

The Discursive Construction of Modern Masculine Identities in Contemporary Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the emphasis on studies of western masculinities has caused studies on local masculinities not only to be ignored but marginalised. The underrepresentation of studies relating to Asian masculinity, particularly on Malaysian men, has caused a significant gap in theorizing about Asian men in general and Malaysian men in particular. With globalization and the shift in societal expectations of gender roles, men are urged to redefine and reconstruct their contemporary identities in their personal and professional lives. Despite the growing interest in masculine studies, research concerning men, especially in the social transformation of masculinity within the contemporary society is largely absent. This study examined the perceptions and experiences of Malaysian men in their negotiation of masculinity. Drawing from in depth semi structured interviews and content analysis of survey questions, the study explores the discursive construction of new masculinity among 28 Malaysian men aged between 25-35. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used for the analysis of interview transcripts. The study sought to investigate how new masculinity is constructed by analysing the interview discourse of the 28 respondents by paying close attention to the linguistic and lexical choices they used to describe masculine identities. This study examined whether the current notion of masculinity sustains or challenges the hegemonic concept. The findings of this study indicate that being seen as independent, competitive and a risk taker are among the important determinants of self-perceived masculinity. In some instances, traditional male identities which is linked with being dominant, muscular and being a provider are no longer considered as ultimate masculine identifications. The findings are of great importance to provide a refined and contextual understanding of how masculinity and complex male identities are constructed in contemporary society.

Keywords: masculinity; gender identity; discourse analysis, perceptions; contemporary identity, men's studies

INTRODUCTION

Despite the upsurge of interest in men's studies in recent years, the evolution of masculine identities of men in the East has received minimal scrutiny as opposed to the evolution of

masculine identities in the West. The 21st century saw the world undergo rapid globalization and urbanization. As these two processes coexist, tensions arise in the reaffirmation of different cultural identities where fear of losing historical and cultural references arise as men struggle to maintain their identities (Greene, Robles & Pawlak, 2011; Kumagai, 2013). Within the modern and contemporary era, the conflict of identity is rationalised with the idea that globalisation involves transformation both socially and culturally. Countries aspiring to become metropolitan in culture have more often than not succumbed to identity unification and cultural homogenisation (Cheng & Berman, 2012). Thus, globalization and modernity, while they lead to the creation of hybridised identities, can bring profound impact upon the notion of gender (Connell, 2005). Cheng and Berman (2012) claim that the emergence of universal values, socio-political exchanges, interfaces between people and global assimilations has weakened local cultures and loosened some patriarchal ideologies that traditionally govern Asian societies. Such interferences in cultural and ideological foundation affect the constructions of identity among men in general as the pressure to preserve their ethnic based masculine identifications becomes greater (Kumagai, 2013). Given the diverse socio economic and multi ethnic backgrounds, Malaysian men are likely to be affected by similar phenomenon, where masculinity is approaching an outdated definition (Tosh, 2011). At the magnitude of globalization that Malaysia is undergoing today, scholars foresaw changes in identity where men are inspired to revolutionize conventional identities (Kumagai, 2013; Connell, 2005), where socio cultural changes tend to weaken stereotypes, influence expectations as well as impact men's perception of identity, gender roles and normative values (Low, 2009; Khalaf, Wah, Ghorbani & Khoei, 2013). It is in this sense that the question of how the changing era and social transformation inflict crisis to modern men in defining the new ideals becomes one of the emerging issues to be explored. Given rapid transformation of Malaysia, it is interesting to explore the development of the nation's masculine subject, in terms of how men cope with social and cultural changes.

Previous local research that examined the construction of masculinity have tended to look at definitions of masculinity for a specific group of men. For example, Khalaf et al. (2013) investigated definitions of masculinity among Malaysian youths in university. Their study found that masculinity was interpreted as 'having good body shape', 'being respected', 'being a family man' and 'having financial independence' (Khalaf et al., 2013, p. 6) Despite these varying perspectives towards masculinity, their study is limited to university students aged between 20 to 30. As such, findings are disproportionate for generalizability. Refined understanding of masculinity can be achieved if samples are diversified to encompass men of the larger societal context. Given the unique feature of Malaysia as multicultural and multiracial, findings could benefit from having a broader sampling that includes men of various races and cultural background to discuss their perceptions of masculinity. Vogel, Heimerdinger-Edwards, Hammer & Hubbard (2011) explicate that race and cultural plurality make a significant determining factor of one's definition of masculinity, due to the differences in traditional cultural values within a particular culture. Hence, men's understanding and definition of masculinity may vary.

Meanwhile, Ng, Tan and Low's (2008) cross countries exploration of masculinity covers five Asian countries including China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia. They found that Malaysian men view masculinity as 'having a good job', 'having lots of money' and 'being a family man' (Ng et al., 2008, p. 353) Although their results revealed varying perceptions of masculinity, their study relied primarily on objective questionnaires and survey. For that reason, findings could be limited in depth and are inadequate to explain the complexities of masculinity.

Scholars posit that men's negotiation of their masculine identities in contemporary culture is becoming more complicated and problematic than ever before (refer to Coposescu,

2011; Kumagai, 2013; Zheng, 2015). There are still a limited number of local studies that have gathered insights of multicultural men's collective idea of masculinity from the context of contemporary society. How manhood is manifested in modern context of plural society has rarely been identified. Similarly, previous studies such as Khalaf et al. (2013) and Ng et al. (2008) have not been able to encapsulate the complexity of modern masculinity in Malaysia because they lacked depth, richness and multidimensional perspectives that only men whose identities are facing socio cultural transitions are able to enlighten. It is also important to note that Malaysian men and women are situated within the social spectrum that emphasises masculine hierarchies where association to patriarchy is evident (Azhari, 2013; Kalthum, Noor & Wok, 2008). Thereby, what it means to be men and how they conceptualise the notion of masculinity has motivated this study.

