

**Employing Master Narratives to Theorise the Missing Men in Higher
Education:**

a grounded theory case study in the UAE

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Declaration

This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other degree or diploma.

Abstract

There has been significant international progress in female participation in education with a vast amount of research dedicated to the subject. However, more recently a reverse gender gap has emerged in several areas of the world including West Africa, North America, Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, the UK, and the MENA region. In the UAE this reverse gender gap includes female students significantly outnumbering male students at tertiary level. However, quality data on the issue is relatively lacking, especially when compared to the gender gap literature focusing on girls in education, thus the reasons behind the “missing men” are not well understood. Employing a social constructionist grounded theory design and a responsive interviewing technique, this study emerged into three distinct stages using Ras Al Khaimah, a northern emirate in the UAE, as a case study. In Stage 1, the favourable response given by most of the male “no shows” in continuing their studies contradicted the reality wherein only a minority of young men attend tertiary education each year in the UAE. In recognition of my “cultural outsidersness”, in Stage 2 I referred to male and female Emiratis who shared a cultural and historical context with the young men to describe, explain and exemplify the concepts and themes from Stage 1, before returning to the target demographic in Stage 3. Embracing the complexity of the issue, this thesis provides a nuanced understanding of the missing men in the research context while demonstrating the capacity of the theoretical framework of master narratives to incorporate research and theories from different academic fields, meeting the call from several of the cited scholars for a greater integration of scholarly research. In particular, I suggest that master

narratives provide a valuable conceptual tool to “undress” patriarchy and open up the discussion on masculinities, facilitating an interdisciplinary growth of theory. The findings suggest that patterns of male participation are affected by a combination of the country’s demographic situation, socioeconomic history, and evolving sociocultural practices. A master narrative framed in terms of autonomy and relatedness, imbued with patriarchy, was seen to be of particular importance in the research context. Adding to the existing body of knowledge on psychological needs, I contend that a need for security is the driving force behind these young men’s autonomy and relatedness seeking behaviours.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Focus

There has been significant international progress in female participation in education with a vast amount of research dedicated to the subject. However, more recently a reverse gender gap in relation to boys in education has emerged in several areas of the world including the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), West Africa, North America, Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, and the UK (Ridge, Kippels, & Chung, 2017; Ridge et al., 2019). Despite this global trend of gender inequality in relation to boys' education in many countries, quality data on the issue is relatively lacking, especially when compared to the gender gap literature focusing on girls in education (Lauglo & Liu, 2018). In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), girls outperform boys in secondary school completion and attainment (Ridge, Kippels, & Chung, 2017), while the reverse gender gap is most apparent at tertiary level wherein Emirati women account for 70% of all university graduates (UAE Gender Balance Council, 2021). In an attempt to understand the reasons behind the lower rates of participation and performance of young men in the UAE, studies have been conducted on the experience of male students in pre-tertiary education (Ridge, 2009), the non-persistence of male high school students (Al Marri & Helal, 2011; Ridge et al., 2013), as well as the motivations (Al Kaabi, 2016) and persistence (Daleure, 2011; Ridge & Farah, 2012) of male students at tertiary level. However, there has been no qualitative research examining the demographic of eligible male high school

graduates' reasons for not continuing their studies in higher education. Thus, the reasons behind "the missing men" at tertiary-level are not well understood. Using Ras Al Khaimah, a northern emirate in the UAE, as a case study, this thesis provides a nuanced understanding of the missing men in the research context while demonstrating the capacity of the theoretical framework of master narratives to incorporate research and theories from different academic fields, meeting the call from several of the cited scholars for a greater integration of scholarly research. The research questions which guided this study were:

- i. What are the reasons given by male Emiratis of university age in the case study for not continuing their studies at tertiary level?
- ii. What further understanding can other Emiratis in the case study provide as to the reasons young men do not continue their studies?
- iii. What theory can be generated from the RQ1 and RQ2 findings?
- iv. What are the implications of RQ3 for researching the phenomenon of the missing men in higher education in other contexts?

Much of the global research on the reverse gender gap has focused on noncognitive differences between genders, masculinities, and unequal returns in education for men and women. In his quantitative study on the missing men in college, Jacob (2002) boldly claims that 90% of the gap can be explained by differences in noncognitive skills, as well as higher returns in

tertiary education for women. He uses a cost versus benefit model to explain the lower participation of men in higher education, wherein the former is composed of direct costs such as tuition fees, foregone earnings, and “psychic” costs centred around noncognitive skills. Benefits, or premiums, considered as ‘lifetime earnings’ were expanded to include nonmonetary benefits such as improved marital prospects, health, and longevity in Becker et al.’s (2010) adaptation of the model. Arguably, there are several issues with determining the value of education in this way. Firstly, it is difficult to quantify elements such as noncognitive skills and marital prospects. Secondly, an economic model is reductionist, concealing the complexity and interplay of each dimension, and disregarding social, cultural, and psychological processes. In addition, the studies by Jacob (2002) and Becker et al. (2010) are both based in the United States and thus the theories may not be transferable to different cultural contexts such as the UAE.

In their policy brief presented at the T20 Summit, Ridge et al. (2019) assert there is a need for countries to map and *understand* gender disparities in order to identify barriers and ultimately find solutions (my emphasis).

However, as with Jacob (2002) and Becker et al.’s (2010) research, most studies to date have been quantitatively-based, and while being able to ‘identify’ and ‘map disparities’, the data is limited in explaining why. In concluding their quantitative study on the reverse gender gap in 50 countries Lauglo and Liu (2018) also highlighted the need for qualitative research to confirm their post-hoc explanations or generate more plausible explanations.

Therefore, in an endeavour to obtain an in-depth and intricate understanding of the phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2007), and allow for data-driven rather than speculative understanding to analysis (Dörnyei, 2001), a qualitative approach was employed which followed a social constructionist grounded theory design (Charmaz, 2008) and used Rubin and Rubin's (2012) responsive interviewing technique. The research evolved into three distinct phases. In Stage 1 and Stage 3, semi-structured interviews were conducted with young male Emiratis who had graduated high school, and had either not started higher education or had not persisted with their tertiary-level studies. As mentioned, targeting this demographic in the UAE has thus far been neglected as most research has focused on high school students or students enrolled in higher education. Stage 2 of the research emerged in the research design as I felt that I did not have sufficient insider knowledge, or "special second record" (Hull, 1985), to situate the findings from Stage 1 within the larger sociocultural context; the overall favourable response given by participants in continuing their studies at tertiary level contradicted with the low enrollment rates and high incidence of male "no shows" in higher education institutes annually in the UAE. Thereby I conducted focus groups and interviews with male and female Emiratis in their late twenties and thirties in order to gain their perspective and interpretation on the results, while gathering information on the broader sociocultural environment. In Stage 3, twenty-one interviews were conducted with young Emirati men of university age following new lines of enquiry that had arisen in Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the research. In all, 41 interviews and three focus groups were conducted with a total of 46 participants.

1.2 Theoretical Tools: Master Narratives

While the aim of grounded theory is to generate an explanatory theory rooted in the data (Chun Tie et al., 2019), the theoretical perspective of the research method is distinguished as a way to raise theoretical questions and think analytically about the data (Charmaz, 2014). As the major theoretical perspective associated with grounded theory, Charmaz (2014) describes symbolic interactionism as “a way of knowing – a way of growing – that opens your views of meanings, actions, and events in the worlds you study” (p. 262). As I am a cultural outsider in the research context, albeit having spent most of my life in the Gulf region including fifteen years in the UAE, I sought to acquire a “way of knowing” that was relevant to the cultural context of the research site. Thus, I chose not to employ a theoretical perspective from the outset, instead allowing the data to suggest a “way of growing” in an endeavour to increase the cultural relevancy of the grounded theory. A master narrative model, based on the epistemological principles and conception of “self” proposed by Hammack and colleagues (Hammack, 2008; Hammack, 2010; Hammack, 2011; Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; Hammack & Toolis, 2015) and defined by McLean and Syed’s (2015) five principles, emerged from the data as a useful way to conceptualise the findings and present the emerging theory. Part of the objective of a master narrative model is to facilitate interdisciplinary discussion, enabling links to be made between research in different academic fields (Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; Hammack & Toolis, 2015; McLean & Syed, 2015). Thus, it provided a cohesive framework to integrate literature from the range of disciplines to which the findings

pertained. I contend that adopting this approach acknowledges the “full wickedness” of the research issue recognising the multitude of factors and conditions embedded within a dynamic social context rather than seeking to “tame” it through simplification, a tactic often employed to make a problem more manageable (Conklin, 2005). Stemming from a social constructionist epistemology, a master narrative framework is compatible with a grounded theory approach. It is also complementary to a symbolic interactionism perspective on which it is in part derived, as well as being anchored on narrative identity theories, life course developmental theory, cultural psychology, Eriksonian identity theory, cultural-historical activity theory, social identity theory, and Foucault’s theory of discourse and subjectivity (Hammack & Toolis, 2015). In the ethos of uniting fragmented theories and disciplines, Hammack and Toolis (2015) contend that:

This theoretical anchoring allowed us to moderate the historical emphasis on personal agency in some theories of narrative and identity [e.g., McAdams, 2001] with perspectives that emphasized the power of social structures and the social categorization process to shape individual subjectivity [e.g., Foucault, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986]. Cultural psychology’s thesis of mutual constitution through linguistic mediation [e.g., Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978], as well as symbolic interactionism’s thesis of self-development through social interaction and the “conversation of gestures” [Mead, 1934], provided us with a dynamic way of theorizing the link among narrative, identity, and culture. (p. 352)

1.3 Claims to Significance

The research findings provide a nuanced understanding of the reasons young men do not continue their studies in the case study, and a deeper insight to Emirati society for cultural outsiders. While the findings are context-specific and thus cannot be generalised to other milieux, a case is presented in the Discussion for employing the master narrative model as a way to examine a societal issue such as the missing men, rather than identity per se. Aligning individual level processes and structural factors on the same metric employing the metaphor of “narrative”, which is already widely used in a variety of academic fields, allows for links to be drawn between different disciplines facilitating the exploration of a wicked issue such as the missing men in different contexts (Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; Hammack & Toolis, 2015; McLean & Syed, 2015). In particular, I suggest that master narratives can provide a valuable conceptual tool to “undress patriarchy” in order to uncover underlying drivers of gender equality (Edström et al., 2014) and open up the discussion on masculinities, meeting Connell and Messerschmidt’s call “to reduce the isolation of men’s studies [and] emphasize the relevance of gender dynamics to the problems... being explored in other fields of social science” (2005, p. 848). Complementing Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) local, regional, and global framework, by incorporating a fourth “individual” level I contend that master narratives facilitate analysis of the interplay of structural and personal processes operating within a context. I maintain that framing the model in terms of the psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness and security encourages looking beneath the surface of young men’s educational

attitudes and choices, providing deeper insight as to the underlying reasons, and allowing for similarities to be drawn between different environments despite variances in outward behaviour.

The framework is discussed in more depth, outlining the relevancy to this research context and its applicability to theories of masculinities, in the Theoretical Framework and Discussion chapters.

