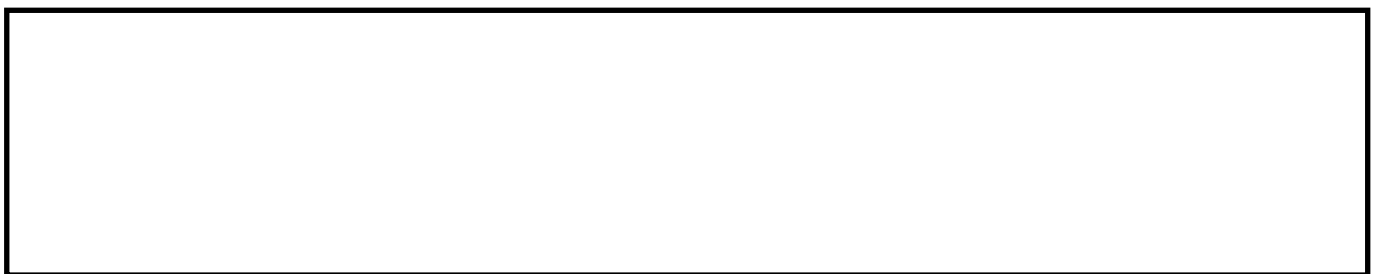


Examining oilmen's notions of 'fatherhood masculinity' as a pathway to understand increased offshore oilfield safety behaviours.

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Examining oilmen's notions of 'fatherhood masculinity' as a pathway to understand increased offshore oilfield safety behaviours

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Abstract

This study explores how notions of fatherhood masculine identity held by offshore oilfield workers positively influenced safety and risk predispositions in the workplace. Findings are based on a 'rapid', two week, embedded ethnography of a remote offshore drilling platform in the UK North Sea. Ethnography was reflective of the traditional two-week 'hitch' permitted for most UK offshore oilfield workers. Drawing directly from the workplace narratives of thirty-five oilmen labouring in a variety of different roles in the North Sea drilling sector, this study presents how oilmen working in the traditionally hazardous and 'high risk' industry redeveloped previously risky masculine notions of workplace identity. For many men, this process of reimagining was intertwined with fatherhood. Oilmen formulated "softer, safer" masculine identity practices founded upon notions of distanced breadwinning, self-preservation, and returning home safe to their onshore families. Such notions readily replaced - and rendered "outdated" - oilmen's previous and historic identity narratives largely linked to risky and hypermasculine workplace norms. Identity reformations resulted in a safer workplace culture that normalised and respected men who upheld safety, and marginalised men who performed risky or dangerous workplace behaviours. Implications upon worksite safety and for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Masculinities, institutional identity, risk-taking, industrial sociology, industrial and organisational psychology.

1. Introduction

Global society is rapidly shifting towards a new institutional modernity ever-increasingly preoccupied with safety (Beck, 2009). In parallel to this, social actors in contemporary society place increasing importance on understanding their gender identity as a tool to guide everyday decision-making and make sense of the world we live in (see Connell, 2005; Crawford et al., 2019; Venkatesh et al., 2000). Many modern dangerous workplaces are weighted heavily towards employing workers who identify as men. Male-dominated industries are recurrently found with a higher rate of incidents and accidents than that of gender-equal workplaces (WHO, 2019). However, findings may be related to a greater male preference for employment in sites of dangerous labour (Tiger, 2017). Some industrial spaces may also retain historical motifs of gender bias towards dangerous work. These norms may prevent workers who identify as female from gaining a majority foothold in such industries (Judson et al., 2019; Miller, 2002, 2004).

Men operating in high-risk industries are frequently tasked with maintaining the safety of themselves, and that of the environments within which operations are conducted. The last twenty years have seen a multiverse of diverse social psychology initiatives attempt to understand and engineer-out preconditions underpinning the performance of unsafe acts, that increase risks to both workers and operating equipment, specifically in male-dominated industries (see Antonsen, 2018; Cooper, 2000; Jose et al., 2018; Pidgeon, 1991). However, gender identity constructs are recurrently an overlooked influencer of men's behaviour in these environments (see Connell, 2009; Hanna et al., 2020; Nemoto, 2020). Some recent research has been undertaken to examine how the conditions of these workplaces (i.e. male-dominated, isolated, dangerous, stressful) influence the construction of men's institutional masculinities. However, the disciplines of psychology and sociology appear to take very different approaches to categorising masculinity, and drawing linkages between the masculine conceptions of workers, and local worksite safety and risk behaviours. While several recent studies - belonging to both disciplines - have recently emerged on this topic, little agreement has been reached over appropriate methodological approaches and findings.

Notably, many psychology-led investigations employ outdated identity conceptions that define masculinity via binary or biological classifications (Browne, 1999; Fannin and Dabbs, 2003; Hofstede, 2009; Mearns and Yule, 2009). Such thinking upholds workplace masculinity as a fixed and unchanging construct. For example, Hofstede reduces the concept of masculinity to a collection of interlinked dimensions reflective of achievement, heroism, material success, and assertion (see Hofstede, 2009; Noorbehbahani & Salehi, 2020). For some studies, this thinking is employed to draw correlations between such narrow descriptors of 'maleness' and the presence of said descriptors underpinning frequent undesirable or dangerous workplace actions. Measures of workers' masculinity is primarily collected via short, self-report questionnaires that rely on fixed models of male identity. Resultantly, men are offered little opportunity to redefine such descriptors, or voice how their own understandings and notions of masculinity may support or resist specific workplace practices.

To example this thinking, a recent study by Heuvel et al., (2017) explored psychosocial risks and risk management in European workplaces from national and cultural perspectives. Research employed Hofstede's pre-constructed cultural dimensions of masculinity to determine the 'masculinity' of survey participants; with measures of masculinity representing a questionnaire scoring matrix. Findings concluded that the greater workers scored on measures

of masculinity, the less successful their psychosocial workplace risk management. Masculinity was defined solely by 'stereotypically' masculine traits such as power distance - i.e. assertiveness, taking the lead, confidently giving out instructions, autocratic decision making; uncertainty avoidance - resistance to change, fear of failure, not breaking rules, issuing instructions authoritatively and clearly; and 'high' masculine dimensions - placing importance on earnings, competition, personal achievements, wealth attainment and longer working hours. Similarly, scholarly research by Rojo et al., (2020) used Hofstede's gender cultural dimension sub-categories to examine undergraduate student nurses' clinical placement performance. The study focussed on defining masculinity via behavioural descriptors of "assertive characteristics, intermediate uncertainty avoidance (the half-way point between being cautious when taking risks and not being concerned), low long term orientation (a society which sees its citizens maintain time-honoured traditions and fulfil short-term obligations) and high indulgence (a society where freedom of speech is valued and maintaining order is a low priority)" (Hofstede, 2018 in Rojo et al., 2020, p. 6). Research concluded male students were significantly more likely to have issues surrounding 'low uncertainty avoidance', suggesting a greater chance of engaging in workplace practices where procedure or outcomes are uncertain - due to their scores on Hofstede dimensions of 'masculinity'. Findings position that Hofstede's cultural dimensions represent a fitting framework to predict correlates between specific masculine traits and risky workplace behaviours.

