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### Men's emotions: Heteromascularity, emotional reflexivity, and intimate relationships

**Citation for published version:**

Holmes, M 2015, 'Men's emotions: Heteromascularity, emotional reflexivity, and intimate relationships', *Men and Masculinities*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 176-192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X14557494>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1177/1097184X14557494](https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X14557494)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Men and Masculinities

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

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## **Heteromascularity, emotional reflexivity and intimate relationships**

### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the underresearched topic of how masculinity relates to emotional forms of caring within heterosexual relationships. Both scholarly and common sense thinking, often present heterosexual male partners as unable and/or unwilling to do emotion work, leaving women burdened with this task. However, contemporary relational complexity increasingly requires emotional reflexivity. Such reflexivity entails interpretations of one's own and others' emotions, and acting in light of those interpretations. The question here is to what extent and how that emotional reflexivity might effect a reshaping of heteromascularity towards more caring forms of emotionality? Drawing on interviews with heterosexual couples in distance relationships, it is argued that emotional reflexivity may produce a variety of ways of relationally gendering emotions. Those who seem to adhere to ideas of men as emotionally restricted may claim tactile forms of emotional expression. However, there may be limitations to these forms in certain circumstances and this may see a reflexive reorientation of heteromascularity emotionalities towards more verbal forms of support. The point of seeking to illustrate that masculinity and emotionality are open to such reflexive shifts is to debunk essentialist views of gendered emotionality which undermine efforts to achieve greater gender equality in intimate life.

Keywords: Emotion, intimacy, gender, reflexivity, heteromascularity

## **Introduction**

Common sense thinking on emotions tends to characterize women as emotionally expert and men as rather hopeless at emotional forms of caring (Duncombe and Marsden 1998; Whitehead 2002: 156). Whilst the role of anger in men's violence against their women partners has been well documented (Mullaney 2007, Robinson 1996; Robinson and Hockey 2011), there is limited scholarly literature on heterosexual men's engagement in loving forms of emotionality within intimate relationships with women (Lorentzena 2007; Robertson and Monaghan 2012: 158). Heterosexual men have emotions that are not always violent and can exercise emotions other than anger (Hearn 1993). This may sound an obvious claim to make, but there is remarkably little research on masculine emotionality. Here the task is to discuss to what extent emotional reflexivity is associated with heteromascularity; that is with masculinity as done within heterosexual relationships. Emotional reflexivity is defined as relationally reflecting and acting on interpretations of our own and others' emotions and as describing the way in which emotions are central to how we make our way through the world (Author reference 2010a, 2011; Burkitt 2012). Norbert Elias (2000/1939) deftly illustrates that social processes are key to understanding such emotional navigation.

Thus this paper begins by examining debates about changes in emotionality, which trace increasing restraint, although questions remain about the gendered nature of emotional 'cooling'. Key scholars such as Elias (2000/1930), Wouters (2007; 2004), Hochschild (1983) and Stearns (2007) all trace an historical process of increasing emotional regulation, with some variations on whether this tends towards more or less formal behaviour. Within these processes changing

relations between the sexes necessitate greater emotional reflexivity and thus shift heteromasculine forms of emotionality. Men are usually thought emotionally inexperienced and the emotion work of relationships left to women. However, it is important to recognize that men reflect on, and are capable of learning how to provide varying forms of emotional support to their heterosexual partners. A qualitative study of couples in distance relationships<sup>1</sup> is drawn on to see how this gendered emotional reflexivity might work, and to raise questions about what may be required for it to have more impact on gender equality.