1.4 A Note on the Organisation of the Thesis and the Theoretical Framework

Researchers who follow a grounded theory design often face a dilemma when it comes to writing up the research concerning the point at which to include the literature review and the theoretical framework (Dunne & Üstündağ, 2020; Elliot & Higgins, 2012), and I was no exception. In a standard PhD thesis, it is customary to include a section on the theoretical framework before the findings as it is usually derived through the literature review before data collection (Kivunja, 2018). However, Glaser (1992) advocated that traditionally in a grounded theory study the literature review should be delayed until after the data collection. The reason for this is to ensure that the researcher retains an open mind following an inductive approach and allowing theory to emerge from the data. While recognising the importance of the ethos of this sentiment in conducting inductive research, several grounded theory scholars advocate doing a literature review earlier in the research process. This is in part to learn what research has been conducted on the

subject beforehand in order to determine whether there is a gap in the literature, and if grounded theory would be a suitable research design (Elliot & Higgins, 2012). Dunne and Üstündağ (2020) contend that often the literature review in grounded theory is conducted in three stages, with the initial stage being a review of empirical studies to contextualise the study and identify gaps in the literature. In the second stage, the researcher consults the literature while moving iteratively between data collection and analysis “to assist in the construction of a grounded theory which is rooted primarily in the raw data” (para. 24). After data analysis the researcher conducts the third stage of literature review “to elevate the grounded theory to a more abstract level and enable the researcher to contextualise, compare, and contrast her or his grounded theory with regard to extant theoretical concepts and empirical findings” while potentially drawing on theories from other disciplines in theory production (para.24). While all three stages may be conducted before embarking on the research in a deductive research design, this latter stage is where the theoretical perspective emerged in this study. The question faced by many researchers following this process, including myself, is where to include this information when writing up the research. Dunne and Üstündağ (2020) advocate that there is no correct answer and that each researcher needs to “take ownership of the write-up process and offer a compelling, cogent and unapologetic justification for the sequencing and structure of the final written output” (para. 30). They state that considerations of readability should take priority when writing up the research and to use clear signposting to guide the reader.

For that reason, rather than confining the literature review to a chapter, it is interwoven at relevant stages throughout the thesis. The initial stage of the literature review and pertinent information from the latter stages are incorporated into this introductory chapter and the Contextualisation chapter in order to describe the setting in which this study was conducted, and outline gaps in the literature. Following on from the Contextualisation chapter, the theoretical perspective employed, master narratives, is outlined. Although the perspective emerged as a useful framework through which to consider the findings after the data collection, it is presented beforehand as it helps to guide the reader through the thesis by contextualizing the epistemology employed, providing a link between the Contextualisation and Methodology chapters. The rest of the thesis follows a standard format wherein the Methodology chapter details the research design and justifies the chosen methods, briefly outlined above. The Results section is presented in two parts, reflecting different stages of the research. The main findings from Stage 1 are presented in the first section. As the initial line of questioning in Stage 1 was derived from previous research, these results address literature presented in the Contextualisation chapter. In the second part, the findings are outlined in more depth with the results from Stage 2 and Stage 3 focusing on factors directly affecting young men's decisions to study at tertiary level. In the Discussion chapter, the findings pertaining to the broader sociocultural environment that impact young men's decisions to obtain higher education qualifications are considered in accordance with the literature; this is also the most substantive part of the literature review. Concluding the Discussion chapter, I use the master narrative framework to draw parallels in the

motivations behind young men's educational choices and attitudes in other research contexts despite differences in outward behaviour. Finally, the Conclusion chapter summarises the findings while highlighting how they contribute to the scholarly body of knowledge and theory on the lower participation rates of males in higher education. Although the results of this thesis are context-specific and thus cannot be generalised to other environments, the master narrative model is proposed as a useful theoretical framework through which to conduct research on the missing men in education in other contexts and open up the discussion on hegemonic masculinity.

Chapter 2: Contextualisation

2.1 Structure of Chapter

As previously stated, a social constructionist approach and theoretical perspective which places history and context at the centre rather than the periphery was employed in this thesis. Thus, this chapter starts by briefly outlining the socioeconomic and demographic history of the UAE in regards to the rentier state, before moving on to contextualise higher education in the country. A review of empirical studies on male participation and non-persistence of education in the UAE is then presented, aligned with global studies where applicable, in order to situate the research and highlight gaps in the literature and thus the reason for this study. A rationality for the choice of site in regards to the phenomenon of the missing men is then offered.

In the following chapter, the theoretical framework is presented, framing the epistemology and ontology of the thesis. The relevance of the research context is briefly discussed again in relation to the choice of theoretical perspective.

2.2 Socioeconomic and Demographic Background on the UAE

Ascending to power in 1966 not long after the first major oil fields were uncovered in Abu Dhabi, the late H.H. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan is famed for uniting the Trucial States to form the UAE in 1971. Described as

“the father of the nation”, Sheikh Zayed developed the UAE into a welfare state to support the newly-founded country’s citizens, depicted as “his children” (Al Nowais, 2019). Emiratis were supported in the cost of family formation through the provision of government subsidies such as family allowances and state-provided housing made possible by national oil rents (De Bel-Air et al., 2018). In accordance with the features of other rentier states in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the public sector expanded substantially providing nationals with well-paid and secure employment during this period of growth (Sharabi, 1988). Reportedly Sheikh Zayed replied “my wealth is for children” when he was asked if he worried about “spoiling Emiratis” or causing them to become overly dependent on the state (Al Nowais, 2019, para.4). Revered for his vision and generosity, Sheikh Zayed is spoken about with great warmth and admiration by all generations of “his children”.

The nation-wide improvements in hygiene and healthcare in the UAE resulted in higher life expectancy and lower infant mortality rate, leading to a demographic boom. Termed a “demographic gift”, when a population bulge reaches working age and is economically active there is an opportunity for great development in a country as the working youth support a much smaller retired population. However, as the young population continues to rapidly expand, this means that there is increased demographic pressure on resources as the state is expected to provide the same education, healthcare, and housing to its citizens. With only 8% of employed Emiratis working in the private sector in 2019 (UAESat, 2021), there continues to be a strong

preference for public sector jobs which are perceived as having higher job security and a greater work-life balance (Gulf Talent, 2016; Jenns, 2019; UAE National Youth Agenda, n.d.). However, many of these positions are projected to become automated as part of the UAE's Fourth Industrial Revolution digital transformation (aus dem Moore et al., 2018). In recognition of this, the UAE National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence 2031 (2018) reports that automation will need to be carefully managed when considering that 125 000 of the positions are held by citizens. Thus, in line with policy recommendations for reducing a population's over-reliance on public sector jobs in the MENA region (Salehi-Isfahani & Dhillon, 2008), "soft signals" have been sent in local media encouraging youth to seek employment in the private sector rather than assuming that the public sector will continue to be the primary employer for nationals (e.g. Gokulan, 2021). Other initiatives include mandating federal universities to foster employment opportunities with private companies, encouraging entrepreneurship, including employment diversification as an objective on the UAE Youth Agenda, and announcing the automatisisation of public sector jobs as part of the government's digital transformation (e.g. Issa, 2021). The reduction in the availability of public sector jobs and push for nationals to seek employment in the private sector will likely increase the importance of higher education qualifications since competition for jobs will be on a global scale, unlike public sector positions.

2.3 Contextualising Higher Education in the UAE

In addition to the changes outlined above, the UAE is seeking to diversify its economy from an overreliance on oil, moving to an innovative knowledge-based economy (UAE Vision 2021, 2014). Globally, higher education institutes have been described as instrumental actors in developing a knowledge society and fostering innovation, thereby promoting national economic growth (Deiaco, Hughes, & McKelvey 2012; Lane, 2012). This is reflected in the UAE's strategic plan in which tertiary education features prominently; "More Emiratis will enter higher education, where they will enrich their minds with the skills that their nation needs to fuel its knowledge economy" (UAE Vision 2021, 2014, slide 20). While the government's plan clearly delineates a relationship between post-secondary education, workforce participation, and transitioning to a knowledge society, there appears to be a disconnect in terms of gender in the UAE. Leading the way in empowering women in the MENA region, currently Emirati women constitute 70% of university graduates in the UAE (UAE Gender Balance Council, 2021). However, although having increased significantly, only 33% of Emirati women are actively employed (UAESat, 2019). In the literature the discrepancy is largely attributed to family commitments and cultural restrictions (Almutawa, 2013; Hamade, 2015; Moghadam, 2013). Another hypothesis put forward is that many women obtain higher qualifications as an alternative to early marriage and to secure their future in case of divorce, abandonment, or becoming widowed (Abdulla, 2007; Abdulla & Ridge, 2011; Ashour, 2020; Lauglo & Liu, 2018). While the U.A.E. government is seeking to increase

female participation in the workforce, in recognition of the significant pro-female gap in tertiary education, it has also been striving to encourage men to continue their studies after high school. In 2007, one of the UAE Ministry of

Table 1

Number of Emirati Undergraduate Students Enrolled in Federal and Non-federal Higher Education Institutes in the UAE from 2012 to 2020

Academic Year	Female		Male		Total
	Number	% of increase	Number	% of increase	Number
2012-2013	37330	-	24617	-	61947
2013-2014	40603	8.8	27015	9.7	67618
2014-2015	43186	6.4	27651	2.4	70837
2015-2016	44126	2.2	27158	-1.8	71284
2016-2017	45438	3.0	25786	-5.1	71224
2017-2018	46527	2.4	24833	-3.7	71360
2018-2019	47421	1.9	23573	-5.1	70994
2019-2020	48346	2.0	23130	-1.9	71476
Total	352977		203763		556740

Source: UAE Ministry of Education

Note. Undergraduate students accepted with a “conditional offer” who need to meet the English requirement within a specified period are included in the figures

Education's three goals included expanding the participation of males in higher education. The ministry pledged to form a "plan of action to raise the percentage of males enrolling in the federal higher education system; and identify strategies that by 2013 will raise the number of degrees awarded to males by 50% from the current 2007 baseline," (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research [MOHESR], 2007, p. 28). While it can be seen from Table 1 that there is an increase in the actual number of male and female students enrolling in tertiary education throughout the UAE, this is to be expected due to the country's rapidly growing young population. Thereby, as a general trend, the percentile of young Emiratis of university age increases each year in the UAE. However, year-on-year women continue to significantly outnumber male enrolments.

Since 2014, part of the decrease in university enrolment of young men in the UAE can be attributed to the introduction of National Service. The service is mandatory for all Emirati males aged from 18 to 30, aside from certain exemptions such as being the only son of a family, or having a prohibitive disability. Initially set at nine months, the service was extended to 12 months in 2016, and then to 16 months in 2018. Before 2020, male high school graduates with grades of 90% and above could choose to delay the service until after completing their university studies. However, in March 2020 it was announced that these students must attend a four-month basic training course directly after high school and achieve the required grades in the Emirates Standardised Test (EmSAT) before starting tertiary education. Upon finishing their studies, they must complete their National Service training. In contrast,

the service is optional for female Emiratis, fixed at nine months, and enrolment requires the approval of their legal guardian. While the conscription can be seen to significantly impact the number of male Emiratis enrolling in university, it has only exacerbated the situation rather than caused it.

As part of the education reforms implemented with the creation of the nation-state, public schooling at primary and secondary level is provided free to all U.A.E. citizens, and to the children of Emirati mothers and non-Emirati fathers, whom are not automatically entitled to citizenship. For those who meet the admission criteria, free tertiary level education is also provided through three federal institutes: the UAE University (UAEU), Zayed University (ZU), and the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT). New high school graduates, and those returning from National Service, are assigned “priority status” to study at these institutes. Delaying registration may cause a potential student to lose their priority status meaning that acceptance will depend on availability and that they may be liable to pay fees. As these three institutes are primarily English-medium, part of the admission criteria consists of having a minimum level of English language proficiency. Some researchers have proposed that this may be a reason for deterring young men from studying at tertiary level as they are reported as graduating high school with lower levels of English than girls (Abdulla & Ridge, 2011). Until recently, the English requirement for admission was an EmSAT level of 1100, which is the equivalent to IELTS 5 or CEFR band B1+. In 2018, UAEU and ZU raised the English requirement to EmSAT 1250, equivalent to IELTS 5.5 or CEFR

band B2. Those who do not possess the English language skills may be granted conditional entry based on the premise of attaining the English requirement within a stated period, usually a year. This may be done by passing the institutes' mandated English language course or achieving the required grade in external exams such as EmSAT, IELTS or TOEFL. While the English level required for conditional entrance has fluctuated over the years, since 2018 there has been an upwards trend at all three federal institutes. However, in previous years there has been no lower entry requirement for conditional entrance at times. Thus, students with low English were not prevented from attending, but may have felt disinclined either because of language difficulties or the additional time needed to complete an undergraduate degree by initially having to study an English preparatory course. Less attention has been paid in the literature to the overall lower performance of male Emirati students in PISA subjects such as Mathematics, Science, and Reading, which in 2015 were reported as "some of the most significant gender differences observed in any PISA-participating country" (Alhammadi, 2019 p. 129).

