what is it doing?” This was a question posed to me by my supervisor regarding my intentions for using the poetic structure as a location for my research findings by presenting creative digital versions of my interviews. I perceive this question as a foundational reflective distillation of intention behind presenting findings creatively. This inquiry enthused a self-interrogation to how I would use poetry to present research findings. The presentation will be a place in which I can practise the reframing of experience through a creative recollection of memory. This informs how I would like to facilitate creative expression for future embodied places. The nature of ethnographic poetry, like many other creative mediums, is that it is temporally situated and yet also always temporally in motion depending on the viewer (Lee, 2016). The gift of these various temporalities existing within one creative expression or poem is something I would like to explore further as the project evolves.

Through my ongoing investigation into masculinities from a female and feminist perspective, I have been able to understand the relevance of Bourdieu’s field theory (Hilgers & Mangez, 2014); understand gender as a social construction and journalism as a semi-autonomous social field in social space. The ethnographic research process is a type of new journalism, allowing for a full array of human experience without external investment, external influence, self-censorship, or political fears associated with not belonging. Bourdieu’s theory says that positions in a field are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or capital: economic, social, and cultural

capital which can all be transformed into symbolic capital (De Vuyst & Raeymackers, 2017).

I have witnessed how the possibility of co-curation within a creative poetic storytelling space will be influenced and changeable through viewer observation of and response to the material and how the readers see creativity as capital. New digital media and alternative forms of independent journalism offer a new sense of public space, reconciling tensions between horizontal democratic spaces and the heavy-hand of commercial invested curation (Prebble, Maalson & McLean, 2017). One question I have asked myself throughout this process is; how can *Men at Peace* reconcile to include creative therapeutic expression in democratic media spaces for men? Presenting this data through ethnographic poetry is a start to answer this question.

Only a few interview subjects chose anonymity though for consistency and for a sense of a collective voice, I decided all quotations would be anonymous in public presentation. *Men at Peace* bridges literal discussion with abstract creative communication. If ethnographic poetry reflects social or cultural perspectives, they must also reflect the possible change within social and cultural structures. This is precisely the intention of a creative representation; social change through alternative meaning making. I reflect that *Men at Peace* must be continually reassessed for its equalising feminist and democratic research foundations.

To remain “on the pulse” with my own research inquiries and to successfully uphold the intention for presenting data through ethnographic poetry, part of my ethnography has been taking part in my own informal and self-reflective process. If feminism can be described as activism that aims to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression (Prebble, Maalson & McLean, 2017), then my feminist approach to *Men at Peace* requires an ethnographic stance to use the awareness of my own sociopolitical gender positioning and my field preconceptions and misconceptions as implicitly informing

material. There is an awareness of possibly contributing to equalising forces that do not further polarise or add to gender oppression. Early on in the interview process, I became aware that gender was never absent from the field. I had to remind myself that some places or contexts may be more overtly gendered than others (Pini, 2011). Gender identity plays a critical role for a female researcher in masculinities field research. Other identifiable aspects such as social class, age, and ethnicity need to be considered as well as gender identity. These sociopolitical identifiable aspects were also limitations as I attracted less demographic diversity than desired.

During the data collection for Men at Peace, it became more apparent how to read the interviewee in accordance with approaching the choice of an interview space; when to suggest a space, when to choose a space and when to hand the decision making power over to the subject. Female ethnographers often appear to be more aware of their sexual status and its impact on field research and relationships than their male colleagues (Lumsden, 2009). In my interview process, I have observed myself doing this subconsciously. Once, when I was leaving the house to interview a man, I changed from a skirt to pants at the last minute, mentally assessing my memory of the “type” of masculinity and sexuality that this interview subject seemed to exude and what “wearing a nice skirt” to an interview might mean to him. As a relatively inexperienced ethnographer, I am still unsure about how to balance this self-reflexivity in regards to my autoethnographic awareness and authenticity.