As language is integral in the communication of social realities and it is through language that ideologies and belief systems are formed, it is crucial to uncover how masculinity is interpreted and projected by men, whose understanding of gender has been previously shaped by patriarchal and hegemonic governance (Kalthum et al., 2008). Fowler and Kress view CDA as a "powerful tool for the study of ideological processes, which mediate relationship of power and control" (Fowler, Hodge, Kress & Trew, 1979, p. 186). CDA accepts that meanings are produced from the interconnections of language and socio-cultural practices. This means that the representation of the world are relatively linguistic-discursive, where meanings are created from the maintenance or deconstruction of dominant socio cultural and historical values (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Broadly speaking, CDA allows for the expression, constitution and legitimatization of identities in language to be investigated critically; because language is viewed as a vehicle for change (Fowler et al., 1979) and an impetus for identity formations (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2009). The choice for this method of analysis is motivated by CDA's ability in providing detailed examination of linguistic features, which has proven useful, especially in the interpretation of 'slippery' concepts like identities and ideologies (refer Benwell, 2002). This article has two objectives. First, to establish CDA as a valuable approach to uncover linguistic constructions of modern masculinity in narrative interview. In doing so, it does not only show that CDA encompasses more than linguistic examination of texts but validates its potential as an eclectic tool for critical analysis. Second, to scrutinise meanings of masculinity within contemporary Malaysian society. It focuses on what masculinity is and how contemporary masculinity is perceived and articulated in Malaysian men's personal accounts and lived experiences.

MASCULINITY IN MULTICULTURAL MALAYSIA

Beynon (2002) states that in the process to extend critical understanding of male identity, it is important to acknowledge that masculinity is inflected in cultural specific ways and is formed by aspects such as class, ethnicity, age and nationality. In the Malaysian context, men of diverse cultural background are ideal sample for this study because in their varying portrayals of identity based on their different sociocultural backgrounds, their individual adaptation and internalization according to cultural norms influence how they define and identify themselves. For men of multicultural and multiracial background, masculinities encompass certain behaviours and cultures associated with men as well as the different ways of being a man (Beynon, 2002; Vogel et al., 2011). For example, in a plural society, men learn 'appropriate' gender roles in accordance to role expectations prescribed in one's culture. This means that men perform culturally legitimized roles to fit in traditional assumptions of how a man should act or how manhood should be defined (Connell, 2012). Beynon (2002) states that in an ethnically diverse and complex socio-cultural environment, the construction and expression of masculinity is interpolated by ideals dictated within the sphere of hegemonic

masculinity based upon social role conformity. For example, the cultural norms in Asian society, as well as in most cultures prescribed breadwinning identity in men (Cheng, Yeoh & Zhang, 2015). Men are also expected to be financially stable and to fulfil the financial needs in a household. In Malaysian society too, it is not acceptable for men to cry. These are some of the expectations of behaviours and what are perceived as appropriate for men. These ideologies and stereotypes are a form of internalised adaptation of an individual's masculinity.

However, because understanding an ideology of masculinity may differ substantially within a particular culture, men's perceptions and definitions of masculinity are unlikely to be homogenous. Aspects such as racialized markers, stereotypic views of certain races and anxieties in the performance of identity among certain groups of men are likely to contribute to differing views of masculinity. In this regard, identity differences and social fragmentations are found to be stemming from the perpetual stereotypes and racial myths (Mahathir, 1970). The Malays are presumed the privileged race because their *bumiputera* (*sons of the soil*) status is protected by the constitution (Alatas, 2013). The race dominates under Malay hegemony causing gaps and segregations in Malaysia (Hedayati, Abdullah & Maghsoodi Tilaki, 2015). As a consequence of power and privilege, this ethnic group is perceived as lazy, incompetent, and complacent (Norraesah Mohammad, 2005; Mahathir, 1970) which might affect how masculinity is institutionalised among men of this racial group. Meanwhile, expectations for men also differ in terms of races. The cultural norms of the Malay race for example, require the men to provide wedding dowry (Kamaruzaman, Zahari & Suhaimi, 2016), whereas in Indian culture, the responsibility is diminished among Indian men as women are expected to pay dowry at marriage (White, 2017). In the context of Indian society, while there are Indian males who oppose to the dowry system because of its patriarchal and oppressive nature against women, many other men are exercising the custom because it restores the primacy of male status or is simply a practice that is culturally entrenched (White, 2017). These divergent perceptions and performances might contradict the cultural stereotypes and cause confusion in an individual's negotiation of masculinity.

In the framing of gender difference, Beynon (2002) asserts that gender norms and male identity are influenced by the extent of fulfilled expectations. This means that men who conform to cultural expectations are perceived congruent with their male identity because they fulfil a set of behaviours and gender role norms associated with being men, while those who oppose to these identity markers are viewed as defying norms and could risk having their masculinity questioned (Beynon, 2002; Connell, 2012). The assertion is founded upon Pleck, Sonenstein & Ku (1993) description that male identity is the "endorsement and internalization of cultural belief systems about masculinity and male gender, rooted in the structural relationship between the two sexes (p. 310.)". To a large extent, the legitimization and reproduction of masculinity in contemporary Malaysia depend on how Malaysian men understand and internalise beliefs about gender roles and manhood in general.

CRISIS IN MASCULINITY AND MEN'S EXPERIENCES

Cultural changes and social transformations create impactful repercussions to gender norms and have since influenced people in their performance of gender (Connell, 2005; 2012). Men's understanding of masculinity is consistently shaped by these changes and as a result, how they construct their masculine idealisms may deviate from traditional attributes of masculinity, causing a paradoxical understanding of the concept. More men are battling conflicts of identity because globalisation brings in westernised values while rooted traditional cultures that tend to evolve slowly are forced to be preserved at the same time (Kumagai, 2013). Globalization has opened doors for western cultures to transcend

Malaysian demographics. From ways of thinking to lifestyles to spoken language (Kim, Siong, Fei & Ya'acob, 2010) and even diets (Pingali, 2007), the amalgamation of western culture into local traditional values and practices is difficult to undermine. Scholars fear that the impact brought about by westernization and rapid social transformation may impact certain qualities such as class identifications, gender roles and individuals' identity formation (Jensen, Arnett & McKenzie, 2011; Kumagai, 2013).