A study closer to this focus of this research, conducted in 2009, explored the concept of safety culture in Scotland's global oil and gas industry (Mearns & Yule, 2009). Researchers sought to draw linkages between the increasing global footprint of energy organisations, as they expand to conduct business within many different countries and cultures, and potential for different national cultures to understand and perform risk in different ways. As a component of study, the 'masculinity' of workers from different backgrounds were examined for correlates with unsafe workplace behaviours. Research concluded that Hofstede's masculine dimensions varied significantly per workers' nationality. Most importantly, workers' masculinity was defined by the extent to which self-report questionnaire data 'matched' with Hofstede's distilled descriptors of masculinity for a given locale and context. Researchers concluded: "There was [...] variability in Masculinity scores: workers in the US samples were significantly less Masculine (i.e., tended towards Femininity) than workers from British, Australian and Filipino backgrounds" (p. 8). Such thinking - alongside the findings of the other studies - illustrates the problematic nature of defining masculinity via a narrow set of descriptive behaviours. In each study, it is unclear to what extent such values or practices are truly reflective of oilmen's masculinity, given that such men were never asked to clarify or explain their actions or questionnaire selection choices as linked to their sense of gender identity. Findings are absent of any context. To compare this with contemporary sociological thinking, men may perform their masculine identities in a myriad of different manners that still allow for the descriptor masculine. Simply because men do not engage in negative traits stereotypically associated with hypermasculine behaviours, such as assertion, dominance, risk-taking, this does not automatically sanction their identities to be defined as 'less masculine'. Men may simply perform their masculine identities in different, yet equally legitimate, ways (see Connell, 2005). Like other studies, Mearns and Yule concluded that greater scores of 'masculinity' - as measured by Hofstede's dimensions - resulted in greater negative workplace outcomes. They suggest extremes of masculinity "could ultimately result in the loss of interpersonal relations and good communication" with such dimensions also holding the potential to "create cultural norms that will determine the propensity to engage in risk-taking behaviours at work" (p. 9).

Others recognise the limitations of generalising men's masculinities to a simple set of (mostly negative) values and norms. Noorbehbahani, & Salehi, (2020) highlight the inherent difficulty with reconciling any formal categorical model of masculinity with individuals' actual intentions or behaviours. The absence of both primary context for which theory-forming masculine behaviours were first observed and mapped – such as with Hofstede's masculine dimensions – and the near ubiquitous absence of any ethnographic or observed secondary context from which subjects' behaviours could be matched to primary masculine exemplars, render any efforts to reduce such complex and wide ranging phenomenon as one's gender identity into a set of concrete categories as highly problematic. While men may seem to perform - or much more commonly, to self-report in questionnaires - values or behaviours in an industrial context that match descriptors resembling a specific model of masculinity, they may perform or act out such values practices for very different local reasons and functions. Without asking men to explain and clarify the intentions behind their behaviours, any meaning becomes lost. Drawing conclusions from such generalised data risks attributing men's actions and performance to identity descriptors which may be seriously incorrect, should men be given the opportunity to describe their masculinities, and elaborate upon the linkages between their workplace identities and behaviours. This is as opposed to asking men to simply select a 'best fit' for their masculinity from a set of narrowly defining categories originating from pre-scored and inflexible models.

Converse to psychological studies, modern sociological investigations of masculinity-risk relationships increasingly involve asking men to define their understandings of masculinity and how such, often complex and diverse conceptions and understandings can drive different attitudes and behaviours in different contexts, and when facing different audiences (See Adams, 2019; Connell, 2009; Hanna et al., 2020; Winlow, 2020).

A recent and fascinating body of work by Colfer (2020) explored men's different understandings and practices of masculinity in the traditional 'masculine' work setting of the forestry industry. Using long-term ethnography, Colfer explores how – in many cases – the traditional notions of tough, hypermasculine and breadwinning masculinities most often associated with forestry work have been subverted by softer and more diverse forms from this popular stereotype. Colfer discusses that where many works traditionally position 'forestry masculinities' as representative of a singular constellation of behaviours intertwined with dominance over the natural landscape, control, and strength (among others); new forms of workers' industrial masculinity are readily constructed by workplace and personal factors that reimagine forestry work to divorce any performance of labour from such notions. This leads many men to actively perform labour in different - arguably safer - ways, anchored to their sense of identity, that resist outdated locational stereotypes of masculinity linked to hazardous and risky forms of labour (see Colfer, 2020).

George & Loosemore (2019) develop an equally engaging argument in a study of masculine ideologies in the Australian construction industry. Like Colfer's accounts of forestry, George & Loosemore question the stereotypical nature of many masculinity studies that suggest global or national construction industries are dominated by stereotypically hard, tough, strong, and risky male identities. They cite a lack of empirical evidence as a primary point of concern for such generalisations. As opposed to utilising Hofstede dimensions as a means of characterising masculinity, George & Loosemore opted to use a wider mixed-analysis framework exploring how men frame workplace behaviours in the contexts of linkages to masculine labour norms. Opposing much research done in this industry, George & Loosemore found that hypermasculine practises and characteristics were less present than expected. Where values

and norms linking with 'traditional' masculine construction stereotypes were highlighted, these were deconstructed to examine how the performance of identity practices linked to the requirements of worksite labour and the inherent risks of the construction role. The study forms a more nuanced and wide-ranging picture of multiple and ranging construction masculinities than the oft-cited single stereotypical notion of risky male identity interlinked with this employment (George & Loosemore, 2019).

A linked recent study by Hanna et al., (2020) also examined UK construction workers' masculinities using a qualitative, case study approach. Like others, Hanna et al. discuss the tendency of existing research to frame the masculinity of construction workers as an inevitable universal truth; hallmarking this identity with connotations of resilience, toughness, aggression, and strength. Using thematic analysis, the authors uncovered that some masculine identities in construction work were linked to upholding traditions of stoicism relating to reluctance for reporting of injuries, and for help-seeking regarding illness (also noted by George & Loosemore, 2019). Such notions belonged to occupational groups that also engaged in poor health choices and workplace risk-taking. However, alternative masculinities were also highlighted, with some groups of men citing respect for the workplace experience and the priority of labour group bonding and support structures underpinning the promotion of positive safety behaviours. As opposed to a singular notions of labour masculinity, Hanna et al. illustrate how resistance to purportedly traditional 'risky' construction masculinities lead to the construction of new forms of identity, that uphold positive 'softer' workplace practices in an industry often stereotyped as hard, tough and hypermasculine.

Similar, less recent studies have also upheld the multiplicitous nature of men's masculinities in industries otherwise stereotyped to contain singular macho, risky, or tough identities. McDowell's (2001) ethnography of inner-city banking institutions found traders constructed their workplace identity upon a multitude of personal and employment conditions that resisted the singular macho stereotype of 'banking masculinities' (see McDowell, 2001). Boyle (2002) explored men working in a pre-hospital emergency services evaluation context. While some cultures of masculinity were present that upheld notions of stoicism and toughness - supporting stereotyping of male identities present in psychological models of masculinity, men also negotiated values and performances of healthcare heroism, and emotional caregiving. Findings suggested that masculine performance were context-dependent, with tensions between 'hard' and 'soft' workplace performances dependent on contextual stimuli and immediate organisational demands (see Boyle, 2002).

Despite such wide-ranging studies of masculinities linking complex labour identities and workplace behaviours, little research has been conducted in the locale of study this research focussed on. The UK offshore oilfields have enjoyed comparably little attention, despite the industry representing both one of the UK's most high-risk industrial operations, and one of the most heavily stereotyped industrial workplaces. Numerous media and scholarly characterisations of oilmen paint those working offshore as archetypal of the rough, strong, difficult, stoic and hardy exemplars of male frontierism (see Angel, 2014; Faulkner, 2009, 2011, 2014; Miller, 2004; Zambrano, 2012).