### **Heteromascularity and emotional cooling**

Norbert Elias argues that, within European societies from the eleventh until the nineteenth century, both men and women were expected to exercise increasing emotional restraint (Elias 2000/1939). This civilizing process entails socialization, rationalization, individualization and pacification of bodies and emotions. Extended interdependence between individuals and shifts in power between social groups occur as courtly society succeeds the dominance of warriors and is in turn succeeded by the triumph of moneyed merchants. The emergence of rationalized modernity brings more rules around emotional expression and these rules are evidence of individualizing tendencies which see people shift away from defining their emotions in communal terms and instead developing a sense of privacy and shame. Power and control of individuals are no longer exercised primarily through external, violent attacks, or the fear of them, but by internalized self-restraint. Foucault (1990) provides a similar description of a shift from sovereign power exercised through force to modern diffuse forms of power/knowledge

where norms are internalized by individuals; but he is critical of the Freudian ‘repressive hypothesis’ which informs Elias’s position. Power does not always say ‘no’, but can produce individuals and the relations between them. The resulting emotional trends are thus more ambivalent<sup>2</sup> than in the original Elisian view and can continue to produce conflict, confusion and some relaxing of regulation, as well as greater restraint (cf. Burkitt 1997). However, Foucault’s approach is overly discursive and does not deal well with emotions and bodies as they are produced in relations with others. Thus instead of Freud or Foucault, Symbolic Interactionist approaches and sociological theories of reflexivity are developed to examine the crucial part emotions play in deliberations and (inter)actions. What emerges is a profoundly social model of emotions and reflexivity that can deal with uncertain emotionality.

If emotional ambivalence is to be understood, more attention is needed to what extent the civilizing process involves a gendering of emotional reflexivity. Elias (2000/1939: 142-160) discusses the relations between the sexes, but concentrates on the secrecy and shame which gradually emerges around the discussion and doing of heterosex. He outlines the slow development of barriers in speaking about sexual acts to children and the shift away from practices such as communal witnessing of the consummation of a marriage towards more private sequestering of sexual acts. By the nineteenth century both men and women are expected to exercise greater self-restraint over their sexual drives, albeit not equally so. Elias maintains that bourgeois dominated society condemns extramarital relations, but that straying by husbands was ‘usually judged more leniently than the same offence by women’ (Elias 2000/1939: 157). However, the associated emotional changes are only briefly noted in terms of how ‘[t]he pattern of self-restraint imposed on the people of bourgeois society through their occupational work was

in many respects different from the pattern imposed on the emotional life by the functions of court society'. Bourgeois life is taken to 'demand and produce greater self-restraint than courtly functions' (Elias 2000/1939: 156). However, this restraint is discussed in terms of new norms about the need for secrecy and privacy around sexual relationships. Emotions are only briefly mentioned and then only the shame, embarrassment and fear that become associated with heterosexual acts.

From the twentieth century onwards more relaxed regulation of emotions supposedly occurred as status differences between the sexes lessened. Cas Wouters (2007, 2004, 1995) notes a lessening of clear demarcation between people of different status in the face of the changing forms of interdependence between individuals that arise in societies based around making money. As divisions between the sexes break down, self-restraint and good manners become more important in maintaining power. Such changes are assisted by feminist movement. Greater questioning of social rules and norms around bodily and emotional expression emerges. Thus feeling rules (Hochschild 1983) may become unclear and people may struggle to decide where social dividing lines now lie (Author 2004). Hochschild's useful conceptualization of emotions as managed according to feeling rules therefore needs revising, especially in the context of changing 'sexual scripts' (Gagnon and Simon 2009/1973) which produce a degree of uncertainty in heterosexual men about how to 'do' emotions within a partially detraditionalized intimate sphere where some expectations that they care have emerged (Lloyd 1984: 85; Rogers 2005).

