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Men and the mask: Dramaturgical mask-wearing, masculinities and oilmen's 'stoical' emotional shielding practices in Scotland's offshore oilfields

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ABSTRACT

Scotland's North Sea offshore oil-drilling-fields have long been stereotyped as sites reinforcing and reproducing unique forms of masculinities aligning with *hegemonic masculinity* (HM) descriptors: stoicism, competition, and conflict. Oilfields encompass near-all-male workplaces, requiring labour in difficult conditions, distancing from friends, family, and home life. Emerging research in oilfields has begun to resist the HM-stereotype in favour of complex understandings of masculinities, labour-and-identity performances. This work details findings from a lengthy 'embedded' ethnography of the UK Offshore Oilfield. Specifically, highlighting and discussing men's metaphorical 'mask wearing' practices: the process by which oilmen engaged in complex performances of masculinities that resist HM yet retained overt components of stoicism; a key HM-descriptor. This 'masked' stoicism was presented and performed in unique ways that bridged genuine and non-genuine performances of oilfield masculine identities and interconnected with resistances against risk-taking and supports for safety. Goffman's dramaturgical perspective is applied to deepen and interrogate findings. Salient implications for oilmen's wellbeing, masculinities theory and future study are put forward.

1. Introduction

Much research explores gendered labour. Studies historically link 'masculine-labour' descriptors to work conducted within remote, heavy, dangerous and manual environments [1–6]. Scholars have speculated reasoning for specific workplaces becoming 'male-dominated' is that such workplaces allegedly demand specific stereotyped 'masculine' traits and characteristics from labourers, and that these closely match depictions of 'hegemonic masculinity' (HM). HM represents a revered collection of 'defining' masculine behaviours operating inverse to supposed notions of 'femininity' [7–9]. From the opposite perspective, a growing body of contemporary gender research suggests men working within alleged 'non-traditional male occupations' re-construct or re-adjust their behaviours and masculine identities to perform work-related labour that can still be considered 'masculine' that would otherwise previously have been stereotyped as 'feminine' [10–13]. Such labour operates antagonistic to notions of HM but is performed in ways that is contextually considered 'legitimately masculine'. This demonstrates the fluidity and ambiguity of labour gender-identity and how this is conceptualised.

HM refers to a gendered ideology best described as depicting the most contextually revered and 'time honoured' 'typically male' characteristics for a specific time and place [14–16]. Connell's HM-theory draws from Gramsci's concepts of *cultural hegemony*, positing that—within a given society—there exists a singular dominant ideal of masculinity: the hegemonic masculinity. HM represents an ideal *masculine* archetype maintaining power-inequalities via conjuring dominance over other masculinities and femininities. Men who attempt to conform to the HM perform practices Connell deems supportive or compliant with HM-ideals, for example: emotional suppression; stoicism, aggression, competition, aggression, bodily control and domination [14]. Men are avoidant of practices stereotyped-as-inverse to HM, especially those linked with supposed-femininities, for example, overt notions of care and emotional openness. There are two (arguably three) additional levels to Connell's theory of multiple masculinities. In addition to men attempting to perform HM, there are men who perform practices not in direct subscription or alignment with HM, but operating in *complicit support*. These men do not actively resist any HM-congruent practices and are termed by complicit masculinities; a mid-tier between the HM and the two lower levels of masculinities. Lastly, there are two tiers of *subordinated* and *marginalised* masculinities. These layers are occupied by men who operate in direct heterodoxy (challenge and

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resistance) against HM-ideals and performances. Connell argues, as HM is the most revered and accepted construct of identity ideology and performance for men in western society, men operating at these levels are enduringly subordinated and marginalised, as their behaviours are inverse to the hegemonic ideal and behaviours in complicit support of HM, and thus they are subordinated as *feminine* [14]. This is because these men are typed as not in active pursuit of HM.

2. Literature review

Contemporary efforts to study *men and masculinities* (M&M) using the HM-lens are mostly confined to non-industrial-locales geographically based on land [17–19]. Some scholarship over the last thirty-five years has explored M&M in geographically enclosed and distanced-from-land locales; particularly high-risk workplaces [20–29]. Studies raise important perspectives surrounding construction and enactment; 'performance' of male identities in enclosed and dangerous locales. However, research is beginning to date. New, field-driven research is required to re-examine perspectives to maintain congruence between scholarship and the realities of contemporary culture, society, and technology and workplaces. A small portion of past scholarship focusses on studying M&M in oilfield contexts [23–27,30]; adopting HM as a means of making sense of the behaviours of oil workers to classify and give structuring language to their 'masculine' performances.

Recent research has begun to explore how emotional labor impacts men in male-dominated fields [31–33]. Societal pressures to conform to HM can lead men to engage in emotional shielding practices, suppressing or concealing emotions deemed as 'vulnerable or weak' [34–36]. McKenzie et al. [37] explores this with regards to mental health; evidencing men internalising themes they associate with 'weakness' to the detriment of mental wellbeing and ability to form open and meaningful social connections. Findings are echoed from studies within industry: Gater [38] explores, via qualitative interviews and visual methods, the employment journeys and interactions of a cohort of working-class men located in Aber Valley, South Wales who opted-out of formal education during their youth. Findings suggest community traditions and a working-class masculinity defined by stoicism, risk-taking, and toughness forge men's preferences towards specific types of labour. Participants favoured manual jobs over sedentary service sector roles and jobs requiring emotional labor. Preferences were driven by the physical nature of manual work, perceived benefits, and notions of personal wellbeing among participants. However, not all forms of manual labor were equally favoured.

Similarly, Stergiou-Kita et al. [28] investigate, via literature review and secondary-analysis, the intersection of masculinities and men's workplace health and safety, interrogating existing research, identifying key themes, and pinpointing research gaps. HM is utilised as a lens to conceptualise masculinities in reviewed literatures. Collective findings highlight the prevalence of heroic and hypermasculine behaviours—defined as HM—across various high-risk male-dominated occupations, including mining, farming, construction, and firefighting. Such behaviours are frequently celebrated within workplace cultures that uphold courage, physicality, and endurance as resplendent of the 'correctly masculine' ways to engage labour. Their conclusions reveal the influence of dominant masculinities, shaping how workplace and labour risks are perceived, accepted, and normalised, with men frequently displaying stoicism as a product of masculine norms, enduring dangers without complaint and framing injuries as an inherent product of 'risky' work.