Zheng (2015) and Kumagai (2013) assert that the weakening of historically based identities resulted from the process of internalization and '*Americanization*' which distance local men from their interior experiences. In the context of masculine identities, the male crisis emerges in correlation to the rise of the 'new man', where normative masculinity slowly vanishes (Zheng, 2015). The 'new man', although not entirely in contrast to 'old man', is a new model of masculinity that is affected by the feminist movement (Kimmel, Hearn & Connell, 2005). This new form of modern masculinity epitomises men as rejecting misogynistic attitudes that uphold sexism and male supremacies and adopting more egalitarian viewpoints that promote equal social status. Also, it is worth noting that globalization persists at the expense of erosions in traditional cultures, resulting in unification and universalities in culture. Zheng (2015) posits that cultural unification emerges to produce undifferentiated universal identities that are no longer defined by social class and ethnicity, whereas the breaking of gender ideologies triggers stress in men to form the new ideals. This occurrence can be traced down in the notion of cultural universalism - the process of assimilations across societal and cultural boundaries as well as the integration of previously isolated zones that occur and coexist (Assmann, 2010). These phenomena allow people and community to practise common values and perform universalities in terms of beliefs and identities (Ibrahim, 2004). With globalization and modernization, the dismantling of local identities that have been historically established and embedded in the society becomes apparent. Although change is necessary, this has resulted in men losing perspective of their traditional male identity as change modifies their ingrained understanding of gender roles and norms; further inflicting conflict in the embodiment of masculinity. Therefore, it must be asked if the concept of masculine identity homogenises or fragments under the contemporary society.

The age of global economic crisis has also seen the position of men being endangered, where more men are losing their breadwinning identity in rising unemployment, shrinking labour market and plummeting family incomes due to retrenchment, reduction of salaries, benefits and so forth (Matlak, 2014; Copesescu, 2011). Malaysia is no exception especially, at the height of sexual revolution (Hirschman, 2016), when gender equality is gaining momentum and women are receiving more rights. More women are breaking through the 'glass ceiling' and occupying high ranking jobs, with increasing number of females being promoted to top organizational roles (Abidin, Rashid & Jusoff, 2009). Similarly, the rise of women's emancipation, economic power and financial independence has resulted in the declining of male power as well as the ambiguity of men's culturally prescribed breadwinning identity (Hirschman, 2016). Male crisis escalates where the suicide rate in Malaysia is higher than a few decades ago, with males accounting for 66% of all suicides in Malaysia, (Bahar et al., 2015). Life pressures and societal expectations along with the 'strong and silent' attitude are some of the contributing factors that push men to suffer in silence. In the search of manhood, the struggles persist when more men are occupying prisons, rehab centres, and a fair number of others are failing in the marriage institution (Zainab, Wan Ibrahim & Asyraf, 2014; Chan & Mustafa, 2008). The implications of this phenomenon have not only threatened a man's masculinity but altered gender and power hierarchy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

From a sociological perspective, scholars assert that identity is constructed socially more than biologically; - masculinity and femininity are not innately or psychologically developed but are learned and picked up from cultural practices (Connell, 1985). Gender, according to Gerson and Peiss (1985) is not static and should be seen as “a set of socially constructed relationships which are produced and reproduced through people’s action” (p. 327). It is produced from shifting cultural and subjective meanings, within the interplay of power, representations and differences that emphasize on diversity, hybridity and heterogeneity (Bhabha, 1996). In this context, the social constructivism of gender and identity entail the idea that individuals create their gender identity based on the time and space, experience and reality around them where meanings are formed and negotiated.

Another indispensable theoretical foundation in a discussion of gender and masculinity is Connell’s hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987). As one of the culturally dominant forms of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity generally revolves around the concept of heroes which stresses on male norms values such as leadership, aggression, autonomy, assertiveness and bravery. The hegemonic concept, which puts forward the perpetual dominance of men against women, is also a pattern of oppression against men. It honours men of the privileged group to exercise their power and control over subordinate male groups commonly characterised by their ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation (Connell, 2005). This form of masculinity is prized and idealized and has historically reigned over other types of masculinities in hierarchy. Hegemonic masculinity however, is criticized for being oppressive and harmful. It is perceived accountable for the rise in toxic masculinity and the perpetuation of crises in masculinity (Kaufman, 1999). Likewise, critiques of hegemonic masculinity suggest the theory lacks explanations on how men navigate their masculinity, mainly when Collinson and Hearn (1994) describe the concept as being ‘blurred, uncertain in its meaning, and tends to deemphasize issues of power and domination’ (as cited in Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 836).

Meanwhile, the birth of plural identities and multiple masculinities have become the impetus for the change in the concept of masculinity; to what Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 847) call a ‘challenge to hegemonic masculinity’. Built upon Connell’s hegemonic theory, scholars like Kaufman (1999) and Kimmel et al. (2005) have demonstrated that there is no solitary form of masculinity as masculinity is socially constructed. It is an active process of acquiring attitudes or simply enactments of roles and learned behaviours which is bound to change and is evolving (refer Kimmel et al., 2005). Imms (2000) mentions that the foundation of masculinity lies in the understanding that masculinity “is a complex set of behaviours with different meanings culturally and historically and regulated with interactions with other men, women and power structures in society” (Imms, 2000, p.155). Masculinity is multiple in four different ways according to Imms (2000); 1) its attributes cannot be reduced to single and simple characteristics, 2) it is influenced largely by the society, causing differences in roles expectations and performances, 3) the construction of masculinity is relational and is not constructed in isolation but with influences of femininity and other men, 4) the multiplicity of masculinity branches out power structures in hegemonic masculinity, raising more questions on the validity of hegemony.

Central to the analysis of language and identity is the use of CDA as a methodological approach. This study considers the suitability of CDA because it includes cognitive approach in uncovering meanings contained in discourses and language. It provides a framework to examine the complexities of masculinity through linguistic and discursive analysis of interview transcripts (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). To define meanings of masculinity and enact socio-cultural changes in modern society, CDA is utilised in this study because it offers

a critical interrogation of language use and potential explanation of the multidimensional yet subjective concept of identities and masculinities. The framework is useful in the analysis of 'opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language' (Martin & Wodak, 2003; p.6). As such, it is arguably a significant approach to expose patterns of language in uncovering the construction of knowledge and identity, and thus allows for 'reality' to be described and narrated in a particular way.

THE PRESENT STUDY

This study investigates the construction of Malaysian masculinity among a group of men in contemporary society. It explores the understanding of masculinity among Malaysian men resulting from the different ethnic adaptation, internalization of normative values and cultural identifications about how men should act and how manhood should be defined. This exploration holds importance in that it addresses men's experiences and identity formation in their own right, not from a perspective of feminist studies and feminist women. Despite the flexibility of multiple masculinities, the exploration and theorization on its multiplicity concept is limited and more ethnographic studies at micro level may offer extensive understanding about masculinity; that men do not necessarily practice a single type of masculinity. Similarly, reports on multiple masculinities are scarce and concepts of contemporary masculinities have received minimal discursive explorations. The dearth of contemporary empirical studies that discuss the consequence of men's crises and their implications to constructions of masculinity contributes to the significance of this study.