Advice to men may encourage a masculinizing of intimacy focused on rationalized control of the 'chaos' of changing structures of intimacy (Rogers 2005), but it is unclear whether this actually

plays out within heterosexual relationships (Seidman 1991: 6). There are other possibilities in finding that a 'kind of emotional re-education becomes necessary if we [men] are to learn to care' (Seidler 1994: 147). Women may be the ones who require their male partners to learn to do more emotion work (Duncombe and Marsden 1998). The problem here is assuming, as Seidler does in his earlier work, that 'men' are a clear and cohesive group who do masculinity. This fails to recognize that not all experiences of masculinity are had by biological males (Peterson 1994: 91; see also Beasley 2012; Connell 1995; Robertson and Monaghan 2012: 156; Whitehead 2002). More recently Seidler (2007) has tried to attend to non-dominant masculinities and varieties of experiences of masculinity, but the performance of masculinities is still portrayed in terms of a refusal of emotions or 'a way of concealing inner emotional toil' (Seidler 2007: 13) rather than considering how masculinities may involve doing different kinds of emotionality. It is important to examine how changing social conditions and ideas about gender and intimacy can produce reflexivity, but a reflexivity more reliant on emotions as (inter)actions are less regulated by traditional practices and actors are more and more faced with novel situations and new ways of relating (Author 2010). A capacity for emotionalized reflexivity is not equally distributed and to what extent is it gendered?

### **Masculinity, emotion work and intimacy**

Sociological research continues to indicate that emotion work is strongly associated with femininity, meaning that 'women' do most of it (Duncombe and Marsden 1993; Erickson 1993; 2005), while 'men' who engage in it are likely to feel feminized and their existence is thought

not to threaten hegemonic masculinity (Campbell and Carroll 2007; Hanlon 2009). Gender imbalance has also not been shifted by late twentieth century advice books suggesting that women adopt a 'cooler' emotional approach to intimacy (Hochschild 2003). The assumption is that men are still constrained by forms of (hetero)masculinity which define men as public, emotionally detached creatures under control of their reason, in contrast to women who symbolize the embodied and emotional realm of the private (Lloyd 1984; Kimmel 2005: 72; Seidler 1994: 4). When men do appear as actors within the private sphere, they seem to have left reason at the doorstep and to be at the mercy of overwhelming sexual desire or anger (Peterson 1998: 92; Whitehead 2002: 176). If they appear as less violent villains at home, then they are usually discussed as incapable emotional actors (Cancian 1984; Peterson 1994; Rutherford 1999). This ignores the diversity of ways of doing masculinity within the private sphere, and essentialises gender as a static property of males and females rather than as done by individuals in relation to others (Campbell and Carroll 2007; Connell 1995; 2000).

Some men adopt caring roles sometimes, and are willing to disclose the strong emotions they experience in these roles (Campbell and Carroll 2007: 500; Clarke 2005: 397-400; Hanlon 2009; Lorentzena 2007; Rutherford 1999; Seal and Ehrhardt 2003). 'Men' are no longer as confined to the instrumental public role Parsons and Bales (1956) identified as complimenting 'women's' private emotionally expressive role. Recent research has noted that for young heterosexual men, in particular, gender is done in ways that combine more 'traditional' forms of masculinity with a newer cultural emphasis on emotional expression within intimate relationships (Allen 2007; Patrick and Beckenbach 2009). This is arguably part of a convergence between heterosexual and non-heterosexual forms of intimacy (Weeks et al. 2001; Roseneil 2005), although some claim



that gay culture still tends to separate sex from emotional intimacy (Hurley 2003). A 'separation of love from sex' may also be part of much heteromascularity (Monaghan and Robertson 2012: 141). However, the limited scholarly attention given to masculinities, emotions and intimate relationships has tended to focus on relationships between gay men, on fatherhood, or on the anger, fear and hatred that men bring to their relationships with women. In the case of some pro-feminist writers this involved a tendency to locate the problems hegemonic ideals of masculinity raise for (emotional) intimacy within the male psyche, instead of within material and political conditions, power relations (Peterson 1994: 92-4; Connell 2000: 23) and processes of change. Such writers may adhere to forms of identity politics for good political reasons such as combatting male violence, but identity politics have long been considered problematic within feminism and can limit our understandings of gender and social change (Beasley 2012). Feminists must beware of temptations to enjoy belittling men's emotional competence, as doing so reinforces gender inequalities (Jackson and Scott 1997). It applies to emotionality what Lynn Segal (1997: 215) says of sexuality, that it is important to avoid 'colluding in men's defensive denial of their own confusion and doubts' and thus 'concealing that which we most need to reveal and understand'. A sociological and feminist approach is applied to establish how diverse forms of heteromascularity are made and remade through emotionally reflexive practices.