Investigations within construction and farming sectors have equally highlighted stoic trends as linked to HM, but also revealed diverse constructs of masculinities with both HM-congruent and HM-opposing identities uncovered. Bryant & Garnham's [39] work examining mental health, suicide, and stoicism in male-dominated farming cultures of the drought-affected Australian rural landscape, network together issues of neoliberal-driven economic pressures, farming behavioural-norms and masculinities, with notions of farming cultural identity and moral worth in conceptualising farmer's suicide practices. The authors highlight the concept of the "fallen hero" as encapsulating the shift from pride to shame within farmer's masculine identity, spotlighting masculine tensions as contributing to farmer suicides.

Relatedly, Hanna et al.'s work [40] in the UK male-dominated construction industry highlights the ongoing prevalence of rates of illness and injury compared to other sectors. Findings reveal interplay between divergent masculine themes in workplace labour practices and sense-making. A culture of stoicism discourages workers from addressing illness or injury, linking with a competitive environment suggesting the normalising risky behaviours as natural and expected aspects of workplace labour. However, homosocial camaraderie and respect for personal experiences among workers was also identified; helping to foster healthy behaviours. Variances were identified in health attitudes between younger and older workers. Findings suggest health practices of male construction workers reflect rational responses to structural challenges, uncertainties and trends within industry.

Daggett's work is also relevant [41]. Daggett lays the foundation for her critical analysis of the socio-political and cultural dimensions of fossil fuel dependency; interrogating how energy systems, particularly those focussing on fossil fuels, forge relationships between labour, governance, and environmental degradation in the Anthropocene. Daggett's analysis highlights how fossil fuel infrastructures sustain modern economies but also reproduce systems of power and inequality through consumption, waste, and—importantly—labour dynamics. Building on this foundation, Daggett [42] introduces the concept of *petro-masculinity*, which examines the entanglement of fossil fuel reliance with patriarchal and authoritarian systems. She argues that fossil fuel dependency reinforces traditional masculine ideals of strength, control, and domination (i.e. dependent characteristics of HM), suggesting climate action represents challenge to these entrenched identities. This framework reveals how opposition to decarbonisation often stems from a deeper cultural attachment to the power structures that fossil fuels sustain and legitimise. Daggett [43] also critiques the pervasive "fossil myth", which positions fuel expansion as synonymous with societal progress. She connects this myth to broader systems of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy, which justify extractive relationships with both people and the planet. By challenging this narrative, Daggett advocates for energy transitions rooted in justice and equity, arguing that technological solutions alone are insufficient without a corresponding cultural shift in how energy systems are conceptualised.

The above literatures paint a complex picture of shifting norms and labour-linked masculinities in high-risk industries, recurrently spotlighting stoicism as a damaging practice negatively influencing wellbeing, risk-taking, and operating inverse to social cohesion. Despite this, no studies exist that interrogate nuanced perspectives underpinning men's emotional suppression practices in high-risk workplaces. This work investigates this perspective, building on my existing publication-set from my embedded ethnographic work with oilmen in the UK oilfields. Much of my linked work exploring men, masculinities and high-risk occupations (as well as high-risk activities) has questioned the oft-applied 'hegemonic' perspective applied to men, and the use of men's often-surface-deep behaviours to define specific practices as 'negative' [44]. This is opposed to asking men themselves to define their behaviours and motivations, sense-making and self-perceptions underpinning actions and intentions. This research responds to a gap in existing gender-studies knowledge, shedding light on the ways oilmen performed 'practiced', 'disingenuous' and 'calculated' displays of stoicism that at first glance could readily by stereotyped as depictive of HM. However, and unlike existing scholarly positions, close-investigations allowed oilmen to share stories underpinning their behaviours, revealing that oilmen performed calculated 'masked' displays of stoicism in ways that actively resisted HM. Oilmen chose when and how to 'remove their mask' and portray their *genuine masculinities* and

'unmasked' performances.

The following section explores study methodology. Then follows an examination of findings: how unique characteristics of the oilfield shape workers' practices of emotional suppression and identity negotiations—oilmen articulating difficulties in attempting to reconcile identities between the separate geographical locations of onshore and offshore. Emotional tensions arising from struggles are negotiated by workers selectively, recurrently and creatively, with oilmen repressing some important mental themes native to life at home. Oilmen accomplish this control by wearing a metaphorical mask. I focus on investigating the various practical and symbolic reasons behind workers wearing masks, and how masks operate to protect oilmen's underlying masculinities. A discussion follows reinterpreting findings: Goffman's dramaturgical lens is applied to generate theoretical perspectives on the processes of presentation and negotiation of masculine performances within the all-male oilfield 'total institution'.[1] Discoveries reveal oilmen decide to 'mask' and 'reveal' specific genuine and non-genuine performances as a protective mechanism. Oilmen bridged calculated and pseudo performances of historically '*stereotypical*' and 'masked' masculine notions with newer, genuine performances of '*contemporary*' masculinities. Goffman's *the setting*; *theatre and stage* is applied to interrogate linkages between oilmen's performances and behaviours. Discussion evolves into a pathway for further theorising; spotlighting that resultant theory and discoveries provide important—rare—perspectives on links between workplace locations and gendered displays.

3. Methodology

My research work took place on a remote oil and gas drilling installation in the far UK North Sea (UKNS), near the northern portion of the Scottish waters, approaching Norwegian sector. I refer to this platform herein as 'Point Delta' (PD). PD is an ageing 'workhorse' of the UKNS; partially shut-down and reactivated over the last twenty years, and modified as a 'dual-riser' installation capable of drilling for both oil and gas. Thus, the platform consists of two 'jackets' a drilling platform and a production platform, separated and connected by two lengthy bridges, with the accommodation, galley, catering block and the helideck situated in the top-middle of the production platform. Fig. 1 (below) provides some context to the remoteness, isolation and human-made structure of PD.

My access to PD was facilitated speculatively via negotiations with DrillMech: a major UK drilling organisation and the managing drilling-contractor for PD. I approached DrillMech directly about my research, with a clear intention to study M&M, safety, and risk behaviours within a genuine drilling environment. Negotiations were lengthy, but eventually, with DrillMech's support, I successfully secured a promise to travel offshore, providing I underwent a lengthy process of training. Familiarisation represented a year-long journey of working several days a week from the DrillMech head office. This was in addition to completing required classroom and practical exams to visit the oilfield, including survival training. Preparation included underwater helicopter escape drills and practical life-boat launch drills, taking place in a local warehouse water facility and the local shipping harbour respectively.