This study sheds light on the values of CDA as a complimentary approach to survey method in exploring meanings of masculinity and how the concept is understood, practiced and circulated within our social script. In addition to analysing constructions of masculinity, the present study demonstrates a systematic operationalization of CDA as a methodological framework to discuss what is the standard masculine performance, how have men achieved or failed to achieve these standards, how men create new discourse of masculinity, their definitions of normal, good, or bad, desirable or undesirable that impact their views and beliefs about masculinity.

Accordingly, the main questions driving this study are:

1. How do Malaysian men perceive their masculine identity?
2. What attributes are considered important to be a masculine man?

METHODOLOGY

SURVEY

The present study adopted a mixed method design, using survey questionnaire and in-depth focus group interview with men aged between 25 to 35 years old. A survey from Phillips (2006)'s Men's Attitudes to Life Events and Sexuality (MALES) study was distributed to 152 participants. The full survey was designed to assess men's attitude and behaviour in relation to erectile dysfunction. However, there were studies not in the context of men's health that have successfully utilized the survey to examine men's perceptions, characteristics and constructions of masculinity in general (e.g. Ng 2008; Sand, Fisher, Rosen & Eardley, 2008). To answer the study's research question, only one section of the full MALES survey was utilized as the section specifically focuses on questions about male identity and important characteristics of a masculine man. There are three parts to the questionnaire. The questionnaire elicited the following information - firstly participants' demography and

background, secondly participants' feedback of characteristics and attributes they consider masculine and non-masculine and finally participants' rating of the masculine attributes they perceived on a scale of importance.

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW (FGI)

Out of a total number of 152 respondents of the survey, 28 men participated in three FGIs to complement the survey. FGI was preferred because it allows the researcher to benefit from group dynamics and interaction. Kaplowitz and Hoehn (2001, p. 238) support the effectiveness of the approach because group interviews "facilitate an exchange of ideas and information thereby stimulating individual group members' thinking and allowing group members to build on each other's ideas". FGI as a data gathering method allowed the researcher access to a diverse range of respondents' in terms of their personal thoughts, experiences and perceptions about subjective social reality issues in a non-threatening environment. FGI questions were adapted from Khalaf et al. (2013). Respondents in each FGI were encouraged to engage in a free-flowing discussion where relevant aspects of masculinity were discussed. The first part of each FGI dealt with meanings of masculinity, the second part examined common stereotypes and gender roles given to men while perceptions towards attributes considered masculine and important were explored in the final part of the interview.

DATA ANALYSIS

The FGI was crucial to explore holistic descriptions on what constitute a masculine man apart from respondents' personal account and opinions, beliefs and views, also their experience of masculinity. While it provides new insights and rich data collection, the method is flexible and useful to explore 'complex and emotionally laden issues' (Hofisi, Hofisi & Mago, 2014, p.62) such as sexuality and identity. The FGI sessions were digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Emerging concepts and recurring key themes were identified and classified through focused coding. Code categories were derived later to sift through a large amount of data, in which the process was more selective and focused. Data from the survey and interview were manually coded and thematically studied. To fulfil ethics requirements, a written informed consent was obtained from the interviewees and participants were requested to fill in a confidential social demographic questionnaire.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In a much broader context, our study has brought about the important feature of CDA; - its ability to conceptualise discourses as action that contributed pragmatically. In the narratives that collectively construct meanings about masculinity, understandings and discourses describing masculinity is not merely a form of language use. CDA as a tool of analysis in this study has enabled identities to materialise in the verbal and narrative descriptions that are formed from institutionalised social and behavioural practices in our culture. The use of CDA in this analysis has created a basis that approved the fact that the relationship between discourse and situations is one of mutual constitution (Wodak, 1996). This further shows that every single instance of linguistic choice used in the interview discourses in the process of masculine identity construction, reflect the Malaysia's cultural and societal context in which meanings of masculinity are shaped.

The results presented in this section are based on the survey questionnaire and FGI sessions. The results are outlined and discussed in the following order: 1) The respondents' definitions of masculinity; 2) The respondents' perceptions of traits and attributes considered

masculine and non-masculine; 3) The respondents' view on the stereotypes and gender roles that label men; 4) The respondents' view on the feminization of men and 5) The respondents' view on characteristics considered important to men.

DEFINITION OF MASCULINITY

The concept of masculinity is shifting in its definition (Kumagai, 2013). This can be reflected in the findings from the FGI sessions. The respondents were asked "*What makes a man masculine?*" They were encouraged to share their perspectives about what makes a man masculine in their own definition. For example, to locate how masculinity is perceived and constructed, the respondents were also asked at what point a man is regarded as masculine? When he does what? Or when he achieves what? Analysis via CDA based on respondents' verbal responses, specifically from the lexical choices they articulated showed that masculinity is variously defined which also included traditional traits of a man. For example, comments from the respondents identifying masculinity in the form of strong physique and muscularity via adjectives – 'strong' and 'well built' (see example 1 below), 'tough' (see example 3).

*Example 1: "Manly men are **strong and well-built**"*

*Example 2: "Manly man is **macho and cool**. He's a man's man"*

*Example 3: "To me real men are **tough** and intelligent. Someone who is brave and able to defend himself"*

Apart from physical identification, the concept of masculinity is also recognised emotionally (see example 4 below), a rather new perspective to associate men with, given the stereotypical beliefs that the society generally holds; that men are emotionless or that men have no feelings. The lexical item 'stable' in example 4 below and 'cool' in example 2 above may imply the ability to control emotions and not be ruled by them. As they are a wide range of powerful emotions such as anger, jealousy, hurt, grief, wrath, fear, envy, pride and so forth, the society views being overcome by emotions as equivalent to irrevocable consequences. One of the comments is:

*Example 4: "Manly man is emotionally **stable**, willing to take responsibility, take care of everything"*

Whereas traditional masculinity is often associated with the act of chivalry and men's gesture towards their female counterpart, findings in this study reveal that the majority of Malaysian men still cling to the principal. The respondents also define masculinity as a man with heteronormative orientation in which they associate gay or homosexuality as a non-masculine trait. They used words like having 'attention' and 'passion' to describe their heterosexuality towards their female counterparts (see example 6 below). However, different men approach the concept of masculinity at different standards. Some measure the strength of masculine traits through the tender acts towards women (see example 5 below). Traits of masculinity were also described using attributive adjectives with negation 'not' (example 8) and 'never' (example 7) via terms such as 'shabby' (example 7), 'hygiene' (example 7), 'nerds' and 'skinny' (example 8) that (masculine) men refused to embody. For example:

*Example 5: "Masculine man is someone who is powerful and strong, but **display tenderness towards women**"*

*Example 6: "Manly man has **attention and passion** for the opposite sex"*

*Example 7: "Masculine men to me are those who take care of their appearance and never look **shabby**. He must take care of his looks and **hygiene**"*

*Example 8: "Masculine men are definitely not **nerds and skinny**."*

Example 9: "Masculine men are those people look up to as role models or idols."