Of the limited primary research available, studies by Collinson (1998, 1999) represent the most authentic, ethnographic attempt to explain linkages between oilfield masculinities, safety, and risk-taking behaviours. Collinson - in 1990 - visited a North Sea oil platform for a period of two weeks. Collinson's ethnographic journey is unique. During his spell offshore, the platform he visited had recently come under new management. While Collinson's focus was to ascertain

which worksite factors led to the development of local safety and risk behaviours, his final conclusions focussed less overtly upon men's masculinities, and instead upon men's rejections for cultural change towards safety, underpinned by management monitoring and surveillance. Collinson (1999) explored that when a new safety initiative was implemented offshore - coinciding with his visit - oilmen rapidly saw this as a challenge to their established masculinities. These masculinities represented notions of worksite labour intertwined with oilman identity. For most, being an oilman was best represented offshore through practices of heavy labour, stoicism under threat and challenge, hard 'grit', and getting the job done at all costs. As oilmen were effectively asked to compromise this identity, through the introduction of new safety protocols, most oilmen sought to immediately reject these new workplace norms, framing the adoption of these as a betrayal of their established and recognised 'risky' masculinities. Instead, workers actively rejected new safety standards. They concealed injuries, failed to report identified risks and problems, and policed their peers to maintain the previous standards of 'macho' workplace masculinity and associated dangerous labour practices. Collinson concluded that forcibly attempting to shift workplace culture may result in increased risk-taking and rejections of safety, even if such enforced culture change is designed to enhance safety and mitigate offshore oilfield risks, it may have the unintended effect.

While Collinson's studies represent an intriguing ethnographic journey into oilfield identity and culture – they are historic and dated. When examined alongside more recent ethnographic research on masculinities, Collinson's perspective retains the singular masculine lens of much psychological study, all be it with a sociological perspective. Instead of conceptualising masculinities as multiple, research focussed on examining for masculinity as identified by a constellation of negative performance traits that are assumed to readily define oilfield identity. In the years since Collinson's research, the oilfield has undergone a number of major changes, including - arguably - a greater acceptance for safety in the wake of several major UK and EU offshore disasters (see Karmakar, 2019). For the ethnographic-focussed researcher, such changes are double-edged. The modern legislative and practical difficulties in gaining access to offshore oilfield platforms are a probable reason why almost no research access is granted for academic purposes, that is, unless research aims and outcomes are set to benefit the parent company managing the platform. This likely represents the reason why the last thirty years have seen almost no ethnographic research conducted in the offshore oilfield with regards to examining linkages between the masculinities of oilmen and workplace safety and risk practices.

This researcher was successful in gaining authorised access to the UKCS (UK continental shelf) oilfields. In 2017, and 2018, I visited a remote offshore oilfield drilling platform that I shall term Point Delta¹. Access was granted for the explicit purpose of ethnographically examining oilmen and their workplace masculinities, to ascertain linkages between workplace identity, and most specifically, how notions of identity may construct different safety and risk practices. Investigating this research question is important. Presently, both psychological and sociological studies struggle to give an in-depth account of how men's complex notions of their masculinity are represented in the workplace, beyond constraining such constructs into existing frameworks. Such frameworks inevitable prioritise single, stereotypical conceptions of masculinity. While ethnographic, sociological study offers a broader remit for examining masculinities, limited research has been conducted in the offshore oilfields, due to lack of opportunity. The oilfields are recurrently deemed to be a high-risk workplace. Despite ever-increasing safety legislation, and the ongoing integration of human factors and industrial

¹ This is a pseudonym.

psychology initiatives, accidents continue to happen (see Karmakar, 2019; Reid, 2020). Investigating linkages between oilmen's masculinities, and safety and risk-taking practices offers a novel and timely examination of an under-explored pathway that may shed some light upon whether the way in which men conceptualise their masculinities in the offshore workplace may underpin the promotion of safe or unsafe workplace behaviours.

For this research, I trained to be a part of various mid-water drilling crews as they rotated through the Point Delta fixed-installation drilling platform in December and January, in the far UK North Sea. While offshore I was granted access to all areas of the platform, including the drilling floor, where I spent most of my time. I asked oilmen directly, whilst they were working, how they constructed their oilfield masculinities, what these meant to them, and how these masculinities shaped oilmen's behaviours offshore. Most notably and surprisingly, a popular form of 'fatherhood' oilfield masculinity emerged that resisted all negative oilfield stereotypes. Such a notable discovery deserves reporting due to the positive - and surprising - implications of this identity construct upon increasing oilmen's offshore safety behaviours. Reporting of methods and findings are equally important to grow subsequent investigations beyond approaches that rely on narrow, and stereotypical models of masculinity to construct linkages with specific workplace practices. Looking forward, more research deserves to be done in such locales to do justice to the multitude of complex male identities that may exist in high-risk workplaces - yet are overlooked, and to more fully examine the different ways such notions shape and influence workplace actions.

2. Methods

2.1 Gaining access

Gaining access to Point Delta was a lengthy and difficult process. Firstly, institutional ethics approval for the research was sought and approved². Following this, several organisations with majority interests in North Sea offshore drilling projects were shortlisted and sent a letter outlining the project. Several organisations responded. From these, a meeting with one organisation, that I shall term DrillMech³, was set-up to discuss the research in more detail. The organisation was selected due to the location of headquartering and the volume of their North Sea interests. Following several meetings, it was agreed that DrillMech would facilitate appropriate training, and access offshore.

2.2 Becoming 'offshore ready'

Attaining the requisite knowledge and training to travel offshore was the largest part of gaining access. Understandably, the hosting organisation had never provided access to one of their platforms for anyone other than staff qualified for specific oilfield labour. For the first year of research, I spent several days a week located in the DrillMech head office, in Aberdeen, Scotland. During this time, I conducted six formal semi-structured interviews with onshore workers to help inform my understandings and knowledge of oilfield culture, labour processes, and platform design and technology. I also attended numerous project meetings, spoke at several industry gatherings about my proposed research, and shadowed many staff returning from offshore platforms to hear their stories of oilfield work, how labour practices have

² The research was conducted at, and ethics approval granted by Aberdeen University.

³ This is also a pseudonym.

changed, and what ‘being a man’ and ‘oilfield masculinity’ historically and presently meant to these workers.

The most significant component of becoming offshore ready comprised successfully gaining my oilfield certificates. All travel offshore occurs via helicopter. To travel, and stay on an oilfield platform, all staff must complete a set of certifications pertaining to knowledge of the platform, and helicopter and platform safety and escape. Training consisted of two weeks of classroom exams and practical training. Practical training involved several passes of successfully escaping a water-submerged, and rotated, helicopter shell in a warehouse pool setting. Training also included fire-fighting scenarios in a warehouse, use of underwater breathing gear in a cold-water pool, a full lifeboat launch in a local city harbour, and rope escape from high platforms, into water - among other necessary training, and becoming familiar with life-saving practices such as survival suit technology and water life-raft assembly and use. After my successful completion of these exams, and later medical checks and assessments, I was awarded my offshore certifications and Vantage passport⁴.

Following certification, myself and an oilfield rig manager began to plan a schedule for my offshore stay. Over the next few months’ numerous schedules were confirmed and then cancelled. This was largely due to concerns for safety, dangers of weather, various local incidents, and helicopter changes and rescheduling (both changes in the models of helicopter used in the UKCS, and changes to preapproved flight schedules). Eventually, I received a call early one morning, advising me to be at the heliport the next morning to travel to the Point Delta platform for eight days. This was followed by a second trip a few weeks later, for a further seven days.