Ideologically and socially, Western Societies still do not view the position of men and women as equal. Specifically considering the inequalities in the workplace within capital systems and otherwise, a female or feminine researcher retains an implicit inferior status even while doing a job which in social class terms is structurally superior or equal to that of her male informants (Lumsden, 2009). These sorts of inequalities are part of remaining aware of self and my gender in the field. I have learned that as a researcher, I

should not automatically view or assume that these gender inequalities will distract or impede on my research intentions. In some cases, the suggestion of “woman” as “lesser” enhanced the “saviour” archetype in some men, inspiring them to “help my cause”. Of course, none of these dynamics were addressed or articulated but acknowledged in the felt.

The overarching desire for individuals to belong and contribute to a collective space adds to the richness of my personal research process. This creative ethnography holds and embodies the stories of relational reconfigurations that are complex and complicated and at times considered outside of the norm. People are pulled toward the centre, into the mainstream, into belonging to society. Those who do not exhibit these “acceptable” qualifications are pushed further away from the centre, made more deviant, placed under critical surveillance, and considered to be expendable or obsolete bodies of knowledge. There is an undeniable desire for all to grow into the centre, for acceptance and belonging; to appear to be “normal”. In creative ethnographies, the materiality of lives being lived calls researchers to consider how one might navigate from the margins toward the centre and back again through the material, struggling and trying to belong. A creative ethnography may constitute and may be constituted by the affective and endearing materiality of lives being lived (Lee, 2016).

For the men involved, there is a sense of validation in being well listened-to for the duration of the interview period. This speaking and listening process (Interview, discussion or storytelling), is a part of enacting collective belonging as the creative ethnography or collection of poems represents; part of the becoming and belonging. Being heard and accepted is all too rare in human life. I have witnessed the hunger or thirst to be listened to. Some men tried to organise second meetings to give more research information. I sensed their desire to have the space to talk; seeking permission and space granted through the research framework. This awareness again reinforced my original research assumptions and intentions, which focuses on the need to create

more opportunities and space for men to express themselves. Greater personal integration ensues from telling one's story in an extended, reflective way. This argument aligns with my own previous personal and professional experience with family, friends, in therapist/ assistant/ facilitator positions in the health sciences, and as a host for a monthly poetry/ spoken word event. Many use the interview process as an opportunity to explore and orientate the aspects of themselves that have perhaps been in the shadows or rejected by social or gender norms (Josselson, 2013).

As researchers, ethnographers or interviewers, we have no strict manual to follow and no precise guidelines to orchestrate our research engagements and interactions, ensuring a mutually beneficial outcome (Taylor, 2011). I have come to realise that this is why it is important to see the research and creative process as mutual learning and teaching experience. The mutuality of speaking, listening and observing the field together, allows questions and answers to penetrate a shared intimate space that is also reflective of a wider social space. Men have reported that the resonance and reflections after being interviewed have provided them clarity around their own personal circumstances, gender based work dynamics, or broader philosophical inquiries. Interviews can be an experience of getting to know our strengths and weaknesses in listening and asking intentional questions. I learned a lot about interview etiquette, which invited a more truthful and honest expression from interviewees. Giving adequate time to participants always helped, as did reassuring them repetitively that "there is no right answer" when noticing the trend of questioning 'normalcy' or 'rightness'.

Ethos in research integrity is suggested, implicit, and assumed. The intimacy and relationship I have experienced while undertaking this research has validated what is known as the considerable divergence between how sociological research had actually been done and what was found in textbooks (Lumsden, 2009). There were instances of understanding deeper layers of people I thought I knew well (Taylor, 2011), and others I

had made judgements and had preconceptions about. These surprises were successes in my implicit self reflective stance; watching my own conditioning, gender assumptions, opposing views, opinions, and other presumptions. Digging beneath the surface of gender conditioning enlightened and reinvigorated the need to step carefully and ethically while delving into the personal and emotional lives of others. In each interview, while digging beneath the surface of various individuals' awareness around their own conditioning reinforced my research intention and spurred me to keep excavating my own conditioning and ways of thinking about my own gender. We must not be naive about deception and self-deception in research interaction, even when we are in interaction with our friends, our lovers, our superiors, our partners, our children, our parents (Wengraf, 2001).