2.4 Research on Male Participation and Non-persistence in Education in the UAE

The lower academic attainment and persistence of male Emiratis at secondary school partly explains the reverse gender gap in favour of women as fewer young men are eligible to enrol in tertiary education. However, it

offers no explanation for the high incidence of male “no shows” in higher education each year. In an attempt to gain insight into the low enrolment rates of male Emiratis at tertiary level, the National Admissions and Placement Office (NAPO) of the UAE conducted a quantitative Survey of No Show students in 2005. These students are comprised of two main categories. The first is new students who accept an offer to study at one of the federal institutes, but do not register and do not inform the institute that they wish to defer or will not attend. The second describes a student who registers but either does not attend or stops attending without notifying the institute; the period after which a student stops attending may be a few days or after having already completed several years of study. In their 2005 study, NAPO reported that over 60% of the male no show students chose to pursue ‘income generating activities’ rather than continue their studies at tertiary level (see Table 2 below). Some research has anecdotally attributed this to the availability of well-paying public sector jobs, a feature of the rentier state in the UAE which is said to diminish the necessity of educational qualifications (Abdulla & Ridge, 2011; Ashour, 2020; Hatherley-Greene, 2012; Ridge & Farah, 2012; Ridge, Kippels, & Chung, 2017). It has also been proposed that young men decide to work rather than continue their studies at tertiary level in order to be able to contribute to the family economically (Abdulla & Ridge, 2011; Ridge, 2009). Support for this is reflected in Ashour’s (2020) survey of Emirati undergraduates in which the majority of male and female students agreed with the statement “financial responsibility on men’s shoulders deter them from getting higher degree”, 76% and 82% respectively. However, thus

far there has been no qualitative research to confirm or explore these issues further.

Examining the reasons that students choose to study at tertiary level provides some insight to the “pull” factors for young people in the UAE. In line with global research, male and female university students in the UAE often cite improved employment prospects as a reason for obtaining higher education qualifications (Engin & McKeown, 2017; Matherly et al., 2017). However, when male tertiary-level Emirati students were asked about their future job aspirations by Ridge and Farah (2012), 30% said that they did not know and 21% said they wished to be a “manager”, preferably in the public sector. Thus, in the absence of well-defined responses from more than half of the

Table 2

Reasons Given for Male “No Shows” in NAPO Survey of No Show students in 2005

Reason for “no show”	Percentage
Joining the military or police	33
Staying at home or looking for work	30
Attending other institution	27
Started employment	5
Studying abroad	5

Source: Abdulla and Ridge (2011, p. 5)

participants, Ridge and Farah (2012) postulate that perhaps male Emiratis pursue higher education as a result of their parents' wishes or in the hope of gaining "instant status" by receiving a managerial job after their studies. Improved status associated with acquiring higher education qualifications was also reported by male and female participants in Engin and McKeown's (2017) study. In discussing their findings, Engin and McKeown (2017) surmise from participant comments that the desire for status stems from individualistic needs, perhaps reflecting the researchers' own implicit theories. This initial perspective conflicts with their later conclusion wherein they state that:

the data suggests that motivation in the Gulf context is set within frameworks of self as an individual and self as part of society. Individual expectations, pragmatic goals and societal and family goals are strong influences on motivation to study at higher education. (Engin & McKeown, 2017, p. 687)

This indicates more importance placed on the collective, and lends support to Ridge and Farah's (2012) assertion that family wishes may be important in the educational choices young people make in the UAE. In accordance with this contention, several studies in the UAE have shown that family support can have a significant positive and negative influence on the educational persistence of male Emirati students (Daleure, 2011; Ridge & Farah, 2012; Ridge, Jeon & El Asad, 2017). Employing social capital theory in their research on different ethnic groups in the United States, Wells et al. (2011) describe how parental expectations and involvement are a key predictor of

students' educational expectations which in turn determine an individual's educational attainment. Correspondingly, participants in Ridge et al.'s (2013) U.A.E. research noted that a lack of parental education and involvement, and low parental expectations were all significant factors in the students' own educational achievement and engagement. However, the effect can also be positive as Ridge and Farah (2012) found that fathers played an important role in male Emirati students' persistence in higher education. In fact, family factors were the only statistically significant category in their research. This underlines the importance of family in the U.A.E. context and wider Arab society in general.

Unlike the pattern found in other societies when transitioning to modernity, the extended family structure has remained the norm in the Arab world rather than the nuclear family unit (Sharabi, 1988). Although nowadays some households consist of parents and children only (Al-Ghanim, 2012), it is not unusual for several generations to still live under the same roof in the paternal grandparents' home, with other relatives visiting often. Even when living abroad, family ties remain influential (Abudi, 2011). In Arab society, the family is responsible for providing protection, security, identity, legitimacy and social status (Abudi, 2011; De Bel-Air et al., 2018; Joseph, 1996). The family acts as a collective unit with individuals forsaking their own individual interests for the benefit of the whole (Abudi, 2011), and honouring the family's reputation being of the utmost importance (Maisel, 2018). The significance placed on family is reflected in the UAE Vision 2021 (2014) which states:

We want large and cohesive families always to form the nucleus of Emirati society. Marriage among Emiratis is a vibrant facet of our culture and will remain fundamental to building strong and stable households ... Families are the living fabric of our culture, and the guardians of our values. They form a haven of security and a nurturing environment in which Emirati children can grow. (slide 10)

In exploring generational differences of the benefits in obtaining a college degree between higher education students and their parents, Matherly et al.'s (2017) results indicate the prevalence of a collective perspective; after surveying male and female students' opinions and both of their parents', they conclude that "the value of obtaining a higher education degree in the UAE is transgenerational" (2017, p. 1). In line with expectations of a highly collective society, contributing to the development of the nation was consistently rated the most important benefit of a university education by students and their parents regardless of socioeconomic status or university cohort. Similar sentiments were also expressed by male and female students in Engin and McKeown (2017)'s study. In seeking to challenge traditional Western-perspective frameworks for understanding families, Wanucha (2018) contends that in the Arabian Peninsula "family is a contextual unit through which individuals experience, process, and negotiate external forces" (p. 9). This notion is expanded on in the section on the "concept of self" in the following chapter.

Ridge et al.'s (2013) mixed methods research looking at the non-persistence of male high school students across the UAE may offer some insight as to

why young men do not continue their studies at tertiary level. They reported that the reasons given for non-completion were complex and similar to global studies. Using SES indicators such as the number of cars, mobile phones and computers owned by the family, Ridge et al. (2013) concluded that students who do not complete their secondary school education are of lower socioeconomic status compared to the students they surveyed who were enrolled in a tertiary level institute. In their survey, 56% of the participants who had not completed high school reported choosing to support their family instead, 48% indicated a preference for working and earning money over studying, and 11% reported not being able to afford to continue to remain in school to complete their secondary education. The young men also reported having a less positive school experience than university students, including having unsupportive teachers and peers. In addition, 42% described perceiving school as an “unsafe environment”, compared to 18% of the male students enrolled in higher education. Other studies in the UAE have reported that poor quality teachers, lack of male Emirati role models as teachers, and disruptive classes contribute to demotivating learning experiences which deter young men from continuing their studies past secondary school (Ashour, 2020; Ridge, 2009).

Unlike studies in the UAE which point to differences in the quality of schooling for boys and girls, much of the global research on the academic participation and achievement of boys and girls starting at primary school level has focused on gender differences in noncognitive skills. Female students in pre-tertiary education have been reported as having higher noncognitive skills

than males such as self-motivation, focusing in class, working collaboratively, managing homework, and seeking help when needed (Becker et al., 2010; Bugler et al., 2008; Conger & Long, 2010; Jacob, 2002). In Ashour's (2020) study on the reverse gender divide in the UAE, faculty members expressed similar sentiments on the differences between male and female students at tertiary level. Female students were described as being more 'self-disciplined', 'persistent', 'committed', 'dedicated', 'patient', 'obedient', 'responsible' and 'well-behaved in classrooms' (p. 1089). Ashour (2020) notes that self-reports of female students in the research also indicated that they were more motivated and driven to obtain higher education qualifications, using phrases such as 'ambitious', 'motivated', 'self-actualisation', 'to prove themselves', and to get 'social advantage'. Unfortunately the results of the self-reports for male students are not provided in the study for comparison.

In contrast to the US study by Jacob (2002) outlined in the Introduction which claimed that 90% of the gender gap in college enrollment and attainment can be explained by differences in noncognitive skills and higher returns in tertiary education for women, Lundberg's (2020) study produced starkly different results. Although also seeking to uncover determinants of the gender gap at college in the US, Lundberg found that noncognitive skills were negligible in explaining the difference, as were other variables such as cognitive skills, academic achievement, and parental resources, investments and expectations of their child. However, she noted that a gender gap in educational aspirations, which did not correlate with the aforementioned variables, did have a significant effect. Echoing much of the work on

masculinities and education, Lundberg (2020) concluded by saying that “gender identity concerns may influence (and damage) the educational prospects of boys as well as girls through norms of masculinity that discourage academic achievement... driving both male school underperformance and low educational aspirations” (pp. 417-419).

Emphasising the social construction of gender, rather than a biologically-determined notion of being a man (Bugler et al., 2008; Martino, 2011; Mills et al., 2007), “masculinities” is defined in the following section and discussed in relation to boys’ participation in education.