2.3 Ethnography

The investigatory approach of this study comprised an embedded-institutional ethnography of the Point Delta offshore oil and gas installation. Ethnography has long been associated with allowing researchers to gather in-depth, relist knowledge of the actions and behaviours of social actors in various difficult to reach locales (Brewer, 2000). However, ethnographic methods are often commensurate with long-term embedding of a researcher, for periods of months to years (Agar, 1996; Richardson, 2000). While undoubtedly some locales of study require lengthy and longitudinal embedding, recent scholarly thought has challenged the thinking that such long-term presence should be applied as a blanket requirement of all ethnographies (Andreassen et al., 2020; Knoblauch, 2005; Pink & Morgan, 2013). For example, numerous understudied locales functionally prohibit the lengthy embedding of a researcher. This is true for medical settings (see Andreassen et al., 2020; Doll, 2020) and diasporic communities (see Widjanarko, 2020), to name a few. Also, for many of the workers in these type environments, time in locale is limited and their presence transient. This is the case for oilmen on Point Delta. All drill crew on the platform worked a period of two weeks ‘on’ – onshore, working 12-hour shifts, followed by a period of three weeks ‘off’ – spent onshore at home. Thus, the total ethnographic time spent offshore, of just over two weeks, allowed for the most similar work-time rotation to that of all drilling crews stationed on the platform.

While based offshore, I kept the same work-time rotation as all oilmen, working the same 12-hour shifts. I stayed in the same, shared cabins, ate the same meals at the same scheduled times,

⁴ A Vantage passport is a plastic digital ID card required for travel offshore. It operates like a regular passport; storing travel, location, and biometric information specific to offshore oilfield travel.

and generally sought to partake in all aspects of ‘offshore life’. Occasionally, this included the completion of small tasks, namely carrying materials, and aiding oilmen as an assistant in acts such as changing-out CCTV circuit boards on the drilling scaffolding, to give one example. Ethnography offshore prioritised shadowing and observing oilmen throughout their daily 12-hour periods at work. However, a great deal of time was also spent conducting observations and holding conversations in informal settings, being as offshore; all space is shared and there is nowhere else to go. Such approach conforms to recent reimagining of ethnographies in hard-to-reach locales as requiring ‘short and sharp’, ‘focussed’ and ‘rapid’ execution (see Isaacs, 2013; Knoblauch, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2018; Pink & Morgan, 2013). This continual and intense ‘embedding’ of my time on the platform facilitated a layering of information to provide a rich tapestry within the shortened research time mandated by the locale of study.

Most saliently of my ethnographic method, observations were complemented by semi-structured interviews with drilling staff. During my time offshore I interviewed **all** thirty-five oilfield drilling crew assigned to the Point Delta platform. Interviews were semi-structured. These focussed on asking oilmen to describe what masculinity meant to them as an oilmen working on Point Delta, how any notions had been constructed, and how these notions had shifted since first becoming an oilmen, or beginning to work offshore. I also asked oilmen to discuss safety and risk practices in the context of pressures to perform any behaviours (safe or otherwise) and reasoning and rationale for any local risk and safety practices. All oilmen were assured of confidentiality, provided and asked to sign an informed consent form, and reassured all data would be anonymised with pseudonyms. All thirty-five oilmen voluntarily agreed to take part. All interviews lasted longer than one hour, some ranging much longer. All were recorded with a portable digital recorder – that was assessed and certified for use offshore.

2.4 Participants

Oilmen taking part were all over the age of twenty-one, and ranged to a maximum age of sixty-five. They were employed in a wide spread of different drilling roles on board Point Delta, but all connected to drilling. Notably, almost all participants had worked on at least one other UK drilling platform, with many having worked on numerous UK and abroad installations. This allowed oilmen to provide a wider context for masculinities as they present on different platforms, and highlight any disparity in acceptance or rejection by different geographies. I decided to investigate only the drilling demographic due to numerous tales and stories I had heard onshore, and in training, all positioning those working in drilling to be the “toughest”, “hardest”, and “likely, most masculine” offshore. Likewise, the limited research conducted in offshore oilfields contexts often suggests similar typing (see Collinson, 1999; Diffey, 2012; HSE, 2013, 2016; Paetzold, 1999). However, on speaking with some workers at DrillMech, much was done to dispel this stereotype. Also, as DrillMech was a drilling organisation and Point Delta a drilling platform, it made the most sense to examine this demographic, being as they were the primary workers offshore. To the best of my knowledge, and that of DrillMech’s, no existing research has been published examining linkages between masculinity and risk-taking in active drill crews. As mentioned previously, this is likely due to difficulties in researchers gaining access to such environments and dangerous areas of work. For these reasons, examining drill crew was thought to make the most significant contribution on all practical and research fronts.

2.5 Data Analysis

All observational data (which was lengthy) was recorded in a field journal. Some photos were also taken. Digital cameras are prohibited offshore, as they represent a possible ignition source. Mobile phones and electronics are prohibited from most areas of the platform for the same reasons. However, I was able to borrow a special camera whilst offshore and acquire permission to take photographs. All interview data was also transcribed by myself. In total this represented over forty-five hours of spoken interviews. All modes of data were imported into the software analysis programme NVivo. The five-point inductive qualitative analysis method popularised by Braun and Clarke was used as an initial structuring framework for all knowledge collected. Interviews were coded line-by-line, prioritising preservation of context. At appropriate points, photographic and observational information was mapped to specific textual sections. This allowed initial, yet contextually rich, categories of analysis to emerge (for an overview see Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, 2019; Clarke & Braun, 2013). Many further passes of all data were conducted, refining categorical analysis into separate nodes attached to the most emergent themes in the data. Sorting categories were then added, linking to the overarching research questions. These included ‘masculinities’, ‘safety’, ‘risk-taking’, ‘change’ amongst others. Finally, data was recoded to examine differences between categories linked to the formation of knowledge in the masculinities category and that of knowledge in the safety and risk categories.

3. Findings

3.1 Point Delta: initial impressions

The findings of this research were surprising, but cannot be adequately explored without providing some ethnographic context to the location of study and the oilmen contained offshore. Notably, the most salient and immediate experience for myself was processing the isolate and remote nature of the platform. I first landed at Point Delta at around 0600 on a freezing mid-December weekday, having been in the heliport for a few hours previous to this; getting into my survival suit and attending a helicopter briefing for travel. Upon my initial arrival, I was struck by the sheer remoteness of the installation, all around me in every direction was a large expanse of water. Around my immediate person consisted of structures of steel and plastic that were entirely human-made. Such a realisation brought home to me the constraints of life - namely inescapability - as experienced for weeks at a time by the oilmen on Point Delta. Figures 1 and 2 below provide some context to these observations.

Figure 1: a helicopter landing on the Point Delta helipad. Taken by me at some point whilst offshore. The name of the platform has been blanked, to preserve confidentiality.



Figure 2: the view from one of the upper decks of the Point Delta installation. Only sea is visible in all directions.



Soon after landing, and when being introduced to the oilmen of Point Delta, I was immediately glad with how I was received. Due to much of the existing scholarly research I had read about high-risk workplaces, I had braced myself for somewhat of a masculine cultural shock, or worst still, a rejection of my presence and an unwillingness for oilmen to be interviewed by me at all.

However, I was struck by the propensity for all oilmen to very quickly speak openly with me, and the candid nature with which they described their male identities; how these were formed, and how such notions influenced their behaviours. I was told later that part of this was connected to my willingness to go through training to come offshore, spend time in the office getting to know onshore staff, and my willingness to experience all aspects of offshore life once arriving offshore. Further, many oilmen had been made aware I would be arriving some time prior to my first visit, and had noted the many cancelled planned helicopter flights. When writing this article, and looking back at my transcripts, analysis and field journal, I noted a circled quotation from one oilman to me on my first day offshore: “Most people are trying to get away from this place, it’s rare we have someone wanting to get out here!”. I took from this quotation, and that of many other comments, that oilmen were mostly happy to have a researcher make the journey offshore and show interest in hearing their stories. Other quotations, captured in a crowded tea shack⁵ later on my first day offshore also spoke to this, summing up my impression of the oilmen I travelled offshore to visit, and their initial impressions of me and my objectives:

“It’s great that you were willing to make the trip out here and spend time with the likes of us”;

“You’ll see it completely differently to how we do. Through completely new eyes”;

“I don’t think anyone has been allowed out here before. It’s great that you’re here and we have a chance to tell our story...about life here, men out here...other people might read it”

Such comments rapidly set me at ease offshore, they indicated to me that despite any reservations workers may have held about my presence, scepticism was balanced by a desire to tell their stories. Oilmen’s language and eagerness also signified to me a recognition of the rareness of this opportunity. From this point, on day one, I immediately began interviewing and shadowing oilmen as they went about their normal working lives.