The concept of gendered emotional reflexivity can help understand heteromascularity if feelings are seen as produced by and producing embodied relations with others. This avoids essentializing the category of 'men'. There is almost no precedent for thinking about masculinities and heterosexual intimacy in the light of emotional reflexivity. If emotional reflexivity is about reflecting on, embodying and enacting emotions then it is an ongoing process. Stephen

Whitehead (2002: 156) speaks of this in personal terms, confessing that it ‘has taken several decades of reflexivity to get to a stage where I do not *automatically* go into defence mode when faced with my own emotional inadequacies’. He argues that this is because ‘dominant discourses of masculinity do not sit easy with notions of emotional literacy and maturity’ (Whitehead 2002: 175). Connell (2000: 24-6; 1987) however, takes emotionality to not simply be an individual matter but defines emotional relations as one of four key elements of the social structure of gender. He, like Elias, draws on Freud when he comes to consider these emotional relations. I would argue that there are better models for understanding heteromascularity and emotions in sociological terms. Some degree of detraditionalization requires increased reflexivity, including some men appearing to exercise greater reflexivity about their masculinity in relation to their intimate lives (Duncan and Dowsett 2010), but people do continue to connect emotionally. Symbolic Interactionism can be used to understand how embodied forms of emotional reflexivity can make and unmake relations with others (Author 2010). The limitations of such an approach can be ameliorated by adding Elias’s view of long term historical processes, and his attention to the forms of emotionality produced by shifting social relations of power. Emotional reflexivity is central, not only in how individuals make their way through the world, but in how the social world and social inequalities are reproduced and sometimes challenged (Author 2010). How and why ‘men’ might develop a capacity for emotional reflexivity, or resist it, and its implications for gendering processes and gender equality will now be explored by looking at heterosexual men who participated in a small study on distance relationships.

## Methods

I focus on ten men in heterosexual relationships who were interviewed jointly with their partners between 2002 and early 2005. These interviews are drawn from Economic and Social Research Council funded research on distance relationships. Personal contacts at a range of UK universities were used to recruit couples in dual-career, dual-residence distance relationships (in which at least one partner was an academic). Questionnaire responses were collected from twenty-four couples and fourteen of these couples were interviewed. In two cases male partners did not wish to participate in the interviews, and there were two interviews with lesbian couples. In 2012 and 2013 follow-up email interviews were conducted with eleven of the couples interviewed (see Author 2010 for more details). It is thus a small, but rich qualitative study aimed to examine experiences of distance relating. Face-to-face interviews were recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed. Ethical procedures were carefully followed and particular care has been taken with preserving anonymity, given the relative smallness of the academic community in the UK. As well as changing participants' names, place names have been given the forms 'Histown' and 'Hertown'. This small sample cannot produce any generalisations about 'men' and the kind of reflexivity they exercise, but it can be used illustratively to examine how these particular men's intimate relationships might involve practices which can be understood as embodied and relational forms of emotional reflexivity.