When planning to visit PD, I communicated my requirements to DrillMech, negotiating with various stakeholders to align my presence with the typical rotation schedule of oilmen, for approximately two weeks per trip. Over the course of just over the normal two-week trip time, I completed two trips to the oilfields, totalling fifteen days offshore. While offshore, I conducted thirty-five semi-structured interviews with oil workers, aiming to capture diverse perspectives and experiences related to safety, risk, and masculinities in the offshore environment. I facilitated four structured focus groups, providing a platform for collective discussions. This was in addition to numerous discussion sessions and observational opportunities possible due to work on PD occurring twenty-four-hours a day: never stopping.

My methodology was grounded in a bespoke-design *embedded-actualised* ethnographic approach.[2] This comprising two interconnected phases. The embedded phase involved 'embedding' at the DrillMech headquarters, learning about the organisation, training, and preparing for offshore life; an onshore ethnography. This included conducting seven semi-structured interviews and observations with oilfield workers in onshore contexts, in tandem with a structured policy analysis of DrillMech safety policies. Transitioning to the 'actualised' phase which forms the basis for this research, I embarked—by helicopter—after various delays and further negotiations on my offshore journey to the PD platform, where I conducted site-based research. This unique 'blended' methodological approach involved integrating onshore and offshore components to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of offshore labor dynamics and masculinities. By immersing myself in both environments, I could triangulate data: spotlighting complexities of offshore work culture, shifting notions of masculinities, the changing structures of labour, and influence between 'home' and 'away' contexts.

On return from the offshore oilfield, all data was collated and imported into the software tool NVivo. Thematic coding analysis was employed for both onshore document analysis and onshore and offshore interview data, as both methods share a focus on same subject matter and were intended to complement each other [46,47]. To facilitate comparisons between findings, it was essential for the language used to code, arrange, and sort the data to be compatible. Thematic analysis emphasises identification and documentation of thematic patterns within data, with themes representing patterns observed across triangulated data sets. Motifs play a crucial role in describing phenomena related to the specific research question [48]. Categories for analysis were established based on themes of masculinity, safety, and risk [44], each with multiple sub-categories. Coding was conducted following the six-level method primarily advocated by Braun and Clarke [46] and Fereday and Muir-Cochrane [47]. This analytical framework was chosen to align with Bowen's [49] approach of combining content and thematic analysis of both formal written documents and interview data, invoking a blended yet balanced analysis to interpret correlations and contradictions between prevalent themes. Nvivo was utilised to assist in structuring and sorting of categories.

4. Empirical findings

Before exploring findings discussing emotional stoicism, a primer is required to understand the complexities of the multiple masculine cultures uncovered on PD. These findings are reported in longer-form in an existing publication [44]. This section briefly summarises key discoveries only, serving to enhance understandings of the following sections.

Oilmen's masculinities on PD resisted compressing into a single form of masculinity, hegemonic or otherwise. Both onshore and offshore, oilmen spoke of a previous dominant notion of masculinity that governed the oilfield from the early days of drilling until the mid-late 1980s: the masculinity of *the North Sea Tigers*, defined by hard, competitive, strong, confrontational and resilience-focussed motifs. But, all interviewed espoused this masculinity had largely decayed into obsolescence

[1] I use the term 'total institution' (TI) referencing Goffman's 1961 work [45]. TI describes enclosed social environments defined by stringent control and regulation 'guarded' by institutional rite and routine. TIs have little room for autonomy and individual expression; individuals physically segregated from the 'outside world' and non-institutional 'real world' ways of life. The PD platform represents a total institution.

[2] A publication exploring this embedded-actualised method has since been published fully explaining this method—see: Adams, N. N. (2024). Studying 'closed' workplaces: 'embedded-actualised' ethnography and reflections on 'embeddedness' from the remote UK oilfields. *Ethnography*, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/14661381241266923

Fig. 1. The view to the East from Point Delta (top), the view of the drilling package from the end of the walkway of the living quarters on Point Delta (bottom). Photographs taken by this researcher during fieldwork.
Note: Care has been taken to blur, remove or crop-out any identifying imagery.

and marginalisation. This occurred in part due to shifts in technology automating elements of the drilling process; reducing requirements for 'traditional' motifs of 'strength' 'resilience' and 'stoicism' in the wake of frequent risk and injuries.

However, the major sea-change came in the wake of the Piper Alpha [PA] disaster of 1988.[3] This incident caused identities more closely correlated with safety to become institutionally desirable. Safety policies existed prior to PA but, *Tiger culture* was suggested to downplay and

[3] Piper Alpha, situated in the North Sea, was an oil and gas production platform. A catastrophic explosion took place on July 6th, 1988. 167 people lost their lives, sixty-one individuals survived. Piper Alpha remains the most devastating offshore disaster worldwide. Investigations prompted *The Cullen Report*, outlining 106 mandatory safety enhancements; new safety protocols and implementation of regulations to govern process and culture [50].

subordinate safety practices. The PA disaster attached new legitimacy to the behaviours that safety policies upheld. Safety-motifs became dominant behaviours openly exercised by supervisors, and as such, masculine identities linking with safety became institutionally desirable. Reversely, masculinities associated with risky labour became subordinated and unwelcome. This revealed a complete power-shift in the oilfield demonstrating oilmen's masculinities as transformative.

Instead of a single dominant masculinity, or a single *hegemonic masculinity* emerging, four distinct paradigms of masculinity were revealed by offshore ethnography. Firstly, supervisory oilmen embodied a paternalistic ethos, framing their role akin to familial fathers safeguarding their subordinates. This "protective fatherhood" culture intertwined safety with supervisory 'fatherhood' masculine identity; lapses in safety construed as failures in 'fatherly' caregiving and protection. Similarly, subaltern oilmen under the protection of supervisors espoused a "provider fatherhood" ethos, but a distinct fatherhood identity different from that of supervisors, wherein their offshore labor sustained their role as a *distant provider* for their onshore families. For these oilmen, safety adherence was imperative to safeguard their abilities to fulfil their 'distanced provider' and 'breadwinning' fatherhood roles, forming a symbiotic relationship with supervisory masculinity. Both cultures mutually reinforced safety practices; retaining dual, shared masculine-dominance in the oilfield. This illustrated a complex interplay between familial narratives and workplace safety. Amidst these, two additional cultures emerged: oilmen embracing positive safety behaviours as means of complicit masculine support to the two dominant oilfield cultures of fatherhood, and another defined by masculine 'risky' cultural ideals forming heterodoxic resistance towards the other three symbiotic cultures. For this 'resistance masculinity' oilmen based their identities upon high-risk workplace practices, and understandings of these as 'natural' to oilfield labour, supporting some existing studies [28,38–40]. Overall, these findings actively challenge traditional notions of hegemonic masculinity and attachments to 'risky' labour, instead indicating a multifaceted landscape where various masculine identities coexist and interact, shaping workplace dynamics. While all masculinities on PD at times engaged in emotional suppression to varying degrees, none of these masculinities were associated directly or indirectly with HM [44].