Although it is difficult to agree on a normative definition of masculinity, findings from the FGIs indicate various definitions of masculinity; traditional masculine identities still being regarded as the indication of ultimate masculinity. While there is no oneness of masculinity, the majority of respondents associate the idea of masculinity superficially; through physical traits and external appearances.

COMPARISONS OF ATTRIBUTES PERCEIVED MASCULINE AND NON-MASCULINE

Based on the responses from the survey questionnaire, male attributes such as physically tough (26%) and having strong image (23%) are considered most important masculine traits. A significant number of respondents identify heterosexuality (14%) as one of the traits of masculinity. Others picked up brain and intellect (11%) as key characteristics of manliness while some associate image of masculine to wealth and economic solidity (12%). Even so, the respondents are slowly accepting the notion of new masculinity as traits to identify men with, such as, having aesthetic awareness as a sense of fashion (6%), taking care of appearance and personal hygiene as well as being well kept and well groomed (3%).

The respondents were also asked to respond on types of men not viewed as masculine where the majority of respondents detected signs of non-masculinity from physical attributes (17%) such as having ‘small physique’, ‘thin and skinny’ body type, ‘unappealing looks’ and femininity in men (12%) such as having ‘flawless face’ and ‘soft voice’. Additionally, laziness and dependency (24%) and homosexuality (21%) are among the internal aspects considered non-masculine by the respondents. Detailed comparison between traits of masculinity and non-masculinity are outlined in the table below:

TABLE 1. Male attributes that are perceived as masculine and non-masculine by the respondents

| Attributes of masculine men | Frequency (%) | Attributes of non-masculine men | Frequency (%) |
|---|---------------|--|---------------|
| Physically tough (e.g. “well-built physique”, “muscular”, “toned appearance”, “buffed and muscular”) | 26% | Lazy and dependent (e.g. “depend on women”, “constantly need helps and pushes”) | 24% |
| Has strong image (e.g. “carry the strong and silent look”, “not looking weak and frail”) | 23% | Homosexual (e.g. “gay men”) | 21% |
| Possess stereotypical male characteristics (e.g. “hoarse voice”, “tall and ideal weight”, “calm and composed” “good looks”, “powerful appearance”) | 16% | Not physically muscular/ tough (e.g. “small in size and short”, “not broad”, “thin and skinny”) | 17% |
| Heterosexual (e.g. “straight and prefer women as partner”, “real men date girls”) | 14% | Financially unstable (e.g. “not having stable job and income”) | 15% |
| Financial stability (e.g. “stable job and income”, “adequate salary to support family”) | 12% | Feminine men (“soft and sissy”, “soft spoken”, “no facial hair”, “flawless face”) | 12% |
| Educated and intellectual (e.g. “debate well”, “knowledgeable”, “academic qualification”) | 11% | Men who use cosmetic products (e.g. “men who make up and wear lipstick”, “too much grooming tools”) | 7% |
| Man of honour (e.g. “humble and respected”, “have principles”, “respected among friends”) | 11% | Men who put people down in their actions (e.g. “condescending”, “boastful and intimidating”) | 6% |
| Do not carry feminine qualities (e.g. “chatty and talkative”, “emotional”, “crybaby”) | 9% | Low confidence and self esteem (e.g. “no self-belief”, “uncertain”) | 6% |
| Respect women (e.g. “treat women with respect”) | 9% | Non-protective men (e.g. “men who can’t protect their family”) | 4% |
| Family man (e.g. “men who put his family’s needs as | 7% | Others (e.g. “coward”, “abusive”, “nerdy”, | 4% |

| | | | |
|--|----|--|----|
| priorities”, “family comes first”) | | “complainer who like to whine”) | |
| Having a sense of fashion (e.g “fashion forward”, “good knowledge in latest fashion trends”, “metrosexual”) | 6% | Men who seeks approval (e.g “needs permission to do anything”, “in need of acknowledgements”) | 3% |
| Good at sex (e.g “good in bed”, “strong sexual prowess”, “experienced in sex”) | 6% | Needy men (e.g “clingy”, “constantly in needs of attentions”) | 2% |
| Hygienic (e.g “well-kept and well groomed”) | 3% | Self-vanity (e.g. “vain”, “self-obsessed”) | 2% |

COMMON STEREOTYPES AND GENDER ROLES

This study encouraged respondents’ feedback on stereotypes and gender roles that they think are socially and culturally relegated, not personal and individually relegated. The masculine myths and the common stereotypes against men are thought to be damaging if the inaccurate gender beliefs are perpetuated. The respondents’ feedback followed the general preconception that society holds against those whose gender are masculine. i.e., they should be physically strong (16%). Other stereotypes include men being emotionally strong (34%) and always taking charge (21%). Other over-generalizing labels of men relate to financial stability (15%) in which men are expected to be the provider. Other common roles for males are listed below:

TABLE 2. The respondents’ perceptions of cultural stereotypes and gender roles that men are commonly associated with

| Stereotypes | Frequency (%) |
|---|---------------|
| Men are emotionally strong (e.g “..that men should not cry and express their sadness”) | 34% |
| Men are emotionless (e.g “men are stoic and numb with emotions”, “men are unemotional”) | 26% |
| Men should lead (e.g “men should take charge”) | 21% |
| Men only think about sex (e.g “men only want sex”) | 18% |
| Men are physically strong (e.g “real men are tough and muscular”) | 16% |
| Men should pay (e.g “..that men are the ATM machine”, “men should pay for dates”) | 15% |
| Men are afraid of commitments (e.g “..that men are commitment phobic”) | 13% |
| Men should be capable in everything (e.g “men should know everything, from doing house chores to repairing a car”) | 9% |
| Well-groomed men are homosexuals (e.g “men with beauty routines and regimens are gay”) | 7% |
| Men are easily intimidated (e.g “women think we men are intimidated by their success”) | 5% |
| Others | 3% |