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>Man's Age Group</i>	<i>Years in relationship</i>	<i>Years living apart</i>
Ben	Meg	31-35	11	6

Luke	Catherine	31-35	0.25	0.25
Liam	Kirsten	26-30	2-3	2
Allan	Jane	Over 51	24-34	6
Martin	Lucy	Over 51	24-26	15
Hugh	Claire	41-50	10-12	9
James	Gwen	31-35	9-10	2
Andrew	Isabel	26-30	6	1
Mark	Joanne	31-35	10-11	8
Joe	Margaret	36-40	12	5

These couples are not representative of dual-career distance relaters, although they can be useful in ‘testing’ individualization theories (Beck and Beck Gernsheim 2002) because such individualization could be expected to be most obvious amongst the more privileged. On the other hand, the white, middle class, well-educated heterosexual men discussed in this paper are supposedly less likely to suffer from ‘affective deprivations’ and thus more likely to have the emotional and other resources (Baker et al. 2004: 8-9) to prompt them to reflexively reorient themselves towards more caring. However, a capacity for emotional reflexivity is not necessarily aligned with class privilege (Author 2010). Working class men may also find themselves ‘forced [by circumstances] to dig down deeply into their emotions and find that they have what it takes to share with people and to bond with people and to help people around them’ (Declan, Construction worker trade union quoted in Hanlon 2009: 196; see also Montes 2013). Do the

circumstances of distance relating force the men I interviewed towards similar kinds of emotional reflexivity?

### **Discussion: Heteromasculine emotional reflexivity in distance relationships**

It would be possible to use the data I have gathered to confirm ideas about heteromascularity as involving emotional closure and an unwillingness to reveal their problems to others. A few of the men interviewed said that they did not like talking about their problems. James provides a fairly typical example when I ask him and Gwen whether they talk to each other about their problems:

JAMES: Gwen's much more open with that than I am ... it's something that I've got from my parents maybe where you and your mum are quite open about everything, where the, I know my parents are not open about things at all. Whether that's a knock on from that but you've got to weedle things out of me I think where, you come out with a problem straight away I'm more sort of a, I'll sit on it and either do nothing about it or worry about it

MARY: Do you not find it helpful to talk about your problems?

JAMES: Erm (pause) I don't know really, in the end I do, if it is anybody it's Gwen that I talk to. I think some of the time is that is just sit and think them out in my own head, ...

Here James describes his reluctance to share his problems and how he prefers to ‘think them out’ in his own head. The following section includes almost identical quotes from Ben and Mark. However, as we will see, and indeed as is evident in the quote from James above, these men show that they are able to reflect on their emotionality and make alterations to it to enhance intimacy within their relationships (see Duncan and Dowsett 2010; Duncombe and Marsden 1998). It is noticeable that these three men all say that they are much more likely to share their problems with their partner than with others. Also, these and other men in the study may not like talking about their problems, but they mention other ways in which they express emotions, a few of them seem to have an ‘emotional disposition’ (Burkitt 2014: 60) oriented not just to deeds rather than words (Robertson and Monaghan 2012: 160) but specifically to touch.

### *Tactile heteromasculine emotionality*

There is some talk, by some of the men, of touch as crucial in communicating emotionally with their partner. This emerges, for example in a discussion with Ben:

BEN: Well we talk about work a little bit. Probably you more than me, just because you’re chattier about such things than I am, [slightly pathetically] I just tend to be a bit of an emotional cripple. [Laughter] ... I don’t think it’s got anything to do with the fact that we’re in a distance relationship.

Meg asks why he thinks that and I ask him why he doesn't talk about his problems? He is reluctant to answer, but eventually says:

BEN: I don't know, I'm just not a, I don't tend to talk to anybody about my problems; I tend to work them through myself I guess. ... And often I've worked them through so much in my own head, by the time someone to talk to like you [Meg] comes along, then it seems it, I can't be bothered even saying it because they're all sort of, I've figured it all out, or got bored with it.

A little later I return to this issue again:

MARY: Well do you think that you demonstrate closeness in other ways, rather than through talking?

BEN: Yeah, yeah. I'm not a big talker, I'm a big cuddler.

MEG: You're a big cuddler. You are a big cuddler.

BEN: I'm quite tactile, always have been. Although, curiously not with other people....

Here, the initial picture of Ben as emotionally reserved, or in his own terminology 'an emotional cripple', fits with sociological critiques of masculinity as involving some form of rejection of emotional closeness. However, this picture is upset by his statement that he is a 'big cuddler'.