The structures of the oilfield represent a symbiotic product of labour and function; a unique labour context. Production and maintenance of human, social and cognitive labour is dictated by—and occurs completely within—the isolated, mechanical, electronic and human-made structures of the PD platform: its enclosed spaces, it's surrounding by sea, and PD's wholly networked and purpose-built *functional nature*. To clarify: every construct on the platform, *every form*, is a product of function, and requirement to fulfil a purpose to justify its space, its weight, its consumption and its transport to the locale. The environment—*the island*—inhabited by the oil crews is symbiotic: a product of both the labour required to occur in this location and, by nature, PD's design to accommodate, sustain, and facilitate individuals to work, live, and travel to-and-from this labour locale.

The above structuring shaped narratives of emotional stoicism. Fascinatingly, distancing was conjured and manifested across dual dimensions; oilmen near-universally developing complex and multi-layered emotionally-distancing strategies to cope with geographical distance and isolation of being functionally located on the remote PD drilling platform. This included oilmen framing their working life on PD recurrently as solitary and alone, despite the platform being overcrowded and highly populated, and oilmen acknowledging this. Oilmen also downplayed the benefits of digital communication tools, withdrawing from using these to develop emotional connections, and sometimes resisting contact with loved ones at home. This was inverse to what I had been led to believe would be the case from my onshore ethnography. Managers and oilmen onshore had discussed how technological advances in Wi-Fi and digital communications reduced anxieties and perceived distances between 'home' and 'away' lives. However, the opposite views were uncovered.

Oilmen conceptualised their time offshore as distinctly distant and divergent from their life at home. They described living two lives; "splitting time" between "two lives" and "only […] half a life" among other descriptors of divergence and separation between their existence in 'labour time' or "offshore" on PD, and their 'down time' — "onshore" or "on the beach[4]".

One of the best examples of stoicism: emotional distancing linking to digital communications came from MA.[5] MA was a roustabout[6] in his mid-twenties; working offshore for five years. To shelter from the wind, we conversed in a rusted shipping container, located on the top of the drilling platform. MA had no children but had recently begun a relationship. He explained conflicts between onshore and offshore identity was something "everyone experienced", regardless of age, family or relationship status:

"Out here… you bury the feelings you have at home down inside… you just try and get on with the job and not think about home at all".

MA elaborated that "trying to engage with feelings in the same way as when you're at home" intensified his awareness that "your life is on pause" in the oilfield:

"Look…you can try to manage communications, but… if you see a bad message or something then it'll play on your mind all afternoon. You can't just go in and message if there has been a misunderstanding. You need to wait four or five hours to say something back. […] it's hard… psychologically. […] You just have to put it out of your head to make it out here".

MA summarised by discussing coping strategies:

"[…] time here is so structured and repetitive you can have a lot of thinking time if you give yourself…way too much time…and because of that, things just play on your mind. It's actually better being single here… just because you don't have that person to worry about back home […] Here, it's hard to control it, too much time to think, it's all down to being offshore".

MA focusses on "switching off" emotional thoughts of home and "distancing himself" from his partner. However, during our discussion, MA positioned "looking after his girlfriend" as the most important thing to him. While MA's partner represents the central facet of his emotional connection to home, he actively distances himself from these feelings on PD; evidenced in the above narratives—actively engaging suppression of emotions.

Within other discussions this "mental switch" was explained as "getting your offshore head on". This was a required practice for oilmen, occurring before a scheduled trip. Workers disconnected from emotional factors they prioritised onshore: family, friends and life at home, focussing instead on thinking exclusively in terms of the rigid work routines and activities embedded in offshore life. MA described this as: "the easiest way to survive and…well, not go mad out here".

On PD, patterns of oilmen suppressing and 'restricting' their emotional connections and 'at home' identities connected with oilmen's masculinities. Influences upon identity was noted from oilmen's contrasting perceptions of alienation. When discussing the dualism of onshore and offshore identity, MA commented: "out here we have no one". Another oilmen mentioned he felt he was "out here alone [on PD]". Narratives were echoed by other rotational workers. However, motifs and sense-making clashed when conversations shifted to discuss the practicalities of oilmen 'living offshore'. For example, MA highlighted: "you're never really alone offshore", and another oilman mused: "you're never by yourself on Point Delta". Similarly, others interviewed

[4] A common descriptor used by oilmen, describing anything occurring onshore.

[5] Initials are all pseudonyms developed specifically for this publication; enhancing participant protection.

[6] 'Roustabout' refers to an entry-level oil and gas worker responsible for performing manual labor tasks linked to drilling activities.

spoke of the crowded nature of the platform and drew comparisons to working within a family and a tight-knit group, where there are "no secrets". This revealed a dichotomy between practical and work-focussed 'chat' and the restriction of emotional process and discussion this all shaped by the specifics of the PD workplace.

At this point in investigation, I sought to examine *why* and *how* workers engaged in emotional suppression practices, for what functional purpose, if these engagements were conscious or unconscious, and how oilmen were affected by their practices.

Throughout interviews, many oilmen spoke of "wearing a mask" for coming offshore. Metaphorical masks allowed workers—initially—to shield their institutional masculinities. Masks represented the primary mechanism—the conduit—by which workers "filtered out" and "switched off" emotional connections to home. Masks served as a barrier to distance and protect workers from vulnerable facets of their masculine identities initially "left onshore". Crucially, vulnerability was perceived by workers both as a threat to their own wellbeing offshore, but also to that of others. This was conceptualised in complex ways, but linked primarily to a collective worry of distracting or 'stressing' others with thoughts and concerns connected with home-life that offshore workers held no influence of control over when located offshore on PD.

This thinking was articulated across numerous interviews. I first asked JE, an offshore electrician to explain his thoughts linking to divergent onshore and offshore identities:

"Yeah…I think there is a good lot of people who wear masks here. I think people…well…I'm one for a start…I'm quite an emotional guy and this time of year is not good for me because I lost [a family member close to Christmas][7]…family's so important to me. It's all building up and you don't want to show your feelings here. There are some days where you get a phone call from home, and something's happened and you're here and you do feel useless. […]".