2.5 Gender, Masculinities and Education

Adopting a social constructionist perspective rather than an essentialist view, “gender is conceptualized as fluid, unstable, and culturally bound and as actions performed in everyday social interactions” (Wong & Levant, 2017, p. 387). The study of “masculinity”, while suggesting an exclusive focus on men, nevertheless demands a relational perspective rather than dichotomizing the experiences of men and women in order to acquire a more intricate understanding of the social complexity at play:

Rather than attempting to define masculinity as an object (a natural character type, a behavioural average, a norm), we need to focus on the processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives. 'Masculinity', to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the

practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture. (Connell, 2005, p. 71)

The accounts above highlight the increasing recognition in the importance of the cultural, temporal, and geographical context in shaping gendered relationships (Berg & Longhurst, 2003; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Edström et al., 2019), and thus the tendency to refer to the plural, “masculinities”. Prominent in theories of masculinities is the concept of hegemonic masculinity, perceived as “the currently most honored way of being a man”, which may in reality differ from the lived experience of the majority men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). A product of social processes, hegemonic masculinity was originally formulated to “conceptualize how patriarchal relations are legitimated throughout society” (Messerschmidt, 2012, p. 63). This concept is of particular relevance to this research context due the persistence of patriarchy in the Arab world (Joseph, 1996) and emerging theories on the influence of patriarchy on gendered participation in education. For example, in their research on the reverse gender gap in 50 countries, Lauglo and Liu (2018) hypothesise that, similar to the previously cited studies in the UAE, early exit from education is more appealing for boys. They postulate that “girls perceive a need for distinctly high educational attainment in order to cope with anticipated gender discrimination in the labor market and to secure autonomy in their adult family life” (2018, p. 34). However, they maintain that more research is needed to confirm their post-hoc explanations. Although not clear if referring to the local context or society

in general, a psychologist in Ashour's (2020) study on the reverse gender divide at tertiary level in the UAE also stated that "women have greater motivation for education in a patriarchal society that favours men" (p. 1089). This sentiment was supported by three other academics in her study. Other comments attributed the higher dedication of female students in the UAE to gender socialisation patterns. To explain, male Emiratis are granted more freedom to leave the home unsupervised, while the movement of females in the family is generally more restricted (Ashour, 2020; Crabtree, 2007). This is indicative of the local form of hegemonic masculinity, the "paradox of protection" in patriarchy particularly associated with Arab cultures, wherein female members are subject to the authority and protection of male relatives within the hierarchy in order to safeguard their honour and in turn maintain the family's reputation (Al-Ghanim, 2021). Some scholars have argued that a consequence of the restrictions imposed upon daughters is that they have fewer distractions in life and can thereby devote more time to their studies (Ashour, 2020; Ridge, 2009). However in the present day, "life" in the virtual world can be just as distracting and easily accessed through smartphones, of which the UAE has one of the world's highest penetration rates (The World Bank, 2021). Thus, although granted less freedom to leave the home independently, unless parents are actively supervising the academic work of daughters at home, it does not necessarily ensue that girls spend more time studying.

While gender socialisation patterns may be less distinct in Western contexts, masculinities have been reported as significantly affecting men's participation

and achievement in education. Arguments have been put forward blaming the feminisation of education for boys' disengagement, and advocating for devising more "boy-friendly" curriculum and teaching approaches which focus on practical, kinaesthetic activities (see Martino, 2011; Mills et al., 2007). However, Mills et al. (2007) caution that boys' apparent disengagement with school is less about curriculum and pedagogy, but "that this 'rebellion' on the part of boys is actually a playing out of dominant constructions of masculinity that often have a detrimental impact on the learning of both boys and girls" (p. 15). For example, seeking to understand the importance of gender identity on adolescent's academic motivation and classroom behaviour in U.K. secondary schools, Bugler et al. (2008) found masculine identity to be closely associated with negative classroom behaviour, while feminine gender identity was a predictor for academic motivation. Negative behaviours include being disruptive in class, and a disregard for authority and the importance of schoolwork (Bugler et al., 2008; Mills et al., 2007). Discrepancies in the employment of noncognitive skills has also been attributed to gender identity, whereby "notions of masculinity commonly identify success with achievement through independent working and through competition; so, as we have seen, boys are less likely to seek help, to ask for support, to work collaboratively with others" (Younger et al., 1999, p. 339). While striving towards academic success is perceived as effeminate, disregarding the importance of education or appearing to achieve effortlessly is regarded as masculine (Jackson, 2002, 2003; Jackson & Dempster, 2009). This disdain for education forms part of the macho behaviour exhibited in a culture of "laddishness", described as the form of hegemonic masculinity pervading some secondary schools (Jackson,

2002). At tertiary level in the UK, laddishness manifests in loud drunken, misogynistic behaviour (Warin & Dempster, 2005). Highlighting the need for a nuanced approach, rather than homogenising men's experience, young working-class Bengali men in Archer et al.'s (2001) U.K. research described how this image of higher education was positioned as ideologically incompatible with Muslim masculinity. Furthermore, many of the young working-class men in their research on (non)participation described higher education as being "not 'cool' or as contradicting the 'breadwinner' or 'manual worker' identity demands" (Archer et al., 2001, p. 441). Also based in the UK, participants in Marks' (2000) research on young working-class men in Merseyside expressed similar sentiments, describing higher education as "effeminate" and "not real work" in contrast to "male working-class culture, with its significant emphases on masculinity and physical strength" (p. 304).

However, suggesting that there is a deeper complexity at play, Marks (2000) surmises that the young men's rejection of the value of higher education may in fact be "either a form of bravado, or a defensive explanation for their failure to achieve the standards for which they were initially aiming" (p. 306). He argues this point by noting that "those working-class children who succeed in education are the source of immense pride to their families, indicating that education as such is not necessarily devalued" (p. 306). In her U.K. study, Jackson (2003) arrives at a similar conclusion wherein she states that appearing to outwardly reject schoolwork is a protection strategy against failure employed by boys in secondary school to safeguard their self-worth and/or social worth. In support of this, Jackson notes that the boys reported

concerns about being made to “feel different” and being labelled as the “thick [one] out of the group”. Similarly in their work on gender differences at secondary school level in the UK, Younger and colleagues attribute the “masculine” anti-education behaviours to a preoccupation with peer-group image; “looking good with their mates” (Younger & Warrington, 1996, p. 312; Younger et al., 1999). However, the danger is that, when sustained, “such peer-group masculine identities can become self-perpetuating, and trap some boys into a downward spiral of falling expectation and achievement” (Younger & Warrington, 1996, p. 306). Thus, in order to fully understand the complexity, it is necessary to look beneath the surface to uncover the underlying reasons for young men’s educational attitudes, behaviours and choices.

Refocusing the discussion on broader sociocultural processes when considering why young men are not going to college in Australia, Shelley (2017) outlines how women benefit from greater financial opportunities to fund higher education and nearly all tertiary education institutes provide additional support services for women such as Women’s Centres. Shelley ponders as to why the same programs and funding opportunities are not provided for men whose academic performance and college completion rates significantly lag behind their female counterparts. As an example of the differing support offered in the UAE, bus transport is provided for female university students, but not for males. The rationale being that there are no cultural restrictions on young men travelling independently. However, the result is that male students without their own transport may be prevented from attending

university, such as Khalifa in this study. In 2001 there was no federal university in his emirate so without his own transport, Khalifa was unable to travel to a university in another emirate. This institutional practice continues to the present day. These rules and regulations exemplify in part the governing frameworks of education systems, which Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon (2008) maintain mediate youth transitions from school to work to family formation, in conjunction with other institutions such as labour markets, credit, housing, and social norms regarding marriage. Akin to this thesis, Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon (2008) emphasise the interconnectedness of social and economic markets, advocating that “signals” sent by these institutions inform the hiring patterns of firms, credit-lending policies, skill-set that young people should acquire, and how families should value potential spouses. I contend that the “signals” of these interrelated market and non-market institutions can be considered in terms of a master narrative as they communicate the qualities and attributes valued by society, in line with the “utility” principle of McLean and Syed’s (2015) model, outlined in detail in the next chapter. Thus, perhaps inadvertently the “signals” sent by these policies and practices, indicate that it is not as important for men to continue to higher education. Perceived lower returns on graduate salaries for men reinforce this notion, as would less attention paid to gender disparity regarding men in higher education. However, the danger with this is that as more jobs become automated in the future, underqualified men may be excluded from the transitioning job market (Marks, 2003).

2.6 Ras Al Khaimah as a Case Study

In summarising their research on the young men studying at tertiary level in the UAE, Ridge and Farah (2012) contend that:

there needs to be a lot more research conducted to understand the motivation behind these young men attending college and what they hope to get out of it in the end, especially if employment is not the deciding factor. (p. 7)

Correspondingly, research needs to be conducted on the demographic of young men not attending higher education in order to understand the reasons behind the missing men in the UAE. After reviewing the reverse gender gap in 50 countries, Lauglo and Liu (2018) suggest that the prevalence of countries with predominantly Muslim populations who have made significant progress in female participation in education could be especially interesting case studies. While they report that gender equality in education is a necessary precondition, they state that its establishment is not sufficient for explaining the emergence of a reverse gender gap. As outlined previously, there is a significant reverse gender gap in U.A.E. higher education with males only accounting for 30% of graduates (UAE Gender Balance Council, 2020). From Table 3, it can be seen that in the Academic Year 2019-2020 women accounted for the majority of the student population in each emirate in the UAE, aside from Umm Al-Quwain which arguably has an invalid sample size due to being the smallest emirate with less than 300 students in total.

Table 3

Number and Percentage of Male and Female Undergraduate Emirati Students Enrolled in Federal and Non-federal Higher Education Institutes by Emirate in the Academic Year 2019-2020

Emirate	Female Students		Male Students		Total Number
	Number	%	Number	%	
Abu Dhabi	26342	68%	12183	32%	38525
Dubai	8163	62%	5007	38%	13170
Sharjah	7907	69%	3577	31%	11484
Ras Al Khaimah	2770	80%	564	20%	2770
Ajman	2748	59%	1121	41%	2748
Fujairah	2018	81%	468	19%	2486
Umm Al-Quwain	80	28%	210	72%	290
Total	48343	64%	23130	36%	71473

Source: UAE Ministry of Education

Note. Undergraduate students accepted with a “conditional offer” who need to meet the English requirement within a specified period are included in the figures

In terms of percentage, Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah had the greatest reverse gender gaps with male students only accounting for 20% and 19% of the student body respectively. Although eleven years apart, these figures reflect the findings of NAPO's (2005) survey wherein Fujairah had the greatest percentage of male no show students at 61% and Ras Al Khaimah the second largest at 55%. Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah are quite similar in that they are less urbanized and are composed of a greater proportion of the local population, estimated at 24% and 39% respectively whereas only 9% of the population in Dubai is composed of Emiratis (GLMM, 2018). Linking results from the NAPO survey with per capita income and English exam grades upon graduating high school, Abdulla and Ridge (2011) contend that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in more rural areas with lower English language levels are less likely to attend tertiary education. Thus, with the greatest percentage of "missing men", the northern emirates of Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah present themselves as the most germane for this research focus; young men are seen as being more "at risk" of not attending higher education. Ras Al Khaimah was chosen over Fujairah for two reasons. The first being that I had stronger personal and professional connections to the local community in Ras Al Khaimah. As a result, I was granted access and permission to contact no show students from a federal institute in the emirate. Additionally, participants in Stage 2 of the research were willing to participate in the research and recommend colleagues to interview as we had pre-established relationships. As is expanded on in the Methodology chapter, although trust and rapport are important in conducting any research, they are essential in the cultural context of this study.

Secondly, there is already a significant amount of research on the pre-tertiary learning experience of male students in Ras Al Khaimah, stemming from the Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research. Thus, the findings of this thesis can further build on the existing body of local knowledge, as well as adding to the global research through development of a culturally-relevant theory. The discussion on the relevance of the context in regard to the research focus and theoretical framework employed is continued in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

In the third and final stage of the literature review (Elliot & Higgins, 2012), “master narratives” emerged as a useful theoretical perspective through which to consider the findings according to the principles proposed by McLean and Syed (2015), and Hammack and colleagues (Hammack, 2008; Hammack, 2010; Hammack, 2011; Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; Hammack & Toolis, 2015). Although having emerged during the data analysis, the theoretical perspective is presented in this chapter to guide the reader through the study in the same manner as a “standard” thesis format; it builds on the previous chapter and foregrounds the Methodology chapter by contextualizing the epistemology employed in this thesis. For the purpose of transparency, the manner in which master narratives emerged from the data is outlined at the beginning of the Discussion chapter.