Interview subjects must know that they can only represent themselves accurately if they try. With an awareness of self-accountability and self-responsibility of being represented in democratic forms of the interview process, interview subjects must consent to the interview process with the knowledge that they are representing themselves. If the interview subject is engaged in a way that communicates the truth of their personal integrity then they can be confident that they have contributed to the circulation of the observer's affect when viewing the outcome. This self-representation within a collective voice demands an openness to change; a move away from often bankrupt liberal representations of the individual within more authoritarian variants of hierarchical capitalism that benefits some and serves few (Karatzogianni & Kuntsman, 2012). Therefore, the researcher and the subjects within the field work together toward a similar vision of expressive freedom and self representation.

Creative ethnographers have the potential to allow for new forms of exploration, strategic myth-making, and myth debunking (Karatzogianni & Kuntsman, 2012). As a researcher and a human being, to be a part of this change through connection and interaction with "other" is exciting and indeed pressured. The pressure is alleviated

through the knowledge that the project is the result of collaboration and co-curation through mutual participation. Creating new collective myths through social and creative innovation always needs to be done collaboratively, addressing societal problems by involving stakeholders from across the board; individuals, government, education bodies, and corporate bodies, confirming that the cross-pollinating effect of creative storytelling platforms is essential for innovative and collaborative social culture (Al De Moor, 2017), allowing awareness of alternative forms of cultural and social experience and knowledge as capital (De Vuyst & Raeymackers, 2017). As well as understanding alternative forms of capital, I have also come to appreciate the interpersonal process of the interview as simply an interaction between two people to expand knowledge and understanding, potentially transferable toward a broader audience. This awareness gave me a new appreciation of the hesitancy to commodify and measure experience. In this way, the same collective democracy and appreciation for individuation happens without the commodification or measurement of experience and introspection.

I have had to continuously remind myself that creative expression is not a separate sphere to literal explanation. This reminder is pertinent when understanding the responsibilities that go with representing gender issues through a creative ethnography, especially while being conscious of not perpetuating social and political discrimination when it comes to capacity to communicate reality. Creative ethnographies allow discursive and improvisational opportunities as a communal entanglement of physical and immaterial objects, ideas, practices, and things (Prebble, Maalson & McLean, 2017). The malleable and merged nature of communal and creative expressive spaces became apparent when I held the discussion group whilst reflecting on the feedback of the discussion group and individual interviews. This feedback was noticed in pre and post-discussion questionnaires and were important to re-empathize with interview subjects in their empowerment of self in expressive spaces, reworking emotional geographies through shared experience (Prebble, Maalson & McLean, 2017).

Through my experience inquiring within the political and emotional gender paradigms, I see feminist ideologies at play. Modern digital feminist efforts are seen to be 'redoing feminism for a digital age'. This can translate to creative representations such as ethnographic poetry or creative ethnography. This shift of feminist paradigms assisted through digital platforms is done through working through, making visible, and re-signifying central tensions in contemporary feminism, as well as the precarity of feminism itself in neoliberalism (Prebble, Maalson & McLean, 2017). It is important to use feminist discourse to advocate for equal human rights but also to interrogate evolving feminist theories. I have realised that the presence of modern digital feminist domains are important to keep watch of political underpinnings as focal points for gender-related issues and a way of potentiating creativity. In this way, we can set the compass so that feminist action will not be set up to specifically achieve gender equality on all fronts but more to combat racism, class elitism and imperialism to end multiple forms of oppression through the acknowledgement of shared experience through intersecting demographics. (Prebble, Maalson & McLean, 2017)

Feminist movements are taking advantage of, and emerging from creative digital spaces (Prebble, Maalson & McLean, 2017). This research and the development of Men at Peace is a self-serving endeavor that has allowed me further self-awareness and an avenue to exercise my feminist desires within academia and the creative arts. I do not and have never claimed to communicate the finality or completion of this project nor the essence of having it "all figured out" in regards to creating an ongoing inquiry using creative expression platforms for diversifying views of masculinity. Discourses and counter-discourses have accompanied feminist action since its inception (Prebble, Maalson & McLean, 2017). Being in the process of holding the tension between discourses and counter-discourses is paramount to personal, professional, and scholarly growth and expansion in a gender-sensitive field.