3.2 The historic ‘risky’ hypermasculinity of the UK oilfields

Most significant of the ethnographic findings from my time on Point Delta - and my conversations with oilmen in the DrillMech office - was the concept of how the masculinities of many oilmen had changed, and what has caused this. Oilmen firstly confirmed that the stereotypical typing of men in the offshore oilfield was a historically accurate label, citing tales of high-risk, high-stakes drilling work that demanded and dictated a specific masculine personality for workplace acceptance and labour success. In reflecting upon data analysis, this was one of the most significant themes uncovered. For example, when I asked Tim⁶, a member of a drill-team about what masculinity meant to him, he explained:

“Drilling masculinity...I think in the early days... [referring to the 1980s] you came offshore into drilling areas and it was all wild and things like that...we were all pretty wild in them days, you just got things done. The main thing was to get the job done. There was a macho thing then...It was just the way that it was, all rough and ready. You drank hard, you partied

⁵ A space of almost any kind on the platform at has facilities for making hot drinks. It is a typically a social hub for the platform. Surprisingly, there also exist ‘smoke shacks’ of fireproof design to allow for cigarette smoking.

⁶ All workers’ names are pseudonyms, and have been allocated randomly for this publication.

hard when you went home, and then you came back, but that was the old days...”

Similarly, Paul, a drilling engineer held a similar opinion. Paul raised the label of The North Sea Tigers. This was a term used actively, and with wide local understanding, to refer to almost any male working offshore at the height of North Sea drilling operations. Notably, Paul described Tiger identity as a combination of physical machismo and a reluctance to engage in safety. When I asked him to describe the ‘typical’ masculinity of the UK North Sea, he replied by explaining the stereotype:

“Yeah, Tigers...that’s now in the past, but it was men who had a lax attitude to safety, it was all tough-guys...guys that saw themselves as tough. They would come out and throw around equipment. All very macho...showing they were strong. It’s how oilmen were expected to be”

Another oilman, Charlie - an offshore maintenance supervisor - also made mention of “Tiger” stereotype. This referred to oilmen who worked in the UK North Sea during the UKCS’s oil ‘golden age’; a period from the inception of North Sea drilling in the 1960s, when things were “very gung-ho” until the later 1990s when “safety became more of a priority”. Charlie positioned Tiger masculinity as representing the most subscribed notion during this time. He explained:

“Drilling then was about The Tigers. The North Sea Tigers. Traditionally that’s someone who works hard, parties hard. They go offshore and work the drilling room floor⁷. It’s a guy who’ll be flinging his equipment about, right up near the drill-pipe⁸ in the danger zone and just slap you on the back. The kind of guy who doesn’t need a break. He’ll be like: no, I’ll just work through it. That kind of tough guy”

John, a maintenance superintendent, who had worked offshore for ten years gave a similar account to Charlie. He defined Tiger culture as dominating the oilfield, suggesting oilmen were held individually accountable to Tigers’ risky identity practices. Performances of risk were viewed as “status-building” and a means of “accruing [peer] respect”. By gaining respect, upwards movement in the local drilling ‘pecking order’ occurred. John elaborated:

“You hear the stories about the older guys, The Tigers. I’m probably of the newer generation, just of ten-to-twelve years in to this game. You speak to someone who has been in for twenty, thirty years. Those guys will tell you that maybe they’ve ridden up and down the Derrick⁹ to go up and down the monkey boards¹⁰ which is basically complete suicide. Why somebody would want to do that and show off. I just do not know. But, you hear stories of this. The guys then, they wanted to show off, show they were tough individuals. The guys will jump eighty to ninety feet in the air off the drill-pipe without a harness. If you fall from that you’re not going to survive. These things used

⁷ The drilling floor represents the most hazardous area of the platform. Sections of this area are marked in red to illustrate the most significant “danger zones”.

⁸ The drill-pipe is the top-pipe, attached to the drill-point and used to drill into the seabed. It is in the middle of all danger zones.

⁹ A drilling derrick is a metal tower constructed from steel. It supports the drilling pipe into the drilling well.

¹⁰ A monkey board is a platform (usually without brackets or rails) situated high up in the derrick from which access to high drilling pipes can be gained.

to go on. Or, the guys would slide down the pipe, like a fireman's pole from the drill area"

Many other oilmen supported these historic claims, offering numerous stories of 'Tiger identity' that linked this historic namesake to "rough, and ready for anything", "strong and tough", "resilient" and "hard working" masculine symbolism – stereotypical traits that match much existing psychological study of dangerous workplaces, and some sociological examinations of hazardous locales. However, in all cases, this label was framed as outdated and historic, with many oilmen going as far as to suggest such values and attitudes were actively unwelcome in the modern oilfield. This was exemplified by Jamie, a roughneck - a worker conducting manual drilling labour - working on the drilling room floor. When asked to describe the historic oilfield culture of 'Tigers', he said:

"Tigers are from back in the early-eighties', where safety was less of a thing. It was a lot different then. It was a lot of tough attitudes...showing you were strong...hard...that was the norm. That's changed now. I don't class myself as a Tiger that's for sure"

Jamie's sentiments were echoed by Pat – a drilling supervisor, who voiced:

"...These Tiger notions are outdated. There are no pats on the back these days for being unsafe and getting the job done. Now it's take your time, everything...all your paperwork in place before you start the job, and if you think that you're struggling with the job you stop the job, and nobody has a problem. Whereas back in the old days it was just: get it done...I don't care how you get it done...anything...just get it done"

Such frequently replicated motifs of Tiger masculinity, framed as an outdated concept, led me to investigate how such seemingly established cultural identity, intertwined with oilfield labour had become so displaced and unwelcome.

3.3 Fatherhood masculinities and increased safety behaviours

While all thirty-five oilmen interviewed offshore agreed that the Tiger masculinity was "a thing of the past", workers put forward multiple reasons for the decay of Tiger masculinity, and associated practices of risk-taking. Notions of prioritising technology-focussed labour, increased pressures to perform safety, and a greater awareness of the potential for catastrophic accidents following major North Sea disasters were all suggested by oilmen (for a full account of these discussions see Adams, 2019). However, some narratives were contradictory, some oilmen positing – as demonstrated in Collinson's (1999) study of offshore oilfield safety and surveillance – that increased safety pressures served only to encourage rejection of safety norms and values.

Similarly, oilmen's narratives surrounding their performances of safety, and rejections of the 'risky' Tiger norms rarely focussed on the positives of oilfield safety legislation or policy itself (the opposite often being true). Instead, workers' narratives frequently positioned the ways in which they performed and engaged with safe workplace practices as a means to uphold, or legitimise their different understandings and conceptions of identity as an oilman. Most explicitly, many oilmen framed their masculinities in ways that actively resisted, or downplayed any notions of 'tough', 'hard', 'resilient' or 'risky' identities. This was largely to demonstrate a rejection and distain for the past Tiger oilfield norms and their stereotypical labels of masculinity. Instead, oilmen constructed their masculinities in ways divorced from

the 'risky' Tiger label, yet which also allowed them to readily perform these identities in ways supported by the current safety-conscious and technology-focussed offshore environment and the inherently dangerous workplace.