Salient of JE's narrative is his linking of "tying up" feelings and a reluctance to "show emotions" as "macho"; JE identifying his mask-wearing to minimise emotional burdens of themes he holds close to his identity: his family. However, when I asked JE to clarify any masculine implications of his "macho" comment, he elaborated that suppression practices were independent of subscription to masculinity (ies) linking with 'macho stoicism', particularly any notions that could be resplendent of the old oilfield norms of *The North Sea Tiger* culture.

"No, not showing emotion is not a macho thing…no, I wouldn't say it's at all macho in that way. The whole of offshore has moved away from that. I've been here one of the longest and could be a so-called '*Tiger*' if you like. But I mean, I definitely don't see myself as macho personally. I cope by being happy, when I'm out… But when I'm in my cabin I can be miserable as sin. But then again it's not in front of anyone is it? That's maybe bottling up my emotions and keeping them to myself. But, on the outside I'm a happy-go-lucky chap, but if something is bothering me no one will know. I tend to bottle it up, that bit might be considered macho though".

JE indicated he was aware of the macho implications of emotional distancing. However, he explained his reluctance to display emotions was as much to benefit others as it was himself. He elucidated that "life offshore is just easier when people say that they're fine" and that "the less distractions people have out here regarding what they're missing at home the easier it is for them". For JE, past 'macho' attitudes of the oilfield and his own terming of his behaviour as "macho" represent distinct understandings that he was careful to stratify.

I spoke next with BL, [role anonymised].[8] BL elaborated—in detail—the practice of 'mask wearing' offshore. BL had worked offshore for more than five years. I interviewed him in a storage hut, located in a materials depot area near the bottom of the drilling platform. While we spoke, BL assembled various equipment into boxes for transport to the drill floor. Spray from the sea lashed hard against the hut walls. I first asked him if workers wore "a mask" offshore. He replied:

"Oh yes. Yes, definitely. Because I mean that… [*BL pauses here and collects his thoughts*]. Well, speaking for myself I do that all the time, you've got to…if you come out here looking like you're suicidal then it's going to get noticed and you're going to get pulled up. You've just got to get on with it, hold it in like. […] I was offshore when [something happened][9]…and I did get sent home one of the times it happened […] I couldn't stay here just thinking about that because I was on the phone all of the time. But yeah…you've just got to…it's hard to say just leave everything at the heliport because when you come out here, you just think about it constantly. That's it, you know…my family is the most important thing… […] [it's] what everyone says here if you ask them: everything is fine. Nobody says: excellent, brilliant… They just say: 'fine' …".

BL's account reveals the function of *the mask* operates to shield others from emotional fallout. Like MA and JE, BL positions his family as "most important" to him. However, BL contends wearing a mask is necessary to supress thoughts of home and family when offshore. He also describes being "pulled up". When I asked BL to clarify this, he explained that it was challenging enough for workers to be located and work offshore without the additional stressor of witnessing the emotional fragilities of others when their 'mask' slips. BL clarified that if oilmen are seen to be in a visibly emotional state, they may be "sent back to the beach". Alongside JE's account, other narratives suggested outwardly emotional displays were unwelcome offshore. However, BL clarified management of emotional displays occur functionally, for the "collective safety of yourself and others". He carefully communicated to me that "mental well-being is taken very seriously offshore" and that "workers suffering [from] stress and strain are a danger to themselves and the collective safety of work teams". BL also explained the "everything is fine" mantra eluded to by JE as having a dual function. The phrase reinforces workers constructed emotional stance to others, but also to themselves. Language encapsulates a non-committal short-statement understood to discourage elaboration. This constructed minimising of dialogue—involving sensitive personal topics—serves to strengthen the emotionally neutral mask workers wear to help them cope with being offshore. *The mask* discourages probing questions which may trigger emotional responses.

The above findings relating to personal and collective protections were validated in other interviews. JU — a senior mechanic who had worked offshore for over twenty years elaborated:

"Look, if you've got issues at home, or if something goes wrong… you've got to put a front on and show you've still got to do your job. […] if you start to think about things at home and you're doing a job out here, that's when you can get distracted and that's when things can start going wrong. That's when you've got to kind of divide the two…and sometimes it's not always easy…When I've seen things happen, it's usually when someone is in the distance and not thinking about things, not concentrating…you know?"

Another oilman: RI, in his mid-thirties explained:

"[…] There's not many people out here that I would talk to about my problems […] I think if you've got issues going on at home it's a difficult place to be. There are times that you're not very busy, and if you're not very busy, your head is at home […]".

RI continued:

"You've got to put a brave face on, […] it's a dangerous place to be if your head is not in the game…and it's not just yourself that you're putting at risk, you're putting others at risk as well".

JI: a senior and long-serving oilman, working within drilling

[7] I have chosen to redact a portion of JE's interview discussing their loss of a family member. This is because I believe the story could jeopardise JE's confidentiality as a participant.

[8] I've anonymised BL's role to enhance his protection from identification.

[9] I have chosen to redact a portion of BL's narrative. I feel the anecdote may compromise BL's anonymity. This refers to something that happened onshore.

operations, contended macho oilfield stereotypes were largely propagated by the masks workers wear to go about their day-to-day lives, but that this was not reflective of their genuine oilfield masculinities. He explained the link between masks and an upholding of the past stereotype of *tiger culture*; people mistakenly associating oilmen's masked displays as evidence that culture still exists:

"Yeah, that's exactly it, […] stoicism, toughness. People might think that's still *Tigers*, but it's just one dimension here, one way of behaving to avoid directly speaking to people you don't know yet, everyone here does that".

Crucially, oilmen's narratives revealed oilmen 'wear a mask' to outwardly shield others from their emotions, but also to protect themselves from being encouraged to speak about emotional subjects. This is not because discussion of these topics is formally discouraged offshore, but because the isolating conditions of PD actively construct an ongoing emotional vulnerability in workers; oilmen guarding against this via the mask.

Despite mask-wearing prevalence, almost all oilmen admitted to "taking the mask off" and "opening up" within groups where they felt their identities that lay "under the mask" were comparable. Optimal conditions were described by oilmen as "small, peer-groups" containing "similar people" who workers "trust" and "get along with". Oilmen also identified there existed groups around whom they would "button up". Shielding occurred when oilmen felt their identities were "incomparable" or "too different". One of the most interesting accounts came from BL. I asked BL if there were times he could let his mask down offshore. I was interested in establishing if there were conditions where he could speak about emotional subjects he previously defined as "most important" to his identity when at home, but which he also stated were "mostly covered up".