Cancian (1984) is perhaps right to argue that love has been feminized to the extent that a feminine emphasis on verbal forms of emotionality dominates discourses about intimate relating. Ben, Mark and James seem to feel that they do lack emotional expertise because they do not feel comfortable with these verbal forms of emotionality. However, they admit to being quite tactile, at least with their partners, if not with other people. Similarly Mark says:

MARK: I do try and let you know how I feel but I don't. It's not the release I suppose that [I hope]. I certainly wouldn't talk to anyone else about problems other than Joanne. Joanne's the only one that I would talk to.

Mark says he “prefer[s] ignoring problems really (laughs)”. However, Joanne notes that he is very affectionate in terms of hugs and reassuring forms of touch. This is confirmed in my field notes for the interview, where I recorded that Mark spent a lot of time unobtrusively stroking Joanne's elbow, in what I took to be a gesture of reassurance.

Hugh also seems to indicate a preference for more tactile ways of showing his love, during a discussion with Claire and myself about the importance of talking on the phone each evening, which Claire said was “nice to sort of end your day”. Hugh differs, saying that “it was difficult cause [it's] not the same as just physically giving someone a hug”. Martin also regrets that “there's no way to resolve things y'know sexually or by y'know by physical contact” when apart. This suggests a rather more ambivalent attitude to the relationship between sex and emotions than typically thought to characterise hegemonic forms of heteromascularity (Monaghan and Robertson 2012). These men do not necessarily revert to sexual forms of being



tactile, they describe other forms of touching like hugs as a form of emotional support. This might be because sex was less likely to be discussed in joint interviews with a stranger, but that does not detract from the importance all my participants gave to reassuring touches, which they missed when apart (see also Gerstel and Gross 1984: 59, 63). However, these tactile forms of emotional support are rendered problematic by distance. Some of the men talk about having to learn more verbal forms.

### *Learning verbal forms of caring*

While some of the men may appear to prefer hugs and touch to talking on the phone, they engage in reflexivity that prompts them to learn more verbal forms of emotional support. For example, Hugh and Claire spent a considerable amount of time discussing the inadequacies of maintaining intimacy via the telephone (see also Gerstel and Gross 1984: 56-60). Claire tended to think that Hugh was overemphasizing the difficulties and that apart from the occasional bad one, their phone calls “weren’t that bad”, but Hugh says he “just remember[s] some bad feelings about phone calls”. He says:

HUGH: I just remember just, coming away from phone calls, Claire’s upset and there’s nothing I can do about it , often that would be in the context of a phone call so even, I mean the number of times when I would phone back , usually I would be saying sorry because I hadn't handled something very well. This is where I remember. I know this is probably not that many occasions but I remember it as and therefore I would just be in a sense of

not really knowing how Claire was, and not through this particularly medium of the phone being able to establish whether anything was y'know whether it was getting better, whether it was getting worse.

Here Hugh describes feeling bad about calls and then calling back to try and make Claire feel better and struggling to learn to do this via the 'medium of the phone'. Luke, who is around ten years younger than Hugh, seems to be more comfortable with his capacity to offer emotional care on the telephone:

LUKE: ... we can't care for each other in the physical sense if there's issues or problems day to day at the moment but we do a hell of a good job over the telephone ... you're looking for really there is reassurance and that, if you need to, you can talk sort of thing and y'know: "so and so said this" and "how's that going to affect the future?" sort of thing and just discuss plan and ideas and

Luke elsewhere gives an example:

LUKE: And then Wednesday and I was in a position at work where, I work in an open plan office and I couldn't really continue the conversation so we kind of ended it on the basis that we don't need to go any further and I put the phone down and I felt this isn't right. I'm just not happy with this and I had to go out to run so errands at lunchtime so I just got in the car, dialed her up again it's like the company's paying I don't care and as I'm driving along we're just discussed it even further and got it all sorted. It's, I suppose you

could compare that to someone, sort of never sleep on an argument, it wasn't an argument or anything like that [IT WAS AN ARGUMENT<sup>3</sup>] but it was just an issue that we both wanted closure and hadn't got it because of [circumstances].