One of the most notable groups of oilmen offshore comprised of workers who voiced that they understood their masculinities in terms of distanced, provider notions of "being a father". This discovery was fascinating for several reasons, the most significant being that said workers were geographically distanced from their families and children, rendering them unable to fulfil the role of a traditional caregiver. However, oilmen reimagined traditional fatherhood concepts by performing breadwinning, provider masculinities that were directly dependent on the performance of safety to facilitate their upkeep.

Fatherhood was first mentioned by Davey, a roustabout¹¹. He said:

"For me, my [oilfield] masculinity...being a man is all about taking responsibility for, and looking after my family. Yeah, definitely fatherhood. I mean, this is one of the reasons why I keep working here, so that I can make decent money to provide for them, and get time off to spend more time with them. So, that's me trying to provide as best as I can for them, my daughter...give her the best things... most of the best things that I can for her. That's what masculinity means to me: fatherhood"

Davey revealed his masculinity as predicated upon Fatherhood: "taking responsibility for, and looking after [his] family". However, it's difficult to see how such motifs could reconcile with the distanced nature of oilmen working offshore, given oilmen's geographical distance from family. Davey also links notions of fatherly caregiving and responsibility to giving his daughter "the best things", and "providing". Such notions suggest Davey frames the fatherly role in the only way possible for him offshore: as that of a reliable, yet distanced breadwinner.

An earlier conversation I had with Alan – an instrument technician – clarified the disparities felt by many oilmen of wanting to be at home with their families, and the need to earn money to support them. Such conversations were marked with themes of "helplessness" and "living half" or "a double life". On discussing the isolated nature of offshore work and the role of a father, Alan volunteered:

"You know, with all this social media for keeping in touch, you can get all these photos from the wife, but I don't know if that's good or bad really. The more you think about it, about things at home, you realise anything that happens there is all outwith your power. It's best to just get on with the job. You just don't focus on home out here. I mean...you live a double life here, you're obviously missing home. I mean quite often... I'll often struggle to be speaking to the wife on the phone. I'll phone her every day, a couple of times a day even, but as much as you're concerned...it's like having two separate lives...to an extent... I don't really know how to explain it... [*Alan struggles to articulate and takes a long pause... He then says rapidly and exasperatedly*] When we speak every night it's just her telling me about her

¹¹ An oilfield labourer, primarily responsible for manual tasks surrounding maintenance and support of equipment used by the drill-crew.

day and I'm just doing the same stuff and I can't go into detail about being stuck here with her as she just won't understand"

Alan continued:

"I hate it sometimes, not being able to escape, being away from home...the helplessness if the wee one [his child] or the wife hurt themselves. That helplessness is awful. But, it's time off is what keeps me here. As soon as that chopper lifts up...you forget about it...then it's always like: this is my last trip, I just can't do this anymore. Then you forget about all the pain when you're at home and you come back out and do it all over again. It all comes back to living this double life"

Alan's language demonstrates how the isolated conditions on Point Delta lend to stress and anxiety surrounding negotiations of the traditional fatherhood and caregiving roles. He reveals social media affords a window into "life at home" but that he struggles to negotiate the overlap this allows between 'home life' and his temporal offshore location. Alan qualifies this with his comments: "Events at home are outwith your power" and "I can't go into detail about it to my wife, she just won't understand". Alan's reluctance to "[think] about home life" is justified as a form of self-preservation to minimise the "helplessness" and "pain" that mark Alan's "double life" on Point Delta.

Sam – a drilling worker – was another oilman who offered a similar perspective to that of Davey regarding his masculinity as predicated upon Fatherhood. When I asked Sam what his oilfield masculinity meant to him, he said:

"Fatherhood. I mean, I think the cartoon image of masculinity would be this six-foot-five guy with big muscles and a big beard... kind of a caveman image...that's the cartoon image of masculinity! ...But for me...everything changes after you have kids. I've got kids now... it does, everything changes and for me being a man is about raising my kids. I'm out here for them now...When I was younger, I was out here because it was a bit of adventure... good money to buy a car and go on good holidays with your mates. For me, everything has changed... for me...I'm out here to provide, I'm a provider. For me, that's being a man... being a provider for my kids. Family. Bring them up the right way, making sure that they have everything that they need. So... aye [yes]... I'm secondary to everything now, because that's my priority. Being a dad"

Sam's comments suggest a sea change in the ways in which he constructs his identity – linking this previously to a predication for adventure and money. However, with the advent of fatherhood Sam asserts that this concept was reimagined to link with notions of "being a provider" and making sure his family have "everything they need". In closing his narrative, he anchors both of these concepts as the hallmark definition of "being a dad".

Sam's narratives connect back to an earlier conversation I had with him on Point Delta. This intertwined with Alan's comments on the anxieties of being a distanced father. When I asked Sam about how he negotiated his fatherhood identity offshore, he voiced this as being a difficult process. He said:

"As soon as I get on the rig I'm counting down the days to go home again...you know? That's where the wishing your life away comes in, you're

wanting it to go quickly...so, the worst thing for me is not seeing the family every day and missing a lot, missing out on..."

Sam paused here before continuing. It was clear to me from this break that he found the topic of discussion difficult. He continued,

"Well... my son is six and my daughter is nine...but I've only really seen three years of my son's life...because the other three years I've not been there... [*Sam sounds emotional here*] I've missed their first day of school, their first steps...whatever...you can't get it back. You can't put money on those things, you can't put a price on that sort of stuff. I just can't look at it that way...can't think about it. For me personally, I need to be out here to earn what I'm earning to pay the mortgage and provide, but there is no money in the world worth missing that stuff"

Despite Sam's focus on framing his oilfield masculinity in terms of provider notions of fatherhood, he recognises that financial incentives can't replace time spent away from his family. However, Sam acknowledges that despite distance prohibiting him performing traditional fatherhood concepts, he is able to facilitate his family's stability and "good life" through his own sacrifice of working on Point Delta.

Other accounts of how oilmen resisted any stereotypical masculine behaviours in favour of performing softer identity notions linked to fatherhood were presented. When I asked another oilman, Ron - an electrical engineer - about what being a man meant to him, he echoed the sentiments of the others above:

"Fatherhood. For me it's being a family man. I've got a son, so now it's all about making sure he's taken care of. That he's got everything he needs. That's important for me. For me to be able to support my son and not rely on anybody else. That's my masculinity"

Alongside the above points, oilmen's narratives are especially interesting, as they commonly link notions of fatherhood as representing a provider construct, with motifs of "everything changing". This theme was replicated with reference to safety by many workers. Importantly, when I asked oilmen if their 'new' more recent conceptions of fatherhood masculinity had changed their perception of safety in the offshore oilfield, all revealed that it had. Davey's narratives provided the most explanatory response to this. Saliently, Davey's ruminations of 'what if' danger scenarios operated as a cognitive anchor to enhance his vigilance and promote an ongoing state of heightened situation awareness for detecting possible oilfield risks and hazards. He elaborated:

"Well, if I was single and on my own [i.e. without family] then I wouldn't really think too much about safety...to be honest... but I think that after having the kid...I'm much safer now. I mean, maybe even going on the chopper [helicopter] now...I think about what if something ever happened to me, the missus [his wife] would be left with the kid and stuff [looks stressed and somewhat sad at saying this] ... Hopefully nothing will ever happen to me, but before, I would just get on the chopper and wouldn't worry anything about it, just come out here and work, just do whatever... But then I didn't have any responsibilities... but... [haha] not that it didn't matter either but I just didn't have anyone else to worry about. Obviously now I've got to have an extra think before I do something now...be safer... take extra

care... just in case... definitely since I've had the kid that's changed me...changed my views...towards safety, towards masculinity...yeah, definitely...fatherhood"

Davey's comments draw an explicit connect between becoming a father and his shifting safety perspective. His narrative explicitly highlights causal linkages between changing notions of masculinity – as conceptualised as distanced oilfield fathers – and increased vigilance and performance of safety. Notably his comments on becoming a father, and a need to be able to continually provide for his family anchor his increased safety behaviours. Davey reflexively highlights the impacts of this shift by comparing his pre-fatherhood masculinity to his current oilfield identity. He states: "before I would just get on the chopper and wouldn't worry anything about it". Davey makes a distinction between this behavioural thinking and his post-fatherhood framing of safety: "even going on the chopper now...I think about what if something ever happened to me" / "Obviously now I've got to have an extra think before I do something now...be safer... take extra care". Davey concludes by anchoring this new safety perspective as resultant of his shifting masculinity: "definitely since I've had the kid that's changed me...changed my views...".