> "Yes. You get to know different people in different ways, who you can have banter with, who you can talk to, a group to pal-about with, things like that, and [mentions colleague] is one of the guys, one of the people who if I had something that was weighing me down, I would speak to [him], he's, sort of the same as me, we sort of bounce off each other, honestly, you wouldn't bottle it up for two weeks and then go home, you would explode".

BL's assertions suggest oilmen find commonality in their masculine identities that lie under the stoic masks they present. BL's narrative positions workers gradually take their mask down to reveal these identities based on social cues indicating compatibility. Conversely, oilmen strengthen their mask-wearing when contradictory social cues present. Other oilmen elaborated on BL's comments about taking off the mask; validating these perspectives with similar sense-making and rationales. TI was one such oilman; working in the drilling hierarchy and late-twenties in age; working offshore for around six years:

> "There is always something going on when you come offshore; it's probably the worst place in the world for something to happen […] so there is a thing about trying to keep an impression [referring to mask-wearing]".

TI later elaborated on removing the mask:

> "But with me and my guys, it's not a tough impression anymore…the guys that I speak to, you work with them half your life and you can be open with them, if you have a problem or if they've got a problem […] you'll actually talk to the guys about your problems at home, let your guard down. They don't really get the 'tough guy'…".

Like BL, TI outlined that the "tough-guy mask" dissolves when located within a specific peer-group. Contrary to comments about "leaving onshore life behind when coming offshore". TI can "talk about home" when his mask is removed. He defines this act as representative of "letting his guard down" and "not needing" the mask. TI shared: "you can always tell when something is wrong with someone", indicating a sense of belonging and familiarity with his "close-knit" group of workers. TI's language reveals he can read—via familiarity—oilmen's genuine emotional identity beneath the mask, well enough to gauge when something is wrong.

Another oilmen JA, a roughneck in his fifties; working offshore for twenty-five years, shared similar thinking:

> "[…] there are some people I can let my guard down with though, chat about missing home […] I've spoken to [names four people on PD – also interviewed] especially [a colleague], he can take things… you know? And tell you not to worry about it…I mean I stress myself about things quite a lot… I'm a big worrier. That's me as a person, it's my nature… [my colleague] will try and give me a bit of encouragement you know."

JA identifies shared attitudes as essential in determining "who to open up to". He, like BL, also cautioned against negative fallout; removing the mask in the presence of the wrong peer-group, suggesting oilmen are careful with who to 'let down' their mask in front of. JA revealed his immediate group understand and relate to his "lacking self-confidence" via sharing "similar attitudes" and identities. Removal of the mask allows these group members to see his real identity: "That's just me as a person".

5. Discussion

This research has explored the role of emotional stoicism in high-risk industries, some linking this with presence, production and reproductions of occupational HM and 'traditional masculinities' underpinning risk-taking behaviours [28,38–40]. Some research has focussed on the transformative nature of masculinities in oilfields and similar high-risk locales [24–26,30] and indeed, the role of unique workplaces in constructing cultures of identity [41–43].

Notably, Ely & Meyerson's work in oilfields [30] was the only discovered scholarship that briefly mentions stoicism; the authors suggesting reductions in emotional stoicism: "[…] men had little investment in conveying an image of stoic masculinity. To the contrary, they welcomed such openness because giving and receiving emotional support made them safer and more effective" ([30], p. 18). Beyond Ely & Meyerson, no existing oilfield works interrogate worker's performances of stoicism specifically, nor how stoicism can be exercised in ways operating inverse to notions of HM, as opposed to being considered evidence of HM.

The oilfield's unique social and occupational environment plays a critical role in forging and sustaining oilmen's stoicism praxis. The high-risk, high-stakes nature of offshore work demands a constant projection of competence, strength, and resilience—traits often synonymous with labour masculinities [24–26,29,30]. In the oilfield, cultural expectations encouraged oilmen to adopt *masks* of stoic emotional-control as a way of expressing professionalism and engineering group cohesion. Participants consistently described this mask-wearing as a necessary adaptation to the isolating and pressurised environment, where emotional vulnerability is framed as a safety liability specific to the oilfield. However, findings demonstrated the oilfield also constructs specific conditions that facilitate selective removal of oilmen's stoic masks. The physical isolation of offshore rigs, combined with the prolonged cohabitation of small, tightly bonded teams, fosters an environment where trust and familiarity gradually develop. As BL noted, the ability to "take the mask off" and confide in others depends on the recognition of shared identities and a mutual understanding of emotional experiences constructed by the total institution platform locale: "You wouldn't bottle it up for two weeks and then go home, you would explode". Similarly, TI emphasised the role of enduring working relationships, describing how "you work with them half your life", enabling oilmen to lower their guard and "let down" the mask.

The oilfield's hierarchical and task-oriented structure further influences the boundaries of stoic performance. Participants highlighted how mask-wearing is heightened in interactions with those outside their

trusted peer-group, especially in contexts where power-dynamics or identity differences make emotional disclosures risky. As JA explained, mask removal requires a careful assessment of social cues to avoid exposing vulnerability in the "wrong" group, where such openness could undermine their professional standing or lead to ridicule. This is explained as due to the 'closed' nature of the oilfield where everyone relies on each other to maintain a collective safety environment. If one's 'head is not in the game' individual risk can quickly be transferred to the entire platform, as MI, BL and TI discuss. Emotional presentations are institutionally monitored for evidence of their impacts upon oilmen performing safety-vigilance. Thus, the oilfield environment constructs emotional stoicism as both a cultural norm and a strategic tool. While context reinforces stoic performances as an occupational necessity, the platform setting also paradoxically creates pockets of safety where these performances can be suspended, i.e. spaces to confidentially open-up and share genuine displays of identity to 'release' the pressure of keeping things 'hidden' long-term. The oilfield's combination of physical isolation, long-term cohabitation, and high-risk stakes uniquely moulds this duality, allowing oilmen to negotiate and redefine the boundaries of emotional openness within a broader framework of masculine labour expectations and performance.

Findings spotlight a tension between masculine identity and the oilfield context in shaping workers' emotional masking. While emotional-control is a recognised trait of HM, the labour demands of the oilfield amplify this behaviour, embedding it as a practical necessity rather than solely a gendered expectation. In an environment defined by long hours, isolation, and physical risk, stoicism becomes essential to maintain team cohesion and meet occupational expectations. Vulnerability is often perceived as a threat to safety or credibility, with workers internalising emotional restraint as part of their role. Thus, masking of emotions aligns with broader constructs of masculinity but is also—dually—dictated by the high-stakes nature of the work itself. Despite this, moments of disruption reveal the fluidity of these practices. Participants described trusted peer-groups where the need for stoicism could be set aside, challenging the idea that emotional-control is fixed. These instances suggest that while the oilfield reinforces traditional masculine norms, it also—paradoxically—creates a space for adaptation and identity-negotiation. Ultimately, emotional masking appears to be co-shaped by both masculine identity and the unique pressures of the oilfield, with the context serving as a key driver that blurs the boundaries between personal identity and professional necessity.