It is particularly difficult, participants repeatedly told me, to argue on the phone (see also Gerstel and Gross 1984: 59-60) and this perhaps explains Luke's unwillingness to admit that it was an argument. Luke is reflexive about feeling dissatisfied after a phone call and decides to call back and continue talking, to get it 'all sorted' and get 'closure'.

Luke seems more comfortable, like many younger heterosexual men, with expressing himself emotionally (Allen 2007; Patrick and Beckenbach 2009). However, it is not entirely clear that this is because he is younger than Hugh. Allan, who was nearing retirement at the time of first interview, acknowledges the importance of talking on the phone, especially as a form of "debriefing", where one "can get rid of the hassle of the day". Martin, also over fifty, indicates throughout the interview how talking things through is important for him in his relationship with Lucy. He says for example, that on the telephone they have "learnt to be very careful with each other y'know you just learn to tiptoe round ... it doesn't always work but we do each listen I think for the tone of voice [to help know how the other person is feeling]". Most of the men in the study reflected on the importance of providing more verbal forms of emotional support, given that lack of proximity made embodied forms of emotional expression impossible.

Andrew, one of the younger men, gives a very similar account of what can be read as a reflexive shift from bodily to word based forms of emotional support. When asked what caring for each other means to him and Isabel he says:

ANDREW: Well I, I mean I never thought about it as a difficulty but there's obviously a difference between being supportive of someone and being, well kind of nurturing in a broad sense if you're not there because you can't, I can't give Isabel a hug when she's feeling depressed or whatever the case may be so it's a matter of doing that by y'know be, being on the phone or sending emails or whatever. I think that's the important part if you support each other and encourage each other

Here again we see an account in which nurturing is associated with giving Isabel a hug when she feels depressed, but Andrew realizes that he can't do that if he is not there, so he needs to be on the phone or send emails to provide support and encouragement. Liam, also in a younger age group, admits that he often says "I don't want to discuss this over the phone" and says he prefers to talk face to face. However, women may prompt the men towards a shift in emotionality (Duncombe and Marsden 1998). Kirsten says Liam has got better on the phone because she said "if you want to make this relationship work you're going to have to get better on the phone because ... this is only way that we can communicate, you have to get better with it". However emotional reflexivity could lead to more disengagement with providing emotional support by telephone.

When I ask Joe and Margaret whether that feel odd if they do not talk to each other at some point during the day Joe responds by talking about the kind of emotional disjunction that has promoted he and Margaret to reduce the amount of talking on the phone that they do:

JOE: Yeah. Yeah. I think I think we would, that it would feel odd if we didn't. But then I do think actually that we kind've cut down on it. I think we sort of realized that phone conversations are quite inadequate. I think you couldn't really, we didn't feel like we could kind've do that much with them [laughs a little] sort of, because of the kind of clash of circumstances that you're in when you're in a phone conversation really, 'cause you know, there's always something kind've, for one person, something is going on, and it's very hard to time them perfectly so that you just get someone [at a good time].

Although Martin indicates above that he has learnt to interpret Lucy's emotional state from a tone of voice, he also notes that "you have to learn not to expect the other person's mood to be the same as yours. This whole business when you phone and you're down or very up and the other person isn't you can get into awful messes and we still do sometimes". Both he and Joe are indicating that there is often a disjunction of time and place that can disrupt the order-making aspects of partner relationships and produce a sense of emotional distance between couples (Gerstel and Gross 1984: 66-8). However, like the participants in this project, Gerstel and Gross's distance relaters acknowledged many of the gains they made in better communication and feeling a more intense form of connection which involved not taking each other so for granted. This does not necessarily mean that distance relaters are more (emotionally) satisfied (Govaerts and Dixon 1988) than heterosexual cohabiting couples, but it does raise questions

about how emotional reflexivity can alter heteromasculine forms of emotionality in the direction of greater gender equality. This is not necessarily about men learning to do emotions in a more feminine way, but about a sociological recognition that emotional interactions are not determined by the hard wiring of individuals but can be done differently and may need to be done differently in order for men and women to experience more just and fulfilling intimate relationships. Further research is needed to explore whether and why equality enhancing forms of heteromasculine emotional reflexivity appear to have had limited impact on most women's lives.