## Chapter 6

### Into the Future

With opportunities already presenting themselves, there is curiosity, fluidity, and openness of how Men at Peace may contribute to further research, career, and social change. So far, I have been invited to speak on my research findings at an all women's event called *The Returning*. The time slot for my presentation fell on International Women's Day. *The Returning* is a two-day event that aims at creating space and education for women to empower themselves through female-only interaction, co-learning, and co-creation; <https://www.thereturning.com.au> Before the event, I met with the founder and organiser of an all male event similar to The Returning called Nature In Man to organise a communication activity between the participants of both events. Being a female researcher in masculinities, I knew that my perspectives, findings, and way of communicating would be valuable to some of the participants of *The Returning* and vice versa for *Nature In Man*. Together, we created a series of simple questions aimed at women or the feminine that men could answer on paper.

I spoke about my research from a personal and academic perspective. I spoke to my intentions and why I started Men at Peace. Similar to my samples of randomly generated ethnographic poetry, I had cut a series of evocative and insightful segments from my interviews and explained the social and gender-related significance to these parts. Afterward, we read out the answers to the above questions from participants of *Nature In Man*, then sat and wrote answers to the same set of questions aimed toward men or the masculine.

The presentation and exercises were received very well. Afterward, many women approached me, mentioning that the presentation and related exercises were powerful in helping them understand their own barriers against communicating with and understanding men or the masculine or the gender polarities within themselves.

Since COVID-19, I have not had ample opportunity to participate in many more in person events like these.

Another opportunity was two twenty-four-year-old male documentary filmmakers who are making a documentary series about male rites of passage, asking for consultation on their documentary development and creative process. After our initial consultation, both men continued to seek out my advice and perspectives, enthusiastic to read interview data, hear about the ethnographic experience, and read this dissertation, to allow them a thorough and educated approach when developing their documentary.P

PBB Media is an independent media channel I run with two others. I have been able to use my scope to engage in collaborations with more male contributors. PBB media is a media journalism project focussed on maternity health advocacy, positively informing and educating parents on their rights to health choices and avenues of care within maternity care; <https://www.pbbmedia.org> With this experience of research into masculinities and men's mental health, I have been able to engage more men and fathers into conversation and collaborations, to better support and acknowledge the father's journey so that they are better able to support their partners and family. One example is engaging Steven Kennedy, founder of Birthing Dads; [Birthing Dads - Birth Partner. Men at Birth. Childbirth Educationbirthingdads.org](https://www.birthingdads.org) for an interview on our podcast [https://www.spreaker.com/show/pregnancy\\_birth\\_and\\_beyond](https://www.spreaker.com/show/pregnancy_birth_and_beyond) about his experience in advocating for fathers to become more educated as birth support after his own traumatic birth and post birth experience. Afterwards, we organised a Zoom/ Facebook live event, where Steven shared an hour of his education for fathers to be. This segment had thousands of views and positive feedback. During Birth Trauma Awareness week, we hosted an online panel that featured Steven as a host. According to the engagement statistics of our podcast, episodes, and interviews to do with fatherhood, men and masculinities rate the highest for downloads so far. This shows a need and interest for male focussed information.

From hosting and witnessing the positive effects of The Temple of Words poetry nights, and seeing the realisations spurred from facilitating recent female only embodied writing circles, in the future, I aim to let this research lead into hosting more creative writing and speaking spaces that explore our social and gender conditioning, and how we see bodies and gender in social spaces.

Men at Peace is a continual research process represented through the development and existence of poetry from the field. Having seen the positive effect of men's participation in interviews and the discussion group, my intention continues to be reaffirmed; there is a demand for purposeful expressive spaces where men can gather to consume, observe, interact with, and contribute experience through story and creativity. The research purpose has aided the enthusiasm and willing engagement of men. Through informal feedback from non-male observers, Men at Peace acts as an example that will benefit every person and their gendered presumptions and polarised view points of the gender spectrum. As concluded in the reflective chapter, Men at Peace is ongoing and through this continual process is the proof of a truly democratic and changeable discursive and creative platform, co-curated by initiator/ researcher and participants in the field.

## Appendix

Appendix is available in the folder in Google Drive in the introduction.

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