3.1 Theoretical Perspective: Master Narratives

Germane to this research is Kivunja’s (2018) description of a theoretical framework as “the structure that you use to make the bits and pieces of your data hang together as one body of knowledge” (2018, p. 48); finding a way to present and discuss the results in a coherent manner proved very challenging as they include sociocultural, economic, and demographic aspects, spanning a range of academic fields such as cultural studies, psychology, family studies, and masculinities. Reflecting the wicked nature of the missing men in

higher education, the decision to cross disciplinary boundaries during the iterative process of data analysis and consulting the literature was supported by the call of several of the cited scholars for greater integration of academic disciplines (Arthur et al., 2019; Dhillon & Yousef, 2009; Kay, 2018; Wanucha, 2018). Despite arguments against the panhuman construction of narratives (e.g. Phelan, 2005; Strawson, 2004), Hammack and Toolis (2015) note that the metaphor of “narrative” has transcended disciplinary boundaries, being employed by historians, sociologists, and other social scientists, in addition to psychological and developmental scientists, although they may not necessarily adopt the term “master” when referring to narratives. In line with Hammack and Pilecki’s (2012) hope that an integrative paradigm of master narratives will enable “scholars to see the cross-disciplinary links among studies” (p. 97), I contend that the language of master narratives can be identified in other literature, even when not employing the lens of narratives. For example, in the previously discussed studies on the motivations and values of male and female Emiratis studying at tertiary level, the researchers attributed the altruistic goals of contributing to the development of the nation to the “social climate” describing it as the “current discourse of Emiratisation and development of the UAE” (Engin & McKeown, 2017, p. 685) and “national socialization effect regarding the importance and benefits of higher education” (Matherly et al., 2017, p. 8). The references to “discourse” and “national socialisation” lend themselves to the language of master narratives, wherein Hammack and Pilecki (2012) maintain that “individuals appropriate discourses of the nation-state as they strive to make meaning and coherence out of a complex social and political reality” (p. 84).

“Discourses” are often referred to in studies of masculinities and education (e.g. Archer; 2001; Archer et al., 2001; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Jackson & Dempster, 2009; Warin & Dempster, 2005). Thus, in responding to a call by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) for reformulation of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, I contend that master narratives can provide a useful conceptual tool to facilitate a “more holistic understanding of gender hierarchy, recognizing the agency of subordinated groups as much as the power of dominant groups and the mutual conditioning of gender dynamics and other social dynamics” (p. 848). Employing master narratives as an integrative paradigm will broaden the lens of hegemonic masculinity, allowing an interdisciplinary growth of theory, thus meeting Connell and Messerschmidt’s desire “to reduce the isolation of men’s studies” (2005, p.848). The value of a master narrative model is that it provides a framework to consider the processes operating at an individual and a structural level; “Representing both individual and structural factors as storied aligns the two levels of analysis on the same metric and facilitates the ability to connect them and identify the critical processes that operate in between” (McLean & Syed, 2015, p. 322). I contend that the model provides an additional layer of complexity to Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) local, regional and global framework by incorporating a fourth “individual” level and encouraging a greater focus on the interplay of processes. In the UAE, the relationship between nation and identity may be of great significance as a relatively young state of 50 years wherein Emiratis only comprise 20% of the total population.

In the following sections, a brief background on narrative theories is provided and master narratives are defined according to the four principles outlined by Hammack and Pilecki (2012), which provide an epistemological basis for the model. Within this discussion, the concept of “self” in the cultural context as suggested by the data and the ensuing literature review is outlined. Master narratives are then delineated according to McLean and Syed’s (2015) five principles for identification thereof: utility, ubiquity, invisibility, rigidity, and their compulsory nature. Thereafter, consequences of deviating from the master narrative are highlighted. Finally, alternative theoretical frameworks are considered, as well as the epistemology employed and the relevance of the context.

3.2 Background on Narrative Identity Theories

In line with the foundation of mainstream narrative theorists, one of the four principles of Hammack and Pilecki’s (2012) framework of master narrative engagement is the “principal of personal coherence” wherein they advocate that “the mind seeks order in time and place, hence a sense of continuity that can be provided through story-making” (pp. 78-19). This concept is comprehensively explained by McAdams (2019) thus:

An integrative psychological concept that bridges the sciences and humanities, narrative identity is the internalized and evolving story a person invents to explain how he or she has become the person he or she is becoming. Combining the selective reconstruction of the past

with an imagined anticipated future, narrative identity provides human lives with a sense of unity, moral purpose, and temporal coherence. (p. 1)

It is the latter part of McAdams' explanation that is most relevant to this thesis as young men of university age are asked about their present activities and future aspirations in regard to higher education and life more generally. In creating a narrative identity, it is theorised that individuals seek to answer three questions: "Who am I? What unifies and provides purpose for my life? What will be my place in the adult world?" (McAdams, 2019, p. 7). The latter points to the time of life when these existential questions are most pertinent, adolescence and young adulthood (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2019; McLean & Syed, 2015), and thus their applicability to this research context in transitioning from secondary school. Much attention has been paid to this stage of life, with recent work in the MENA region advocating the importance of taking a broader perspective and considering the transition in terms of school to work and family formation (Dhillon & Yousef, 2009). In Erikson's (1950/1962) theory of psychosocial development, this transition to adulthood is the period of "identity versus confusion" wherein adolescents are said to explore their independence to develop a sense of self. As Erikson's research stems primarily from a Western environment, care and consideration needs to be taken not to uncritically apply it to non-western regions such as this context of study. However, findings from research conducted in other cultural regions (Arnett, 2003; Nelson et al., 2004) including the UAE (Russel et al., 2005) tend to reflect Erikson's theory. For example in Russel et al.'s

(2005) research on Emirati male and female high school students, participants rated being independent, being able to do things for themselves, and being confident and clear about their aims in life to be very important for successfully transitioning to adulthood. The third item, being confident and clear about life aims, can be seen as a direct response to the three questions previously mentioned. Thus, although limited to a sample of only 60 participants, the results suggest that youth transitions to adulthood in the UAE appear to follow the model proposed by Erikson, and seek answers to the existential questions outlined by McAdams.

Early theories of narrative identity have tended to focus on the individual aspect of life stories (Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; McLean et al., 2018), perhaps reflecting the context from whence they have primarily been derived. However, revisiting Erikson's original thesis, recent research has given more recognition to the importance of the broader context and interaction with others (Hammack, 2008; Hammack, 2011; Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; Hammack & Toolis, 2015; McAdams, 2019; McLean & Syed, 2015; McLean et al., 2017; McLean et al., 2017; San Martin et al., 2018; Singer, 2004; Syed, 2016; Syed & McLean, 2021; Thorne & Nam, 2007). Perceived from a socio-ecological lens, San Martin et al. (2018) argue that present Arab cultural identity can be attributed to life in the harsh climatic conditions of the Arabian Desert and a lack of any central governing authority in pre-Islamic times. They propose that a need to protect scarce and unpredictable resources such as food, water, and portable possessions meant that "kinbased tribes in the Arabian Desert necessarily became highly cohesive functional units with

individuals from each tribe highly interdependent with one another to insure their survival” (p. 830). Their thesis is akin to other recent socio-ecological theories on identity attributing differing levels of interdependency in regions in China to the prevalence of rice or wheat farming (Bower, 2014; Du, 2015). Although the socio-ecological environments have changed dramatically in the move to urban modernisation, it is argued that these sociocultural traits continue to the present day. Refocusing the theory on modern living, McLean (2019) explains how social cohesion may be about “social survival” nowadays rather than “physical survival”:

When people story themselves in ways that are consistent across time and context, we have some idea about how they will act, what we can expect from them and, thus, how the group will function. The same goes for intrapsychic processes—we need to predict and anticipate our own actions. So if we go awry of this predictability, we may let the group down and be taking some personal risks—if not about physical survival, then perhaps about social survival. (p. 66)

The quote above highlights the way in which personal narratives “fulfill both an individual psychological and sociocultural purpose” (Hammack, 2011, p.312). “Social survival” arguably refers to “relatedness”, a need to feel connected to others, theorised as one of the three basic human needs of which fulfillment is required for mental health and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The relation between self and the group is expanded on in section 3.3.1 below, with explicit attention paid to the context of study.

3.3 Defining Master Narratives

Hammack (2011) defines a master narrative thus:

A master narrative represents a collective storyline which group members perceive as compulsory — a story which is so central to the group's existence and “essence” that it commands identification and integration into the personal narrative. Master narratives exist at the level of all social categories — including gender, race, nationality, class, and sexual identity — and are predicated on a doctrine of essentialism or primordialism about these categories which serves to imbue them with a “natural” rather than “social” character. (p. 313)

A master narrative can be likened to a “dominant discourse”, theorised by philosophers such as Foucault (1978) as shaping the meaning individuals construct of their milieu (Hammack, 2008). While McLean and Syed's (2015) five principles clearly delineate what constitutes a master narrative, outlined in section 3.3.2, Hammack and Pilecki (2012) four principles provide an epistemological foundation for the model, discussed in this section.

With an emphasis on the collective social nature of master narratives, Hammack and Pilecki (2012) explain that their four principles speak to:

(a) the *social construction* of language, politics, and thought; (b) the need for personal coherence and identity; (c) the need for *collective solidarity* through *shared meaning*; and (d) the mediational and

motivational role of language in *social practice* [emphasis added]. (p. 76)

Founded on a constructionist approach to mind and society, the first and fourth principles are inextricably interlinked. For the first, Hammack and Pilecki (2012) refer to scholars such as Mead (1934) and Vygotsky (1934/1962) to propose that the mind is socially constructed in a “top-down” process by storylines and word meanings received through discourses embedded with political interests outlining ideal norms for governance and intergroup relations. Their fourth principle, emphasises that the process of story-making and narrative engagement is not a passive process; “Rather, we engage with a storied social ecology as we engage in social practice, and our relationship to that practice is mediated by narrative” (p. 79). However, it may be that the degree of negotiation is moderated by the power structure and the level of acquiescence in a society. Hammack and Pilecki’s thesis on political psychology is of particular interest in this research context due to the concept of the “collective self”, discussed in the following section, as representing the relationship between individual, family, and nation.

3.3.1 The Concept of Self

While master narrative theories converge on many facets, the way in which Hammack and colleagues’ theory arguably diverges from others is in the concept of self; “Our conception of narrative is anchored in the notion that the process of narration is inherently social and speaks to a fundamental need for

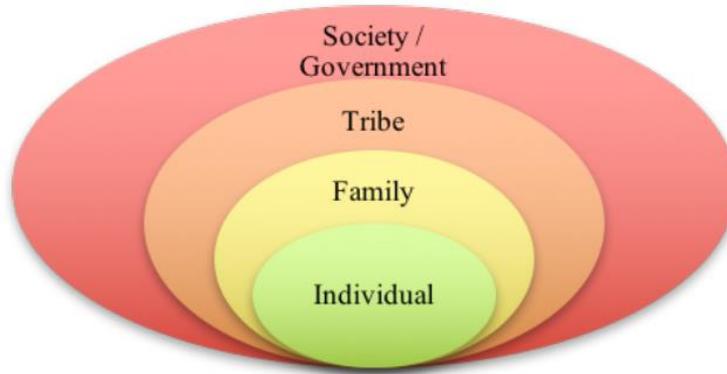
collective meaning” (Hammack & Pilecki, 2012, p. 87). The intricate relationship between self and society is most evident in the description of Hammack and Pilecki’s (2012) third principle of master narrative engagement:

The third principle we suggest is the principal of *meaning in solidarity*. In advocating for the significance of this principle, we reject the notion that individuals represent self-contained psychological entities. Rather, we view the need for continuity not only within the person but also within the community of shared practice, whether that be termed the “culture,” the “nation,” or some other index of social identity. (p. 79)

This distinction between theories is subtle. In McLean and Syed’s (2015) endeavour to propose a model that seeks to “move attention from a relatively exclusive examination of the individual to an examination of the intersection between self and society” (p. 318), there is still a sense of conscious separateness between an individual and the ‘group’ with the focus on the *interaction* between the two. However, the concept of self that became apparent during the data analysis was more akin to Hammack and Pilecki’s (2012) principle, supporting research findings from other countries in the Arabian Gulf. For example, reporting on their study in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, Abokhodair et al. (2017) explain that “the ‘individual’ is not a discrete and autonomous subject. The ‘individual’ is inseparably part of a collective that is itself part and parcel of another larger collective” (p. 701), as represented by Figure 1.