THE FEMINIZATION OF MEN

In the FGI, the respondents were asked on “how they felt about straight men displaying their feminine sides” (such as using cosmetic products, crying in public or showing emotions). Respondents indicate that men are expected to obey the social norms of the community. Gender norms violation, for example “the latest hype of men wearing cosmetic products” (see example 12 below) is regarded as taboo and because gender norms are highly prescriptive, e.g. a man should not use cosmetic products as in example 10 below and wearing cosmetic products should be left to women and not men (see example 12 below), any deviations from the norms are regarded as threats towards general masculinity. This can be seen from the

responses gathered in the interview in which the idea of traditional masculinity is very much closely imbued in the society:

Example 10: "I don't think a man should use cosmetic products"

Example 11: "I think men should stay scruffy and hairy. That's how manly men should be!"

Example 12: "I don't get the latest hype of men wearing cosmetic products. Let's just leave that to women"

Based on the findings, the feminization of men is associated with 'Korean males'. Due to popular culture and media portrayals, they are regarded as effeminate. For example, one respondent points out that using cosmetic products such as mascara and lipstick as being emasculated. The Korean 'flower boy' and Japanese 'herbivores' concepts where men carry immaculate styles or keep a feminine, soft, soulful look is regarded as lacking masculinity in some culture. Although this emerging phenomenon as 'soft masculinity' is gradually re-defining traditional masculinity, some men begged to differ (see their retort in example 13-16):

Example 13: "I don't want to be one of those K-Pop boys who wear mascara and lipstick. Never."

Example 14: "It is fine as long as it's not too frequent"

Example 15: "disgusting and irritating"

Example 16: "Using makeup is too much"

On the other end, perspectives towards men and masculinity have slightly been renewed where men view open demonstrations of femininity as healthy and rather harmless (as exemplified in example 14 above and 17 below). They associate habits of grooming as a boost to their confidence level. The nominal 'confident' in example 17 below in this sense is not trivial as it signifies that men build their understanding of masculinity based on the idea as having increased esteem and self-confidence. Among the responses are:

Example 17: "I think as long as it makes you feel good and confident about yourself, no harm in using makeup/cosmetic"

Example 18: "I do groom, but that doesn't make me feminine"

Example 19: "Grooming makes me confident. Basic grooming is fine, but just no makeup on my face!"

Example 20: "I think they should really man up. But using cosmetics are not exclusively feminine. Men should take care of themselves"

IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF MASCULINE MEN

Table 3 shows the results of important characteristics of masculine men as chosen by 152 male respondents in the survey administered. This 23-item scale assesses respondents' perceptions on the important aspects of masculine characteristics using a 4 level Likert scale that ranged from (1) not important at all, (2) slightly important, (3) important and (4) very important. The internal consistency of the items using Cronbach's alpha demonstrated high internal consistency and reliability with coefficient factor of $\alpha=0.78$.

TABLE 3. Characteristics rated as important to male identity

| Characteristics | % Not important at all | % slightly important | % Important | % Very important | Mean 1.00-4.00 |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Independent | 5.3 | 9.9 | 15.1 | 69.7 | 3.49 |
| Competitive | 7.9 | 11.9 | 51.3 | 28.9 | 3.01 |
| Educated | 13.2 | 26.9 | 17.8 | 42.1 | 2.91 |
| Risk taker | 7.9 | 30.9 | 40.1 | 21.1 | 2.74 |
| Humorous | 15.8 | 11.8 | 54.6 | 17.8 | 2.74 |
| Sensitive | 11.2 | 32.2 | 30.9 | 25.7 | 2.71 |
| Express emotions | 18 | 22 | 36.5 | 23.5 | 2.66 |
| Respect women | 11.8 | 17.8 | 61.8 | 7.9 | 2.64 |
| Secretive | 17.1 | 27 | 42.1 | 13.8 | 2.52 |
| Patient | 9.2 | 53.3 | 28.3 | 9.2 | 2.37 |
| Muscular | 14 | 46 | 32 | 9 | 2.36 |
| Sexual prowess | 38.2 | 21 | 27.6 | 13.2 | 2.15 |
| Metrosexual | 23.1 | 46.7 | 23 | 7.2 | 2.14 |
| Loyal and faithful | 28.2 | 40.8 | 23.7 | 7.2 | 2.09 |
| Does not use harsh language | 31 | 36.2 | 29.6 | 3.2 | 2.05 |
| Financially strong | 44.7 | 31 | 13.1 | 11.2 | 1.9 |
| Breadwinner | 55.3 | 15.1 | 19.7 | 9.9 | 1.84 |
| Individualistic | 52 | 21.1 | 17.1 | 9.8 | 1.84 |
| Vocal and opinionated | 55.3 | 21 | 15.8 | 7.9 | 1.76 |
| Act as a leader | 51.3 | 30.9 | 9.9 | 7.9 | 1.74 |
| Dominant | 51.3 | 32.2 | 13.2 | 3.3 | 1.68 |
| Intelligent | 57.2 | 25.7 | 11.8 | 5.3 | 1.65 |
| Feminine | 65.8 | 19.1 | 9.2 | 5.9 | 1.55 |

TABLE 4. Interpretation of the mean score on the level of importance for masculine identification among male respondents involved in this study

| Mean score | Interpretation of the mean score |
|------------|----------------------------------|
| <1.0 | Not important at all |
| 1.01-2.00 | Slightly important |
| 2.01-3.00 | important |
| 3.01-4.00 | Very important |