I also asked Ron and Sam about how their masculine interactions influenced their safety and risk practices. They both gave similar answers to Davey. Ron discussed recognition for a need to act safer and listen to instructions from supervisors. He identified these practices as fulfilling a need to "come back home to my family in one piece". Sam's discussion also focussed on his interactions with supervisors and their ability to denote formal safety policy to the wider workforce. Where previously, masculinities associated with the historical Tiger culture – deemed stereotypical of the oilfield – ignored safety legislation and pressures, oilmen holding masculine notions of fatherhood identity stringently upheld and promoted safety. When discussing whether Sam followed supervisory guidelines and guidance on safety, he said: "Yeah, I follow their [supervisors] lead on safety, get involved. The main thing is paying the mortgage and making sure my kids have got what they need. I come out, work, stay safe, and go back". These comments exemplified the importance of fatherhood identity, but also self-preservation as the means by which oilmen were able to perform their oilfield fatherhood roles. Notably, the primary mechanism by which performing distanced provider notions of fatherhood was made possible, was through the performance of oilfield safety.

To examine this theory more closely, I sought to investigate how the large group of oilmen holding fatherhood notions of identity felt about the performance of risky practices offshore. I was curious to establish if such practices were ignored or accepted – as Collinson (1999) demonstrated in his oilfield research, or if any peer-pressures to perform or engage in risk overrode any notions of fatherhood masculinity volunteered to me by oilmen.

Surprisingly, almost all oilmen I spoke with highlighted that they actively subordinated any oilmen who attempted to act "macho", emulate any past "Tiger" behaviours or thinking, or engaged in risky safety behaviours. This was for the reason that these performances actively brought the fatherhood masculinities of oilmen into challenge. Oilmen expressed concerns that if they were caught in risky practices, or injured, then this invalidated their abilities to work offshore in the provider and breadwinning capacity they associated with 'oilfield fatherhood'. As such, institutional risk-taking was denounced as unacceptable, looked down upon, and actively minimised by almost all workers on Point Delta.

In a conversation with Davey, the distinction between new, fatherhood forms of masculinity and the of the older, risky norms of the Tiger was made explicit. Davey explained how his own father had worked offshore, and how he had become aware of the informal and stereotypical norms and values expected of men working in the oilfield. He explained:

“[...] look...my dad... he was in the drilling side also... and being from where I’m from, everybody is offshore. So, when I first started [on Point Delta] he was like: Ahhh... you’ll be a North Sea Tiger... but that’s just from the older guys, like him. I think it’s all been phased out now...but you do get the odd guy who is still a little bit like that but I don’t think it’s such a thing out here anymore... at all...”

[...]

It’s become less harsh. I think that’s definitely about the older guys getting phased out of the industry, The Tigers. [...] they [supervisors] tell you that if you’re a lad who’s about to go and lift something heavy on your own you should wait until another guy comes along to help you... maybe before it was like: can you not lift that yourself? kind of thing, whereas now, they tell you not to do things like that, because you don’t want to put yourself out. You’ll see it here with a lot of older guys, their knees are in bits or their backs are in bits, and it’s not gotten them anywhere that macho attitude [...] I do understand that [safety procedures] [are] there for a reason, to protect you... and for me that’s important, to get home to my family the same way as I came out”

Davey’s dialogue reveals that “macho” practices threaten his identity conceptions. Performing risks, such as the solo lifting of heavy objects, brings his masculine identity as a “provider” into jeopardy. Davey recognises danger potential and the physical ramifications risky practices carry: “You’ll see it here with a lot of older guys, their knees are in bits or their backs are in bits, and it’s not gotten them anywhere that macho attitude”. Acknowledging the disintegration of the physical body suggest negative physical ramifications from dangerous practices are one of Davey’s greatest concerns. Physical injury would compromise the mechanisms by which Davey - and many others - fulfil fatherhood status offshore. This parallel is evidenced in his closing statement. he confirms: “I understand safety is for a reason, to protect you”. Davey makes sense of oilfield safety procedures by conceptualising these as “protection”. Within the same breath, he anchors this protection to his physical form and the central aspect of his masculinity: his family. Emphasis placed on returning to his family in the same condition as when arriving offshore endorses the degree to which Davey’s provider masculinity is connected to his physical capabilities. However, this is achieved in a manner heterodox with the strong, hard, risky, and dangerous norms of the historic oilfield Tiger culture, and that of the dated workplace culture presented in Collinson’s 1990 snapshot of the UK oilfield (1999). Instead, Davey’s masculinity constructs increased adherence of oilfield safety. His prioritisation of safety plays a dual role. Working safely facilitates Davey to protect his physicality, preventing his masculine identity as a “provider” from challenge. This conserves legitimisation of his core masculine notions of fatherhood. Safety also allows Davey’s masculinity to operate in complement to that of most of his colleagues. This thinking was confirmed by several other oilmen I spoke with. Mick, a roustabout I interviewed commented: “Supervisors just want us to continue to be able to work out here, continue being able to provide for our families”. On another occasion, he volunteered: “Supervisors just want us to get home safe to our families”. Lem, another oilman - a drilling roughneck - claimed: “[...] safety... it’s

a positive thing, we all want to keep working and earning money, we all want to come home to our families safe”.

One of the most poignant comments about the shifting masculinities of oilfield workers came from Jim – a long-serving oilman in charge of much of the drilling projects on Point Delta. Jim had worked offshore for thirty-nine years, was in his early sixties, and was getting ready to retire. In our discussions, he acknowledged the widely stereotyped notion of ‘the North Sea oilman’ as exemplified by historic Tiger imagery. However, he immediately voiced his concerns for the legitimacy of this typing:

“I think if any of these researchers actually came offshore, and spent any amount of time with these guys, they would be in for a shock. There are a lot of individuals here, a lot of different masculinities. None of them that macho tough-guy thing you’ve mentioned”.

Most saliently, Jim’s dialogue voiced acceptance and acknowledgment for the many different masculinities held by workers and how these interlinked with behaviours and norms divorced from tough, rough, and hard oilman notions. He commented on the Tigers:

[...] that macho bullshit is mostly gone now man...you realise it’s all nonsense...really it is...and the higher up you get the more you realise that there is a lot of sensitive people out there, regardless of where they are, you know?

[...]

Tigers?... I think now that’s a thing of the past to be truthful with you... never even really hear that phrase anymore. Nick, I’ve never seen it for years and years...and even some of the ones who were like that to start...most of the remaining ones have changed because they had to, because the industry has changed towards safety”

Like the comments of Davey, and many others, Jim positioned the Tiger culture as being largely eradicated from the oilfield, in favour of newer ‘sensitive’ masculinities predicated on more personal notions; such as fatherhood concepts, that interlink closely with the performance of safety.