Figure 1

The Hierarchy of Belonging in a Collectivist/Relationship-based Cultural Orientation



Source: Abokhodair et al. (2017, p. 701)

Contrasting the collective self to an autonomous self, Abokhodair et al. (2017) explain that the latter is:

positioned as separate and independent of a larger collective unit. This contrasts with what we term the collective self, which is that facet of the self where the individual is but an appendage of a larger collective and must act with that collective's representational needs at the forefront of concern..... Autonomy, or any notion of individual agency, is perceived in relation to how an individual's actions impact the group. (p. 701)

Abokhodair et al. (2017) exemplify this concept of collectivity using the example of family honour, called *a'ardth* in Arabic. They explain that *a'ardth*

is “a collective trait ascribed to the group as a whole, but it is achieved and accumulated through the actions taken by individual members of that group. If a’ardth is damaged by an individual, it affects the entire family” (p. 701). In other words, individual behaviour and actions create the whole. Findings from the previously cited research on the values and motivations for male and female Emiratis studying at tertiary level support this concept of a collective self. Although retaining an individualistic perspective on many of the participant responses, Engin and McKeown (2017) acknowledge that “society can be seen by some students as an extension of the extended family” (p. 685). The researchers conclude by proposing a motivation framework with “self as an individual and self as part of society” (p. 687). Matherly et al.’s (2017) findings on the values of tertiary education perceived by students and their parents in the UAE further supports the intricate concept of self as part of a wider collective. They report that:

Contrary to expectations, the benefits of higher education did not fall neatly into social, personal and economic factors for any of the groups, e.g., students considered helping the community and influencing social values as part of the same factor as personal outcomes. (Matherly et al., 2017, p. 9)

These studies indicate that an alternative perception to self, as advocated by Hammack and colleagues and described by Abokhodair et al. (2017), is needed when considering narratives in the UAE. Indeed, the notion of nation state as an extension of family may be of more import in the UAE wherein it was previously mentioned that the late H.H. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al

Nahyan is depicted as the “father of the nation” with all Emiratis said to be “his children”. This metaphor of family is still continued today as exemplified by H.H. Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed’s comments when meeting Emirati scholarship students studying in Berlin in 2019; “They are our pride and represent the UAE. They embody our ambition to bring in a competent and educated generation that contributes to the national upswing. We have great confidence in the success of Zayed's children," (Rizvi, 2019, para. 4). When combined with a history of a strong culturally-valued sense of honour towards “ones’ in-group and cultivated a deep commitment to it, and a high premium on kinship cohesion and solidarity” (San Martin et al., 2018, pp. 830-831), it may be that cultural identity as self and nation are intricately linked for Emiratis.

3.3.2 Identifying Master Narratives

Due to the precision with which they specify them, McLean and Syed’s (2015) five defining principles structure this section delineating the properties and parameters of master narratives which had previously gone unarticulated in the literature (Hammack & Toolis, 2015).

The first of McLean and Syed’s (2015) principles is “utility”. Drawing parallels with research on social norms, McLean and Syed explain that master narratives outline the “expected and customary behaviour for group members”, building and maintaining relationships, and managing self-concept (p. 326). Master narratives serve as part of the structure of society providing

guidance on living a “good life” and how to “belong” according to the normative ideas embedded in the sociocultural and sociohistorical beliefs and ideologies of a group (Demuth & Keller, 2011; McLean & Syed, 2015; McLean et al., 2017). The “group” may be at the level of family, society, or nation state (Hammack, 2011; Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; McLean & Syed, 2015).

Returning to Engin and McKeown’s (2017) study on the motivations of male and female students studying at tertiary level in the UAE, they noted that as well as improved employment prospects, participants often cited a “good life” as a strong motivator for gaining a university degree. Being unable to probe further to the meaning of this term, Engin and McKeown (2017) suggested that it could refer to financial comfort or social status. However, when viewed using the perspective of a master narrative and the collective self, it may be that obtaining a degree means meeting the aspirations of the government, and thus by extension the family and self, narrative in the UAE. This concept draws parallels to Matherly et al.’s (2017) findings whereby the most cited reason for studying at tertiary level reported by all participants irrespective of gender and generation was “contributing to the development of the nation”. This can be seen as ascribing to the government narrative of achieving higher education qualifications in order to develop the country, and consequently be a good citizen.

The pervasiveness of the results from Matherly et al.’s (2017) study exemplify the second principle proposed by McLean and Syed (2015), which is “ubiquity”. Again, employing the comparison of social norms, McLean and Syed describe how master narratives are “known” by group members of a

shared culture. However, rather than just “residing *within* the mind, these narratives exist in the material world” pervading cultural artefacts such as media, literature, education textbooks, and political speeches, as well as being evident in historical documents (Hammack & Pilecki, 2012, p. 78; see also Fivush, 2019; Hammack, 2010; McLean & Breen, 2015; McLean & Syed, 2015; Syed & McLean, 2021). They are “embodied in cultural practice, such as commemorative celebrations... Individuals engage with these collectively constructed stories through their own cultural participation” (Hammack & Pilecki, 2012, p. 78). This complements Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) contention that idealised definitions of masculinities “may be exalted by churches, narrated by mass media, or celebrated by the state” (p.838).

However, with their third principle, “invisibility”, McLean and Syed (2015) explain that individuals may not be conscious of the ubiquitous knowledge they share, as a master narrative is “often internalized through unconscious processes so that many are unaware that they are conforming to cultural expectations in defining themselves” (McLean et al. 2018, p. 633). In these cases, the narrative may only become visible or conscious when deviations or nonconformity are perceived (McLean & Syed, 2015; Syed, 2016). Coming from a different background was an advantage in this research as participants were able to describe their lives in contrast to what they perceived as a Western culture.

McLean and Syed (2015) note that the five principles are interrelated, and this is perhaps most apparent in the remaining two principles they outline: the “compulsory nature” and “rigidity” of master narratives. Considering the

former, they state that master narratives have a “moral component, an ideological message, which tells us how we are supposed to behave and how we are supposed to feel” (p. 327). Although this description echoes the utilitarian aspect of master narratives, by the inclusion of a separate “compulsory nature” principle McLean and Syed likely intend to highlight the consequences for those who do not align with the narrative, noting that they tend to occupy a more marginalized position in society. The reason for this relates to the fifth principle of “rigidity”. Although culture is perceived as dynamic in a master narrative model wherein individuals engage with, uphold, and change them (Hammack, 2008), structure and power form the central tenets of the model (Syed, 2016). Thus, unlike previous narrative theories, in McLean and Syed’s (2015) and Hammack and colleagues’ frameworks there is an emphasis on the degree to which individual agency is constrained by the master narrative. The “good values” and group ideologies are said to ultimately maintain structural power and the status quo in society, benefitting the privileged and being upheld by those in power such as heads of family, religious authorities, and the justice system (Hammack & Toolis, 2015; McLean & Syed, 2015). They are discernible through the legal architecture of rights in a society in institutions such as marriage (McLean et al., 2018). For example, the importance placed on inter-Emirati marriage in the UAE, mentioned in the Contextualisation chapter, is apparent in government schemes such as the provision of free housing, construction loans, or land allocation depending on an individual’s financial and family situation (u.ae, 2019). In comparison, Emirati women marrying foreigners is discouraged

through regulations such as not automatically granting citizenship to their offspring.

When considered through this perspective, structural inequality is not just about diminished power, but also pertains to social connection and cohesion, namely “a loss of belonging” (McLean et al., 2018, p. 643). Thereby, being seen to align with the master narrative is essential for well-being to achieve the desired state of “relatedness”. This can be seen in gender theories related to times of transition in education such as moving from primary to secondary school, or starting university. In their research on the latter, Warin and Dempster (2005) noted that young men often displayed “laddish” behaviour initially in order to conform to the hegemonic discourse of masculinity and integrate within a new peer group. While not employing the language of psychological needs, they describe a need for relatedness as the underlying motive wherein avoiding social rejection and isolation, namely “fears about being lonely and having no friends” (2005, p. 896), were alluded to or explicitly stated by participants. Similar sentiments were found in Jackson and Warin’s (2000) research on the transition of young people at stages of pre-tertiary education. Referring to Griffiths’ (1995) work on gender identity, Jackson and Warin highlight “the role of gender within the child’s awareness of social exclusion and inclusion, and her/his accompanying feelings of acceptance, support, rejection and isolation” (2000, p. 379). Adherence to the expected behaviour and implicit rules of group membership ensured a greater chance of integration with a peer group, thus minimising the threat of isolation and rejection during the stage of transition.

3.3.3 *Deviating From Master Narratives*

As outlined in the preceding sections, presenting an identity aligned with the master narrative conveys a culturally valued and accepted life while maintaining the status quo in society. Rebelling against a master narrative is possible, but deviation from the norms and expectations of the group would be problematic, risking ostracization, “social survival” (McLean, 2019; Syed, 2016), and a sense of “belonging” (McLean et al., 2018). The previously discussed studies by Jackson and Warin (2000) and Warin and Dempster (2005) exemplified the importance of conformity for social inclusion in new peer groups during times of educational transitions. A further example can be seen in Jackson’s (2003) previously cited work which attributes a lack of engagement of boys in U.K. secondary schools to theories of masculinity and “laddishness”. To recap, male students reported feeling the need to be perceived as achieving effortlessly or rejecting academic work in order to be accepted by peers. Jackson (2003) theorised this was in part a self-protection strategy against failure, but also to protect one’s social worth. While in public the boys presented an image in alignment with the hegemonic discourse of masculinity pervading their school environment, in private some of them described deviating from the “master narrative” by studying in secret. This revelation highlights the need to attend to the “hermeneutics of faith” and “hermeneutics of suspicion” (Josselson, 2004) when considering the master narratives portrayed by individuals. This may be of particular importance in a rentier state wherein the “collective self” may be considered an extension of

the nation; aligning with the government narrative epitomises the qualities and attributes valued by society.

3.3.4 Biographical Master Narratives

In addition to proposing five principles to identity master narratives and the way in which they function, McLean and Syed (2015) outline three types: biographical, sequential, and episodic. The first category, biographical, which has previously been called a cultural life script by other scholars, emerged as pertinent to this thesis. “Biographical master narratives concern the framework for how a life should unfold” (McLean et al., 2018, p. 633) and can be conceptualised as the “types of events that should occur in a life in a given culture (e.g., graduation from school, marriage), as well as the expected timing of events (e.g., marriage before childbearing)” (McLean et al., 2018, p. 634). The biographical narratives described by participants are outlined in the Results chapter and structure part of the Discussion chapter to highlight the consequential impact on young men’s participation in higher education.