Of the total number of the characteristics, male respondents regard characteristics of being ‘independent’ at the highest level of importance (69%) and being ‘competitive’ as having 80.2% overall importance (51.3% important and 28.9% rated very important). Being ‘humorous’ is another important characteristic of masculine men and is regarded important by 54.6% respondents on top of ‘risk taker’ and ‘secretive’ with 40.1% and 42.1% rate of importance respectively. 61.8% of respondent rated ‘respect women’ as being an important masculine trait while being ‘sensitive’ is 56.6% of overall importance. On the other hand, the majority of respondents regarded being vocal, opinionated and having a breadwinning role, as not important at all (55.3%). Surprisingly, ‘dominance’ and ‘leadership’, according to the results, are also regarded as not important (51.3%). Although commonly associated with masculine identity, being ‘educated’ and ‘financially strong’ are considered somewhat important with garnering 42.1% and 44.7% respectively. ‘Metrosexual’, another characteristic commonly discussed in relation to new masculine identity received a striking significant unimportant value. 46.7% thought the trait as slightly important while only 23.1% regard it as not important at all. Interestingly, majority of the respondents rated having ‘muscular’ physique as not important at all (56%) although some respondents (26%) acknowledged muscular physique as a symbol of masculinity in earlier interview. Despite the shift in consumer culture and the growing interest on looks and aesthetical consciousness

today, the respondents do not regard 'using cosmetic products' as essential, making the trait being considered as unimportant (23.1%). Also, 65.8% rated being 'feminine' as extremely unimportant, ranking the trait highest as utmost unimportant masculine attribute.

DISCUSSION

MASCULINE IDENTITIES AND MALAYSIAN MALES' PERCEPTIONS

In this study, we illustrate the potential contribution of CDA as a valuable framework in the understanding of male identities and meanings of masculinity. Results from the FGIs have shown that men discursively construct their masculine identity around traditional values. They present their understanding of a masculine man as physically fit, emotionally stable, independent, heterosexual and brave. The discursive construction of masculinity also sees the respondents attributing masculinity with good appearance and chivalry acts towards women.

Overall, our findings concur with previous researchers in that there is no single categorical meaning of masculinity (Ng et al., 2008; Khalaf et al., 2008) - our findings proved that various types of identities exist. In Ng et al.'s (2008) study of masculine attributes that Asian men consider important, they recorded that essential manly attributes vary across the five countries investigated; China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia. Japanese men chose 'being seen as a man of honour' as the crucial characteristic to manliness, Chinese men chose 'having lots of money' as their utmost important aspect to manliness while Malaysian men regard 'having good job' as the most important quality. Almost a decade later, our study revealed that for Malaysian men being 'financially strong' is no longer an important indicator of their manhood. This mirrors that men are breaking away from the norms that typically stereotype them as the main provider. Conversely, the highest percentage of respondents in our study did consider some traditional attributes of a man as important; - being 'independent' (69.7%), 'competitive' (80.2%) and a 'risk taker' (61.2%). While these numbers reaffirm the supremacy of traditional values, our other findings show the existence of new masculine norms. The fact that fewer men regarded being the 'breadwinner' as important suggests the male role as the provider is losing its significance.

This data supports a study of gender status and family structure in Malaysia conducted by Hirschman (2016) that shows women were more economically active and that men occasionally participated in domestic roles. With the number of career women on a rise, the possibility for women to be income producers in a family is foreseeable with more women engaging in economically active roles and the increasing number of house husbands to assist with cleaning, washing, cooking, childcare and other 'traditionally feminine domestic duties' (Hirschman, 2016, p. 40), - although this new norm may come at a price. The consequences of men losing their 'breadwinner' or 'provider' identity contribute to the increase of lone-parent households, male psychological conditions, self-esteem issues, marital breakdown and divorce, imbalance of labour divisions in households and so forth (refer Atkinson, Greenstein & Lang, 2005; Rogers & DeBoer, 2001). Looking at another angle, inequalities and wage disparities in the household tend to contribute to wife abuse, because the absence of primary role or economic power in men causes them to validate their masculinity through violence and abuse (Atkinson et al., 2005). Even so, scholars further add that in future, high earning women are no longer a threat to male identity as "the masculine ideologies weaken" (Atkinson et al., 2005, p. 1147).

TOWARDS THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEW MASCULINIES

The balanced number of the respondents (23%) in our survey who see the importance and unimportance of metrosexual identity implies that Malaysian men do not view metrosexuality

as if their male identity depends on it. In the analysis of FGI discourse, some men constituted metrosexual behaviours such as grooming and excessive aesthetic concerns as an act of an emasculated man (as demonstrated in example 13 and 15 above), while another viewed a real man as 'scruffy' and 'hairy' (see example 11 above). The finding resonates with Ervin's (2011) clarification on the rise and fall of metrosexuality. The potential decline in metrosexual identities according to her, is due to the notion itself being a threat to masculinity. This is because being a metrosexual is associated with femininity and homosexuality. Metrosexuality also epitomises narcissism and is seen as a display of excessive self-vanity (Simpson, 1994), while homosexuality is stigmatized and chastised or even criminalized (Chang, 2015). Another study echoes this sentiment by emphasizing that failure to conform to gendered expectations is exposed to become the target for social discrimination (Gordon & Meyer, 2007). Another particular reason for conflicting answers on metrosexuality is due to the ambiguity of the term. While metrosexuality is a lifestyle choice that promotes unique sexuality expressiveness, Ervin (2011) highlights that in terms of performativity, the concept carries some 'confusion' (p.66). In the culture where external appearance represents sexuality, "being straight is not the same thing as looking straight" (Ervin, 2011, p.66). These reservations about metrosexuality as the 'queering of regular guys' (Ervin, 2011, p.60) could factor for the mixed reactions received from our respondents. Likewise, other culturally internalised masculine roles such as 'dominance' and 'leadership' are rejected and replaced by rather unconventional attitudes of masculinity. Respondents rated these two behaviour expectations of a man with less importance, suggesting that the process of eradicating the traditional patriarchal social norms is already on the roll in Malaysia. The pattern also reflects the backlash against the hegemonized prescriptive norms in Malaysia; as Kaufman (1999, p. 78) clarifies this decline in male power is due to social changes and our current gender order.

As far as male beauty and grooming practice are concerned, Malaysian men are not unanimously reflecting what Jung's (2010) conception of 'soft masculinity' and Iida's (2005) 'feminization of masculinity' (p. 57). While the phenomenon observes growing cultural changes in Japanese, Korean and Chinese males, this practice is not regarded as a representation of masculine ideals among Malaysian males. However, such result is likely due to the demographic uniqueness of Malaysia as a multi ethnic country as opposed to other countries, hence, masculine identifications are often racially marked, causing varying conceptions of masculinity. Nevertheless, our finding coincides with Iida's (2005) assumptions that in doing so, they (men) do not only conform to feminine qualities but men are reduced into "passive, commodified bodies" (p. 57).