## **Conclusion**

Heteromasculine forms of emotionality are open to change. Men are not inevitably hopeless at caring emotions and can exercise emotional reflexivity. Whether emotional self-restraint has increased or relaxed, there has been some degree of diversification and democratization in emotionality, but these changes have rendered people more reliant on reflexivity (Elias 1939/2000; Wouters 2004). This reflexivity is not cognitive and individualized, but emotional, relational and embodied (Author 2010).

Emotional reflexivity is required to enable navigation of patterns of relating where gender hierarchies have altered. Such reflexivity is also prompted by the alteration of such hierarchies and likely to be especially evident amongst those who are in some way departing from social conventions (Beasley et al. 2012). This applies to couples in distance relationships who are departing from the norm of cohabitation for intimate couples in ways that often also challenge

traditional heteronormative gender expectations of wives following the career induced mobility of husbands.

However, emotionality in the twenty-first century is not free of power struggles. Gendered relationality is more diverse but not necessarily more fluid and flexible. 'Women' and 'men' are compelled to employ an emotionalized reflexivity in order to behave 'appropriately' in the range of interactions they experience. They reflect and act partly according to their perception of how they and others feel within particular interactional contexts. Within the context of the distance relationships in this small study, it is possible to see that heteromasculine forms of emotionality can be diverse and can change as a result of emotional reflexivity. Some of these men may at first appear to be hegemonically masculine in terms of eschewing emotional expression, however, on further examination it appears that they may prefer more tactile forms of emotionality. Other men seem more comfortable with verbal forms of emotionality, usually thought 'feminine' and even those who identify as 'big cuddlers' rather than big talkers, might learn to enact more verbal forms of emotionality as a result of their interpretation of their own and other people's emotions as done in the intimate interactions involved in distance relating. Thus the reproduction of gender in intimate life is open to small but significant alterations (Beasley et al 2012). By focusing on men's capacity for embodied and relational forms of emotional reflexivity, instead of essentializing male emotional incompetence, it is possible to glimpse one process through which social change around gender can occur.

Emotional reflexivity is employed with varying degrees of subtlety and 'success', but it is not necessarily the case that women's supposed expertise at emotion work brings social rewards, nor

that men are always emotionally 'unsuccessful'. It is clear that thinking, feeling and acting emotionally have to be negotiated around the possibilities and constraints of particular sets of gendered social relations. The shifts in women's social position and the expanded possibilities for ways of relating between men and women, requires reflexive decisions not based on rational choice, but made by discussing, deliberating, doing and feeling a way through gender relations. Gender is done, but to us, as well as by us, and those actual and imagined interactions are full of feeling. By understanding heteromasculine emotional reflexivity it is possible to consider under what conditions it might contribute to more egalitarian forms of gendering.

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<sup>1</sup> The data used in this article was collected with the assistance of a small grant from the Economic and Social Research Council. Grant number RES000220351. I am most grateful for their assistance.

<sup>2</sup> By ambivalent I mean that people may experience contradictory emotions at the same time and that emotions can have an uncertain impact on relations to others (Author 2012: 116).

<sup>3</sup> This assertion that it was an argument was inserted into the text by the transcriber, and I like the contestation of Luke's statement, so have left it there to remind the reader that couples are engaged in a

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presentation of self within interviews. For an account of the part that the transcriber played in the interpretation of the interviews see Author 2010).