Findings vis-à-vis safety and linkages to identity and masculinities, also reveal a complex relationship moulded by both catastrophic events, corporate influences and shifting gender-labour-norms. Tragedies such as Piper Alpha operate as key turning points, challenging entrenched occupational identities that valorise risk-taking and physical toughness. In the aftermath of disaster, there occurs a reconfiguration of workplace practices and a redefinition of the identities that correspond with them. This change is particularly evident through how oilmen discussed safety as evolving from representing simply a procedural requirement to becoming a central element of the cultural and institutional identity framework that governs the contemporary oil and gas industry.

Analysing oilmen's narratives, corporate leadership plays a pivotal role in this transformation, responding to disasters by introducing stricter safety measures and reinforcing behaviours that align with organisational and public expectations. This institutional field, influenced by increased scrutiny and reputational risk, seeks to discipline and marginalise identities associated with dangerous and reckless behaviours. In doing so, corporations position safety-consciousness as a core value within the workforce, reframing masculinity in terms of vigilance, responsibility, and adherence to safety standards. Workers who embody these traits are promoted, while those associated with traditional, risk-driven masculinities are subordinated. However, this shift does not entirely sever the link between oilfield work and danger. Instead, it reshapes the narrative around risk. Safety practices, although framed as precautionary, are still carried out within an inherently hazardous 'closed' environment. This maintains a subtle-yet-persistent connection between masculinity, danger, and occupational identity. While the heightened focus on safety may reduce immediate risks, it also emphasises the ever-present threat of danger, reinforcing the idea that oilfield work remains an arena where men are expected to face and manage risk, albeit in a more controlled manner that prioritises labour masculinities linked to safety, and subordinates and seeks to remove identities explicitly connected to normalising risk-taking.

These reflections suggest that disasters and labour-norms not only challenge existing identities but also prompt their reconstruction, shaped by disaster, corporate priorities and shifting societal expectations. The interaction between safety and masculinity demonstrates the adaptability of occupational identities, illustrating how they are continually renegotiated in response to external events and institutional pressures, connecting with some existing scholarships examining masculinities in high-risk locales [5,20,28–30]. Findings call for further explorations of how crises act as catalysts for cultural change, reshaping the relationship between risk, safety, and identity in ways that both mirror—and react to—broader transformations and requirements within industry and society.

Connell [14,51,52,62] frequently infers men's notions of masculinity from behaviours in local settings. In her hierarchical conception of hegemony, performances are framed as representing men's agency, and social subscription to hegemonic, subordinate or marginalised social categories. Scholars contend this position could be strengthened by examining motivations behind men's behaviours to ensure classifications are accurate [53–59]. Existing studies (and indeed Connell's theorising [14]) often rely on behaviours as an indicator of masculinities, risking typecasting men into narrow social categories to which men themselves may indicate they do not feel they belong. A theoretical dilemma is evident by oilmen wearing masks that facilitate their performance of stoicism. Oilmen outwardly display defining characteristics of an aged, stereotyped and risk-associated masculinity, *but* this is actively for reasons inverse to depicting hegemonic membership or supporting risk-taking and HM-linked components. Oilmen readily display 'masked' emotional stoicism but these performances serve a functional purpose of *enhancing* collective local safety and wellbeing. Instead of these behaviours supporting a culture of risk-taking, oilmen wholeheartedly resist this stereotype.

By applying a lens that infers masculine identity from behaviours alone, as with some M&M studies, masked social performances of oilmen on PD may be read as an indication of oilmen's central masculine values, and thus workers could be positioned as subscribing to a singular stoic masculine hegemony. This perspective overlooks functional implications for self-preservation, social acceptance or: adherence to local cultural norms independent from masculinity. On closer inspection, this research revealed oilmen's stoicism is understood as a performative display disparate from oilmen's underlying masculine identities.

Masculine interactions on Point Delta share several similarities with the statement-reply motifs of Erving Goffman's [60] dramaturgical performance notions. Interpreting oilmen's local identity negotiations dramaturgically provides new ways of conceptualising men's identity performances, facilitating an opportunity to contribute to existing M&M theory.

Goffman's dramaturgical perspective utilised theatre as a metaphor. Theory provides a framework for examining the context and natures of microsocial interactions in everyday life [60] Social actors determine their cultural values, norms and beliefs representing their sense of self, with actors gauging how identity components should be expressively presented to an audience of others. Calculation occurs via appraisal of projections against expectations of an immediate audience. For Goffman, actors' performative identities are fluid; dependent on time, locale and the audience they are directed towards. The goal of each calculated performance is to gain acceptance from the audience. A successful performance culminates in the actor being perceived how they wish. Goffman later extends this performative negotiation to men's

masculinities. He defines these as "an essential expression, something that can be conveyed fleetingly in any social situation and yet something that strikes at the most basic characterization of the individual" ([61], p. 75). Crucially, Goffman acknowledges that masculinity represents a central facet of identity. Masculinity is an "essential nature" which is inextricably linked to the sense of self [p. 76]. While Goffman concedes masculinity can be expressed via fluid performances, the concept is anchored to a measure of intrinsic firmness; an *internal* identity that always exists, but is open to adjustment, growth, reconfiguration and reinterpretation over the life-course. Goffman makes a clear differentiation between men's behaviours and men's performances of masculinity. Identity as performance is a less fluid and dynamic position than simply considering behaviour naturally equal to masculinity. This provides a more robust and tangibly anchored definition of male identity, inverse to the perspective that performance can be read as indicative of masculine identity; a perspective adopted by some ethnographers and masculinities theorists.

Applying Goffman to Connell's HM-theory: Connell, alternates between framing masculinities as stable macro-level character types when discussing regional and global marginalised identities [51,52] and dynamic social constructs when discussing local hegemonic masculinities [14,15,51,52]. Conversely, Goffman makes clear that an actor's masculinity is anchored securely within the self. However, actors' performances shift dependent on locale and expectant audience. He states:

> "The dramaturgical perspective can be seen as an anchor to the perspective [of masculinity as an object of the self], where the individual's identity is performed through roles, and consensus between the actor and the audience" ([60], p. 298)

Goffman also suggests men experience alienation when projecting performances congruent with expected situational and environmental norms, yet incongruent with their central masculine identities. He states:

> "To the degree that the individual maintains a show before others that he himself does not believe, he can come to experience a special kind of alienation from self and a special kind of wariness of others" ([60], p. 229).