Despite muscularity being seen as a symbol of strength and physical attractiveness, our finding indicates otherwise. Men do not perceive having 'muscular' physique as the most important masculine identification. Likewise, similar findings are also reported in Ng et al. (2008) and Khalaf et al. (2013) where Malaysian men viewed physical attractiveness as the least important masculine attribute. Such perception has merit because building muscles to maintain physical attractiveness is linked to narcissism and beauty, which is an effort of femininity. Cheryan, Cameron, Katagiri and Monin (2015) justify this as men attempt to counter balance their masculinity where they overcompensate their masculinity by playing up their manliness and downplaying their feminine concerns on body image or self-vanity when their masculinity is questioned or threatened. Men perceive being overly concerned of their appearance a feminine behaviour, and the constant interest in building muscles is an effort to maintain physical beauty. Some consequences that could result from threats to masculinity among others are mistreatments, violence and abuse especially against women (Cheryan et al.2015) because any changes in masculine taxonomy will trigger the defence mechanism to re-establish dominance and differences. In this context, such mechanism appears in the form

of overestimation of one's masculinity where the restoration of male supremacy is necessary, which is evident in our findings.

Despite men being reluctant to share feelings and seek help as the behaviour denotes weaknesses (O'Brien, Hunt & Hart, 2005), the result in this present study however, is atypical, especially in the context where the hegemonic script of the strong and silent dominates. Findings from our study propose for the emergence for the 'new sensitive men' where masculinity is to be treated delicately. This is exemplified in Kesumawati's (2013) study, where men were more open in displaying their capability with emotions. Similarly, our interview and survey results proved that more Malaysian males were naturally open to sharing feelings and emotions while appearing to recognise the gesture as essential. In the analysis of FGI discourses, men understood that being able to communicate feelings is a masculine sign if not liberating. Not only does this enforce masculinity as being expressive, our findings indicate that men are arriving at their senses that in doing so, their masculinity is not any less reduced.

Although hegemonic masculinity is arguably the dominant pillar of masculinity that is much described in our findings, evidence indicating that masculinity is shifting into a contemporary one is palpable. At the core of modern masculinity is the ability to practice non-stereotypical performances of gender. Whereas the pivotal expectations of traditional masculinity are either preserved or abandoned. But as these two types of masculinities collide, it is safe to say that traditional values and conceptions of masculinity are not dying, but rather evolving.

Our study has demonstrated the value of CDA in the understanding of masculine identities among men in Malaysia. The linguistic and discursive analysis of interview transcripts and results from the survey have shown that 'masculinity' has garnered interesting responses and raised questions over the fixed/static status of conventional male identities. This study has been able to explore deeper meanings of masculinity because of the diverse background of Malaysian men, whose masculinities are potentially at crisis, and fragmentation in socio cultural identity have contributed significantly to this new conceptualization of masculinity. By studying men of diverse background, male issues related to heterosexuality, stereotypical gender roles, homosexuality and patriarchy that are crucial to the discussion of masculinity can be addressed. Ultimately, this study has a few noteworthy limitations despite new developments of masculinity it has reported. First, a broader sample, specifically of older of respondents is needed to view how older men negotiate their late-life masculine identities. Future generational research is necessary as studies concerning Asian men who emerged as adolescents in the 1960s onwards are particularly scarce even in the west. Second, this study has dealt with collective meanings of masculinity and its construction from a group of Malaysian men. Although this preliminary analysis offers a collective meaning of masculinity among Malaysian men in general, profound understanding about male identity can be acquired in the analysis that focuses on a specific ethnic or racial group. Likewise, future analyses that look at male identity in Malaysia could benefit from including additional dimensions of race, ethnicity or sexual orientation. Questions need to be asked about the negotiation of masculinity among minority ethnic, marginalised society or homosexual men that might have different perspectives and definitions of performances of masculinity.

CONCLUSION

As much as the emergent identity is affirmatively shaped by contemporary society, our findings emphasised the multiplicity of masculinity in the Malaysia landscape; for which definitions of masculinity vary. Malaysian masculinity, as conceived through discoveries, in this analysis rejects the popular notion of being a man that are seen to confine them in culturally legitimate roles (e.g: in being the provider, physically tough and emotionally stoic, etc.). Overall, findings in the survey and narrative accounts of men in this analysis repudiate some of the culturally internalised masculine attributes such as power and dominance, leadership, breadwinning identity and muscularity that have historically characterised men in general. In an interesting discovery of the study, being 'dominant' and being a 'breadwinner', two fundamental identifications of manliness in Malaysian culture and most culture worldwide, is no longer considered as salient male identities. This implies a profound shift in views of masculinity. The rise of emotionally honest Malaysian men who are no longer perceived as being emotionally expressive as a sign of vulnerability has also forced masculinity to be seen in a different light. It is clear from the accounts provided in this study; men understand that being able to communicate feelings is manly and empowering. Another significant male evolution revealed that Malaysian men recognized their female counterparts as equal members of the society; putting a challenge to the pro-feminist masculinist theories that view men as constantly exercising patriarchal values.

Malaysian men's understandings of masculinity that highlight the multiplicity of the concept show that men across racial and cultural spectrum identified with these diverse forms of masculinities. Our results are aligned with the notion of multiple masculinities as demonstrated in previous gender scholarship (refer Kimmel, 2005; Kaufman, 1999; Connell, 2005). Men in our study were aware of the multidimensional definition of masculinity and the fact that male identities are changing. In some of the challenges they posed against hegemonic masculinity, their interpretation of contemporary masculinity is not only illuminating but different. In their acknowledgment for multiple masculinities, they can be implied to refute the confining hegemonic idealisms that view masculinity as normative, stereotypical and homogenous. This study agrees with Imms' (2000) assertion that there is no fixed or unitary definition of masculinity because "to classify them (men) as part of a hegemonic order oversimplifies the structure of contemporary society and fails to acknowledge a powerful force within masculinity working against oppression and domination" (p. 160). Our results render a new perspective of what masculine identity entails; suggesting the fluidity in its initial hegemonic concept, slippery and bound to evolve with time. In sum, our study contributes to refining the contextual understanding of complex male identity and how masculinity can be defined today; in which findings and evidence about men's negotiation of dominant masculinity ideology and their narratives of becoming a man in contemporary Malaysia have all led masculinity to accomplish a new resonance and meaning.

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