4. Discussion

Research exploring linkages between masculinity and safety and risk behaviours in high-risk workplaces focusses most prevalently on binary conceptions of gender identity. The most common measures used to quantify men’s ‘masculinity’ in psychological studies rely on Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (see Heuvel et al., 2017; Hofstede, 2009; Mearns & Yule, 2009; Noorbehbahani & Salehi, 2020; Rojo et al., 2020). While useful to develop overarching quantitative questionnaires that categorise ‘masculinity’, such methods only allow for masculinity to be considered in primarily negative terms, with the opposite of so called ‘masculine’ dimensions of – achievement, heroism, material success, and assertion – upheld as ‘femininity’ and defined as ‘less masculine’, even when such characteristics are performed by men.

Sociological thinking rejects these narrow understandings of gender identity. Many recent sociological studies exploring institutional, workplace masculinities and linkages between

gender identity and safety and risk practices uphold the multiplicitous and shifting nature of masculine constructs (Colfer, 2020; Connell, 2009; Hanna et al., 2020; George & Loosemore, 2019; Winlow, 2020). While these studies have done much to dispel the stereotypes that are predominantly attached to some high-risk industries, little research has been conducted in the UK oilfields. Of the very limited sociological research that has been conducted offshore, studies are over thirty years old, and paint a picture of a historic oilfield that largely conforms to stereotypically negative and ‘hard’ notions of masculinity, congruent with outdated labels and notions, that are seemingly compatible with psychological studies in same area (see Collinson, 1999).

As discussed in our introduction, more ethnographic and sociological studies are necessary in under-researched locales like oilfields, however, the difficulties of researchers accessing such environments have stemmed the flow of new knowledge. This is a probable reason for the continued focus of research in dangerous workplaces to utilise methodologies that lend to distanced analysis – such as self-report questionnaires. However, the limitations of such methods are evident when exploring the multiple and ranging subject matter of gender identity. Most significantly, and given the findings of this research, continuing to employ narrow questionnaire methods - that offer little-to-no qualitative inputs from male workers - serve only to propagate the incorrect categorisation of masculinity by using overly narrow or reductive terms. Relatedly, some ethnographers suggest the ethnographic method is suited to longer embedding and observations (Agar, 1996; Richardson, 2000). However, this thinking paints ethnography as a fixed methodological practice that actively engineers it’s use towards specific locales, whilst prohibiting it’s use in others. Despite this, numerous new studies uphold the benefits of short, sharp, and rapid ethnographies in locales that lend only to a short visit by the researcher and research participants alike (see Andreassen et al., 2020; Doll, 2020; Knoblauch, 2005; Pink & Morgan, 2013). I argue that the oilfield is perfect for ‘rapid’ ethnography, being that oilmen themselves are only transient entities in the workplace, and the ongoing and continuous nature of ‘embedding’ in the oilfield results in a rich, ‘in-depth’ layering of findings, occurring from constant immersion and the 24-hour - dual shift - workday¹².

This study successfully conducted an in-depth ethnographic investigation of linkages between the masculinities of oilmen working on the Point Delta drilling platform, and oilmen’s safety and risk behaviours. Most salient of findings is that many oilmen offshore hold different notions of identity that resist oilfield stereotypes. Oilmen were aware, yet actively resist the ‘well worn’ oilmen stereotype of being hard, strong, heavy-handed, and tough risk-takers. Despite this, oilmen acknowledged this stereotype was a previous reality for the oilfield - represented by ‘The Tiger’ symbology - but that this is long outdated and has become unwelcome offshore. Importantly, many men on Point Delta spoke of understanding their oilfield identities in terms of being a father. This was surprising due to the hallmarks of fatherhood often representing close protection, caregiving, proximity and direct emotional contact. However, oilmen reframed their fatherhood identities in terms of being a distanced provider for their families. This allowed them to minimise any hallmarks of fatherhood as defined by close familial proximity. Instead, oilmen focussed on breadwinning as the primary indicator of masculinity in the oilfield. Resultantly, oilmen prioritised operating safely and avoiding risk as a means to preserve the defining ‘provider’ characteristics of their breadwinning masculinities. In practice, this represented an aversion to risky behaviours and an alignment with oilfield safety culture, and supervisory safety advice as a direct mechanism

¹² Oilmen all work twelve-hour shifts, when day-shift ends, a new team work nightshift, resulting in a 24-hour continuous working environment.

to minimise any possible physical harm, or disciplinary actions from taking risks or behaving unsafely. Such occurrences represented the ultimate defeat for oilmen basing their masculinity on fatherhood, as these ramifications would prevent oilmen from performing their provider identities in practice offshore. Thus, oilmen's 'new' notions of fatherhood directly caused them to perform safety offshore and avoid and minimise risk. The stability and security of oilmen's fatherhood identity was evident clearly throughout ethnography. Importantly, fatherhood oilmen looked down upon and subordinated the previous risky notions of the Tigers, upholding "Tiger" culture as an incorrect and outdated identity construct, due to the linkages between Tiger identity and risk-behaviours. Due to the associations between 'risky' Tiger masculine practices and machismo, any overt displays of machismo or 'macho' behaviours were also discouraged offshore. This is because displays of machismo were longitudinally linked with 'being a Tiger'.

North Sea drilling assets have long been highlighted as inhibited by oilmen bearing the 'tough' oilfield masculine stereotype (Collinson, 1999; Diffie, 2012; Paetzold, 1999). On the Point Delta drilling platform, this could not be further from the truth. Findings suggest that oilfield masculinity has enjoyed a sea change. Most saliently, and unlike psychological conceptions of masculinity, men need not – and do not – follow stereotypical behaviours. In support for the body of emerging and recent sociological studies discussed earlier, oilmen on Point Delta readily reimagined their masculine identities in complex and personal ways that hold unique significance. These identity constructs directly affect their workplace behaviours, and the construction of subsequent interactions, social norms, and institutional values. In the case of many oilmen on Point Delta, fatherhood 'provider' notions of masculinity underpin increased safety performance, the eradication of 'macho' behaviours and practices, and aversions to institutional risk-taking.

5. Conclusion

This study explored - ethnographically – oilmen and their complex notions of masculinity on a remote UK offshore drilling platform; Point Delta. Oilmen readily formed complex notions of identity that actively resisted the common 'hard, tough, and rough' oilfield stereotype. Surprisingly, many oilmen offshore voiced that they considered their masculinities and 'what it means to be a man' in terms of their role as a 'distanced provider' to their onshore families. Predominantly, this identity was constructed on beliefs of operating safety, and caution at all times offshore. This was so that oilmen may continue in the breadwinning 'provider' role and maintain fulfilment of their masculinities. For these reasons, oilmen upheld safety and demonised the performance of risk. Notably, while risk-taking had previously been considered a natural and necessary part of oilfield work, contemporary oilmen rejected this on the grounds that the 'macho' "Tiger" identity characterisations associated with risk were now outdated. Thus, as opposed to the idea that the oilfield contains a homogenous, singular oilmen identity interlinked with pro-danger, pro-risk attitudes and hypermasculine values and priorities, the contemporary oilfield instead allows for men to carry their own unique masculinities in ways that render these identities distinctly important to them. More research is required in dangerous workplaces to dispel historical stereotypes. These may be propagated by outdated theoretical paradigms. Notably, rapid ethnography represents an ideal methodology for some such locales. Importantly, and to grow sociological study of linkages between masculinity, risk, and safety in high-risk industries, men must be given the chance to define their own notions of identity to a researcher, and demonstrate how these understandings and concepts shape their local safety and risk practices.

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