3.4 Other Theoretical Frameworks Considered

Notable in its absence in McLean and Syed’s (2015) and Hammack and colleagues’ master narrative models, Bourdieu’s habitus (1977/2005) arguably seeks to conceptualise the same phenomena, albeit from a different theoretical standpoint. While both frameworks have been employed in

interdisciplinary work, McLean and Syed's (2015) clear articulation of what constitutes a master narrative rather than Bourdieu's "deliberate vagueness" (Laberge & Kay, 2002), means that the language thereof can be identified in other literature even when scholars are not employing the lens of narratives. This enabled connections to be drawn between the diverse range of academic fields from whence the findings pertained. Embracing the complexity of the research issue, the principle of "systems thinking" is employed in this thesis wherein the reasons behind the missing men emerged as inextricably linked to the broader environment. However, the temporal pertinence of transitioning to adulthood pointed to the greater applicability of an identity theory, rather than a systems thinking theory. Other theoretical perspectives considered were narrative identity (e.g. McAdams, 2018, 2019) and social identity (e.g. Hogg & Williams, 2000). However as the research progressed and the importance of the sociocultural environment and concept of the collective self emerged, the theories proved limited in articulating the phenomenon adequately. By incorporating the aforementioned theories as well as anchoring its epistemology on several other long-established social science paradigms, listed in the Introduction, master narratives provided a comprehensive, integrative theoretical framework to coherently consider the research issue in its full complexity. While master narratives have been criticised by postmodernists as being overly homogenizing and potentially reductionist, by emphasising the importance of the sociocultural and historical context, and in recognising that master narratives exist at levels of social categories such as gender, ethnicity, class, and sexual identity, McLean and Syed (2015) and Hammack and colleagues' models align with Lyotard's

(1979/1984) call for *petits récits* (little localised narratives) instead of *grand* narratives. Furthermore, by articulating deviations and alternative narratives, the framework intrinsically gives recognition to the multitude of narratives that may exist as *part* of the theory rather than as an exception to it. How the framework emerged from the data is detailed in the Discussion section, as well as the manner in which it is employed in this thesis.

3.5 Social Constructionist Approach

Building on the socio-ecological and evolutionary origins of identity theories, it has been stated that master narratives place history and culture at the centre of their models instead of at the periphery, maintaining that identity is constructed in interaction with society (Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; Hammack & Toolis, 2015; McLean & Syed, 2015; Syed & McLean, 2021). This indicated the applicability of employing a social constructionist approach as the epistemology recognises the importance of the historical and sociocultural context on the construction of shared understandings and practices (Charmaz, 2008; Schwandt, 2003). Charmaz (2008) advocates that this approach “resists the tendency in objectivist grounded theory to oversimplify, erase differences, overlook variation, and assume neutrality throughout inquiry” (p. 408). This nuanced analysis approach further supports the articulation of a master narrative grounded in the full complexity of the context thereby mitigating the potentially overly homogenizing effect, a criticism of the theoretical perspective addressed above.

3.6 Significance of Context

The research context may be particularly well-suited to the theoretical perspective of master narratives due to the extensive familial structure of Emirati society. As more recent work on the development of narrative identity has emphasised the importance in paying attention to the role of “the group”, so recognition has been given to the intrinsic difficulty in observing larger cultural groups (McLean, 2019). Thus, McLean (2019) points to the value in observing more manageable groups that function like minicultures, such as families. In the UAE, Emirati society is largely composed of extensive family networks, of which historically several extended families would make up a tribe identifiable by the family surname such as Al Shehhi, Alhebsi, and Al Zaabi. While the importance of tribal identification may have faded with the rise of Emirati citizenship and identity, family networks and relationships remain important in the close-knit community of less than one million, as expressed by participants in the male and female focus groups:

This is society. We are just 900,000 people, you know. And you expect that everyone will know you, and we know each other. {referring to another focus group participant} I know all his brothers, most of his family. He knows my brothers. I know his, we *know* each other.
(Humaid)

I always like to compare UAE like a countryside, when we compare it to outside ... Countryside in terms of how we are close with each other, in terms of relations et cetera. (Hajar)

These comments highlight the intricacy of family networks and Emirati society, in line with other research in the region (Abudi, 2011; Al-Ghanim, 2012; Wanucha, 2018), wherein the biographical master narrative portrayed by participants was often relayed in relation to family. This lends support to the utility and applicability of employing the theoretical perspective of master narratives in the research context, examining the relationship between individual and society, to examine the role played by tertiary education in building young men's lives.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Research Design

When outlining the different process between topical studies and cultural studies, Rubin and Rubin (2012) state that, in the latter, “closure comes in phases” (p. 63). In accordance with their assertion, this research study evolved into three distinct stages, employing a social constructionist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2008) and using the responsive interviewing model as an extended conversation outlined by Rubin and Rubin (2012). In Stage 1, the target demographic, young Emirati male high school leavers, tertiary-level “no shows”, and students who had recently withdrawn from higher education were interviewed, focusing on research question 1. As outlined in the Results section, none of the topics covered seemed to adequately explain why young men were not continuing their studies. I felt that, as a “cultural outsider”, my insight was lacking. This led to the development of the second research question and Stage 2 of the data collection in which I conducted focus groups and interviews with Emirati men and women aged from late twenties to late thirties, referring to them to describe, explain and exemplify the concepts and themes from Stage 1 (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). By sharing a cultural and historical context with the interviewees, their experiences would have resulted from a related belief and action system which is of particular importance as Dewey (1958) maintains that all experiences are essentially social in nature and context dependent. The findings from Stage 2 offered insights to Stage 1 and uncovered core

cultural concepts and themes leading to a subsequent Stage 3 in which participants from the target demographic were sought to “describe and provide examples for these concepts and themes” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). During the data collection, I moved iteratively between analysis and consulting the literature, described as the second stage of the literature review in a grounded theory study by Dunne & Üstündağ (2020) “to assist in the construction of a grounded theory which is rooted primarily in the raw data” (para. 24). At this point the third research question of generating a theory from the findings of research questions of 1 and 2 became important. After completing all data analysis, I conducted the third stage of the literature review “to elevate the grounded theory to a more abstract level”, drawing on theories from other disciplines (Dunne & Üstündağ, 2020, para. 24). This is the stage at which the fourth research question became pertinent: considering the implications of the theory generated for researching the phenomena of the “missing men” in higher education in other contexts. The mode of data collection and participant information are summarised in Table 4 below.

4.2 Type of study

Employing a social constructionist approach to knowledge, this research uses the northern emirate of Ras Al Khaimah in the UAE as a case study to seek an understanding for the reasons of the reverse gender gap in context. While the findings are not generalizable to other environments, this type of study allows for in-depth exploration of a wicked issue such as the missing men wherein the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clear (Yin, 2009).

Table 4*Mode of Data Collection and Participant Information by Stage of Research*

Stage of Research	Mode of data collection	Demography of participants	No. of participants
Stage 1	face-to-face interview	male Emiratis of university age	4
Feb 2020	telephone interview		11
Stage 2	face-to-face interview	male Emiratis aged late 20s to late 30s	3
March 2020	1 focus group		3
	follow-up interview (face-to-face)		1
	2 focus groups	female Emiratis aged late 20s to late 30s	8
	follow-up interview (face-to-face)		1
Stage 3	telephone interview	males Emiratis of university age	17
April 2020	follow-up interview (telephone)	participants from Stage 1	4
Total number of participants			46

4.3 Sample and Sampling Strategies

Akin to theoretical sampling in grounded theory, in their responsive interviewing model Rubin and Rubin (2012) advocate the importance of selecting participants who have firsthand experience in order to obtain results that are “fresh and real”. Thus, tertiary-level “no show” Emirati males were sought for Stage 1 and Stage 3 of the study. Rubin and Rubin also highlight the importance of gaining a range of perspectives and alternative points of

view in order to get results which are balanced and thorough. They state that this adds to the rigour of results, which is often criticised as a shortcoming of qualitative studies by positivist practitioners. In support of this, the older male and female Emiratis were recruited in Stage 2 of the research to gain a broader perspective and understanding of the sociocultural context.

A range of sampling strategies was used to recruit participants into the research. As with grounded theory, the presiding principle was theoretical sampling in order to collect “pertinent data to elaborate and refine categories in [my] emerging theory” through “systemic checks and refinements into [my] analysis” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 193). However, the focus differed at each stage of the research thus resulting in “multi-phase sampling” (Cohen et. al, 2007, p. 113). For example, in Stage 1 I sought to uncover core cultural concepts and themes through interviews with the target demographic. Whereas in Stage 2, I endeavoured to understand and situate the concepts within the larger sociocultural context, before returning to the target demographic in Stage 3 to explore the themes in more depth. Due to a difficulty in reaching the target demographic, the prevailing strategy was convenience or opportunity sampling. In Stages 1 and 3, most participants were derived from a list of male “no-show” students from a tertiary-level institute in Ras Al Khaimah, and contacted by phone. These included individuals who had never registered in higher education, and students who had stopped attending without notifying the institute. In one instance, the brother of an intended recipient agreed to take part in the research. In addition, three participants agreed to be interviewed when requesting to withdraw from the institute. In Stage 2, the

participants were determined by the availability of Emirati staff at the academic institute. An attempt at “snowball sampling” (Groenewald, 2004) was made by asking respondents to recommend others for interviewing. Two participants in Stage 2 were recruited in this way. However in Stages 1 and 3, this proved to be ineffective and no participants were referred in this way. All of the remaining participants in Stage 2, and one pilot interviewee were recruited through personal and professional contacts.

A total of 41 interviews and three focus groups were conducted in three main stages. The semi-structured interview questions were piloted with three male participants: two high school leavers and one older Emirati male who had left high school in 2001. All three interviewees had never attended higher education. As the research focus moved to a broader context, two of the pilot interviews were included in the data: one in Stage 1 and one in Stage 2.

In Stage 1 of the research, 15 interviews (inclusive of one pilot) were conducted with young male Emiratis. Of these, 11 interviewees had attended the higher education institute for a period of one week to two years then stopped attending without notification. Of the remaining four interviewees, three had graduated from high school in recent years and had never attended tertiary education. The fourth was an older brother, of one of the participants in Stage 3, who had completed higher education after working full time for a year.

In Stage 2, three focus groups comprised of three to four participants (two female groups and one male group), and three interviews with male

participants were conducted to gain a local perspective on the findings from Stage 1 and situate them within a broader sociocultural context. Two follow-up interviews, one with a male participant and one with a female participant, were conducted to seek further understanding on points they raised and clarification on the “tacit discourses” conveyed by their terms rather than assume their meaning (Charmaz, 2014). All of the participants were Emiratis aged from late twenties to late thirties who worked in academia, either in an academic or administrative department. The only exception was the interviewee who took part in the pilot. He had graduated high school in 2001, currently worked in the military, and had never attended tertiary education.

In Stage 3, four of the interviewees from Stage 1 consented to be re-interviewed with the new line of questioning, and a further 17 interviews were conducted with new participants. Twelve interviewees were currently doing their National Service, which had been suspended due to COVID-19. They had all been conscripted immediately after high school, except for one who had been conscripted during his bachelor’s studies. Of the remaining five, two had started higher education but not persisted; one was studying at an Arabic-medium university; and two had not attended tertiary education.

On average, the interviews in Stage 1 and Stage 3 lasted 20 minutes. In Stage 2, the focus groups and interviews lasted from one to two hours.

4.3.1 Limitations in Sampling

As mentioned, most of the participants in Stage 1 and Stage 3 were recruited from a list of “no-show” students from a federal higher education institute in

Ras Al Khaimah. All individuals on this list had accepted the offer of a place to study at the institute, but they were absent without notification. This meant that these participants had applied to university at some point. While attempts at recruiting participants through personal and professional contacts were made to try to access male Emirati high school graduates who had never applied to university, no participants were recruited in this way. This meant that the sample in Stage 1 and Stage 3 is biased towards young men who at some point had considered or intended to study at tertiary-level as all had completed the application process and accepted the offer. However, this was considered an acceptable limitation as the sample included a range of participants including individuals who stated they wished to attend, some who did not want to attend, and some who had stopped attending. The interviewees also provided information about some of their friends who had no intention of applying to university. Thus a range of views were garnered from young men of university age, 90% of whom were classified as “no shows”.