And:

> "When the individual has no belief in his own act and no ultimate concern with the beliefs of his audience, we may call him cynical, reserving the term sincere for individuals who believe in the impression fostered by their own performance" ([60], p. 11).

This alienation was reflected in oilmen's tales regarding conflicting presentation of identities on PD. Anxieties were most concentrated when workers described the suppression of identity components central to their home life. These components were antithetical to offshore life for functional reasons of promoting collective wellbeing and safety. To negotiate this dichotomy of identity performances, workers employ masks. Emotional suppression of underlying masculinities is managed internally by deferring stoic practices to the wearing of a mask; *the mask* operating as a seperational construct that divorces this stoicism from oilmen's understandings of their genuine masculine identities. The particulars of oilmen's deference are important. Oilmen recurrently labelled the masks they wore as "*Tiger* masks". Linguistically, this label distances oilmen's emotionally stoic performances from their sense of self. Instead, localised performances are linked to a culture from which oilmen simultaneously and collectively identify as being removed from their notions of masculinity. Goffman parallels this theorising by contending an actor may obscure his masculinity by "hiding behind a role" if demanded as such by the characteristics of a local environment ([63], p. 298). Interestingly, the environments Goffman exemplifies comprise total institutions like PD [63]. Goffman contends such "role displays" acts protect men from internal conflicts resulting from efforts to convince an audience their performances reflect genuine masculinities. On PD, oilmen's displays of stoicism were often shown to be incongruent with care and concern notions revealed in groups, and discussed in interviews. These softer motifs of identity existed beneath the masks workers wore.

Conversely, Connell reads men's local performances at face value. Behaviours are indicative of men's subscribed preference and placement in a masculine hierarchy. However, Goffman argues of masculine performances: "there is no concrete meaning to any interaction that cannot be redefined" ([63], p. 198). Men may employ a variety of mechanisms by which to negotiate and perform masculinities for reasons other than to represent their sense of self. In conceding disingenuous performances, men may perform masculinities in a multitude of ways that cannot be upheld as a declaration of membership to hegemonic, subordinate or marginalised categories. On PD, oilmen engaged in performances incongruent with their sense of self, yet manage resultant anxieties by framing this display as an expected and sanctioned cultural enactment of their offshore "role". As the equally masked local audience is expecting an exaggerated "role" in place of a sincere performance, workers fulfil this performative expectation through their wearing of a '*Tiger* mask'. In concluding this performance, oilmen are rewarded with reciprocal surface-deep acceptance by most local actors. However, this practice constrains oilmen's underlying masculinities. Despite efforts to manage alienation, workers crave an outlet where their genuine masculinities will be wilfully received. Goffman frames this as an innate and ever-present pull for men to "step out from behind the role" to perform true masculinities congruent with their sense of self ([63], p. 298). He states: "What is important is the sense he [a person or actor] provides them [the others or audience] through his dealing with them [a representation] of what sort of person he is behind the role he is in" ([63], p. 298). This is realised locally by oilmen's gradual removal of the mask.

As interviews dictated, oilmen on PD studied each other's masked performances for fleeting glimpses of their own inner masculinity. While I term this negotiation "momentarily letting the mask down" to "display workers' underlying masculinities", Goffman describes this as "transmitting or conveying fleetingly an actors' identity that exists beyond the role" ([63], p. 298). When mutually agreeable statements are detected, actors reply by adjusting their performance to represent an increasing ratio of their genuine masculinity versus that of their masked role. Once this performative statement-reply interaction is completed, workers disregard their mask. They interact in cultural groups bound together by genuine identity displays. Oilmen connect safe in the knowledge that performances are witnessed by an audience embodying mutually compatible values, and that displays are genuine depictions congruent with their sense of self.

Theoretical integration provides the sociological language to explain oilmen's practices of masking and displaying masculinities on PD as 'masculine roleplay', and the functional reasons why workers employ such practices. Importantly, new theory presents a solution to move beyond considering men's local performances of masculinity as naturally depictive of their masculine identities. Future research should benefit from examining men's local institutional performances of masculinity dramaturgically. By considering workers expected institutional role, environments, audiences, and any practical reasons for displays, the chance of mistakenly categorising men by their acts alone is actively reduced.

6. Conclusion

In the PD oilfield, oilmen's negotiations of identity are complex. Oilmen lead fragmented lives; existing between two geographically, culturally and emotionally different locales. Oilmen struggle to engage with emotional motifs natural to life at home when located offshore. To avoid anxiety and practical distractions, emotional and psychological stress, and risks to both themselves and others, oilmen shield their identities by wearing *Tiger* masks. Masks represent a pivotal component of local identity negotiations; displaying a homogenous performance of emotional stoicism. This performance is widely stereotyped as indicative

of a normative social projection of oilfield masculinity. However, oilmen gradually let down their masks in a statement-reply negotiation to display central aspects of their genuine identities to others. This practice facilitates mutual bonding and the formation of masculine groups. It is critical to emphasise for men and masculinity theory that oilmen employ *Tiger* masks for reasons counter to upholding a hegemonic, dominant or stereotypically singular form of oilfield masculinity, although these masks depict a central stoic facet often typed as depictive of HM. While projecting stoicism, the metaphorical masks oilmen wore were consciously constructed to enhance collective safety and reduce risk possibilities arising from emotional fallout, distractions, and preserving psychological wellbeing—operating as a suppressive and distancing tool from emotions linked to life at home. Framing findings via Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, men may repurpose and perform aspects of stoicism that are primarily associated with HM for purposes heterodoxic to these HM-labels. Contributions of this work provide a dramaturgical pathway for future research to move beyond prioritising men's performances as—incorrectly—indicative of their local masculinities and linked theoretical associations. Findings point to oilfield safety continuing to be locally prioritised. Interrogating masculine performances utilising the *masked* dramaturgical perspectives developed affirms the complexities of interrogating the meanings behind masculine performances, for scholars operating within M&M theory, ethnographers operating within the M&M and CSMM fields, and gender and feminist scholars examining male-dominated-industry.

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Institutional ethical approval was sought and secured from the institution this research was conducted at: The University of Aberdeen, Department of Sociology.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Nicholas Norman Adams: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

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