4.4 Location of Interviews

Two of the pilot interviews, three interviews in Stage 1, and all of the research in Stage 2 took place in person at the higher education institute from which the list of “no show” students was derived. One of the pilot interviews was conducted in the participant’s home. A circular seating arrangement was used to encourage equality between participants and the research team. The

remaining interviews were carried out via telephone, as is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

4.5 Methods of Data Collection

4.5.1 Conversational Interviewing

A semi-structured interview approach was employed to allow for comparison between interviews (Dörnyei, 2001), while permitting participants the flexibility to elaborate on answers which may result in obtaining previously unanticipated information (Drever, 1995). I used the responsive interviewing model as an extended conversation outlined by Rubin and Rubin (2012) in which “both interviewer and interviewee are treated as people, with feelings, opinions, and experiences” (p. 10); the researcher accepts the personality of each participant and adapts to the situation of each interaction. Adopting an open, flexible, and reflexive approach for conducting qualitative research in an Arab setting is recommended by other researchers in order to allow for cultural norms such as indirect modes of communication and sharing of information to develop trust (Hawamdeh & Raigangar, 2014). Although rapport is important in any interview, responsive interviewing actively encourages the building of a relationship between researchers and participants, rather than promoting detachment (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This makes it a culturally appropriate method for conducting research in Arab society due to the importance placed on relationships. The conversational

aspect of the interviews was enhanced by my relationship with the interpreter, a colleague with whom I work closely and a friend.

4.5.2 Telephone Interviews

In Stage 1, three interviews were conducted in person, but due to a low turn-up rate of participants, telephone interviews became the primary method of data collection; accessing hard to reach populations is one of the main advantages of this mode of interviewing (Opdenakker, 2006). For these phone interviews, the interpreter and I were in the same room calling participants using speaker phone. Stage 3 of the research coincided with the lockdown of COVID-19 in the UAE, thus conducting interviews by distance became a necessity since movement was severely restricted. At this stage, the interviews were conducted using Cisco Jabber, a unified communication software with a conference calling tool which allowed the interpreter and I to connect online while contacting participants on their mobiles. Although telephone interviews are often viewed as an inferior data collection instrument by traditionalists, this is not empirically supported in many qualitative studies (Block & Eskrine, 2012; Farooq, 2015; Farooq & Villiers, 2017; Novick, 2008; Vogl, 2013; Ward et al., 2015). Three of the main concerns regarding telephone interviews voiced by traditionalists are an absence of visual access to interviewees' natural environment, difficulty in developing rapport, and misunderstandings that stem from a lack of nonverbal communication (Farooq, 2015). As a result, some critics maintain that the data collected via telephone is not as rich as when research is conducted in the "gold standard" of face-to-face interviews (Novick, 2008). Concerns are also raised as to

access and sampling, as well as establishing trust and credibility. These issues are discussed in detail in this section, while outlining the advantages that phone interviews presented for this research study.

The importance placed on contextual data may result from the sociological and anthropological origins of qualitative research wherein interviewing participants in their natural environment can provide valuable contextual information (Novick, 2008). However, in non-ethnographic studies, such as this research, this contextual information is not necessary, whereas the visual anonymity provided by conducting the interview by telephone may present several advantages for researchers and respondents (Trier-Bieniek, 2012; Tucker & Parker, 2015; Ward et al., 2015). Firstly, participants have reported feeling more comfortable while being interviewed via telephone while relaxing in familiar settings out of view of the researcher (Trier-Bieniek, 2012; Ward et al., 2015). They felt the interaction was more akin to a natural conversation than an interview (Ward et al., 2015). This suggests that the telephone is a suitable mode for Rubin and Rubin's (2012) responsive interviewing as an extended conversation model. In Emirati society interaction between genders is culturally restricted from pre-teen years. Thereby some of the young interviewees may have had limited interaction with females other than their mother and sisters, meaning that they felt shy dealing with a female interlocutor. Being interviewed by telephone may have helped put these participants at ease as Ward et al. (2015) found that participants reported feeling less inhibited by not being able to see the interviewer. Other studies have found that visually anonymous participants tend to disclose significantly

more personal information than non-visually anonymous participants (Block & Eskrine, 2012; Tucker & Parker, 2015). This may be because being interviewed by telephone provides a greater sense of anonymity and privacy than when interviewed face to face (Farooq, 2015; Trier-Bieniek, 2012), with participants feeling less judged (Ward et al., 2015). Consequently, respondents may reply with less social bias (Tucker & Parker, 2015). Nonvisual communication provides another advantage for semi-structured interviews in which unanticipated probes and follow-up questions often arise during the conversation (Farooq, 2015; Novick, 2008). In face-to-face interviews, taking notes can often distract or influence the interviewee (Farooq, 2015). However, in telephone interviews, the interviewee is free to note ideas, comments and follow-up questions as they arise during the conversation without distracting their interlocutor (Farooq, 2015). I often took advantage of this during the telephone interviews to explore new lines of enquiry.

Qualitative research, which relies on transcribed data, may benefit from telephonic interview transcripts as they are based on verbal rather than non-verbal communication (Farooq, 2015). The reason for this is that telephone communication causes the interviewer and interviewee to pay more attention to what they are saying in order to relay their message, rather than relying on body language and gesture (Farooq, 2015; Vogl, 2013) which can sometimes be misinterpreted (Novick, 2008). For example, one of the participants in the male focus group often used gesture or facial expressions to complete his sentences; *they will say “see they gave their daughter to someone who is...”*

{gesturing and facial expression to show disapproval}. Thus, there is an additional layer of interpretation on behalf of the researcher when interviewing and transcribing these excerpts. However, if the interview had been conducted via phone, the participant would have had to explicitly state his meaning, thus removing any ambiguity.

Another often cited disadvantage of phone interviews is unequal telephone access and ownership leading to a misrepresentative sample (Block & Eskrine, 2012; Novick, 2008). However, this is not an issue in the UAE which has one of the highest global rates of mobile penetration, recorded at 201% in 2019 (The World Bank, 2021). This also lends support to prospective participants' comfort using the phone in the UAE, negating the concern of some scholars that interviewees' unfamiliarity with telephones may make them feel uneasy being interviewed through this mode. In fact, a recent survey of UAE adults found that 43% of people reported spending more time interacting with people virtually using their smartphone, than in person (YouGov Omnibus, 2018). As with other global findings, the survey in the UAE found that daily usage was highest among young adults aged 18 to 29, averaging seven hours a day. This supports the assertion that telephone interviews may be a preferred mode of interviewing among younger age groups (Farooq, 2015; Tucker & Parker, 2015). Additionally, where respondents are targeted through purposeful and appropriate sampling strategies in order to answer specific theoretical questions, such as in this research, telephone interviews have proven to be effective (Block & Eskrine, 2012); as the gender, ethnicity, and approximate age of participants was

already known, telephone interviews were used in this study to access rather than identify participants. Access to participants via telephone was also facilitated by the timing of the data collection as National Service had been temporarily suspended and the majority of the U.A.E. population were working or studying from home.

An additional concern raised of telephone interviews is the issue of trust, namely assessing the interviewer's credibility and integrity (Kraus & Augustin, 2001). Thus, at the beginning of each interview when explaining the purpose of the study and the participant's rights, the interpreter introduced herself by name, thereby indicating her Emirati nationality. She then introduced me by name, my academic information, my professional role, and my place of work in the UAE. Participants automatically received my contact number through caller ID on their mobiles. Providing this information and using a local interpreter helped to establish my credentials so that participants knew "who I was". When conducting qualitative research in the UAE, Hawamdeh and Raigangar (2014) note that knowing more than just the interviewer's university affiliation is particularly important in Arab settings in order to establish trust. If I had only been introduced as a researcher from a foreign university, I may have been met with suspicion as someone who has no standing or links to the community: as a "rootless stranger who can hit and run" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 79). The effectiveness of the approach taken is reflected in the high response rate and willingness of parents to pass on their sons' contact numbers to participate in the research.

Recent research conducting interviews via telephone has emphasised the potential to empower the participant for several reasons. Firstly, while visual anonymity reduces the risk of value-laden judgements being made of the researcher (Vogl, 2013), the opposite is also true. Although researchers are trained not to, participants may still feel that there is a risk of them or their home environment being judged. Visual anonymity provided by the telephone removes this perceived social pressure (Daly et al., 2018; Sharrat et al., 2018; Ward et al., 2015). When given the choice to be interviewed in person, over the telephone, or via an internet-mediated video service, 68% of participants in Sharrat et al.'s (2018) study in the UK chose the telephone, as did all Māori and Pacific Island participants in Ward et al.'s (2015) grounded theory study. Reasons given by participants were convenience and comfort with using the telephone for communication. The parallels of participants' interview preferences in these cross-cultural environments suggest an increasing relevance for conducting telephonic interviews in the present day. Finally, it has been suggested that interviewees have a greater sense of control during telephone interviews as it is easier to terminate the conversation than when in person (Vogl, 2013). This supposition was supported in this research study as one interviewee concluded the discussion, saying that he needed to pray. Another two interviewees asked to excuse themselves momentarily for unstated reasons, putting us on hold then rejoining the conversation. After agreeing to participate, participants in this study were asked for their preferred time to conduct the interview. Most agreed to do the interview at the time, with two participants specifying a time to be called back.

The main limitation with telephone interviews, especially when cold calling, was not being able to confirm that the participant was in a suitable environment and focused on the interaction before the interview started. However, it soon became apparent when this was not the case. During this research study there were three instances when the interviewing environment was not ideal. Firstly, although no telephone interview was conducted before 10 a.m., at the end of one interview the participant admitted he had just woken up. Despite this, the interview lasted 26 minutes with the participant giving extended responses. In the second instance it became apparent that the interviewee was travelling in a car with friends, meaning that his responses were short and cursory. However, having already interviewed his brother, the participant's responses provided another perspective to the information already received. The third situation involved another person in the room, assumed to be a female family member, prompting the interviewee in his responses. Although the responses may not have been entirely the interviewee's own, the data was still included in the study as they provided a contribution to the emerging narrative. Charmaz's version of grounded theory, Rubin and Rubin's approach, and Hammack and colleagues' (Hammack, 2008; Hammack, 2010; Hammack, 2011; Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; Hammack & Toolis, 2015) master narrative framework all seek to understand a historically and culturally embedded reality from the varied perspectives of individuals. Thus, multiple interpretations from distinct points of view are recognised and valued in endeavouring to understand the research problem (Chamaz, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Although Farooq and Villiers (2017) maintain that the telephone is not a suitable mode for cross-language interviews, provided it is possible to connect via conference call or using speaker phone with an interpreter, I did not find any issue. However, it is essential that the interpreter is well-informed of the research beforehand, and advisable to use a semi-structured rather than unstructured approach so that the general outline of the conversation is planned. If assigned a high autonomy role, the interpreter can be entrusted to introduce the research and establish rapport at the start of the conversation, thus saving time in translation. The flow of conversation may have been aided by my personal relationship with the interpreter whereby, for example, we could use nonverbal cues to indicate an unclear or interesting response that needed further exploration. This communication took place in person when using speaker phone together in Stage 1, and virtually when connecting visually via Zoom while calling participants in Stage 3. In a face-to-face interaction, this nonverbal communication would not have been possible as it would have distracted the interviewee. Thus as it may happen, communication between us was enhanced when interviewing participants by phone. The interpreter's role is discussed in detail in the following section.

4.6 Language and Translation

Cross-language studies are often criticised for not discussing the epistemological and methodological aspects of conducting research in another language, and not making transparent the interpreter's role in the

research process (Bergen, 2018; Brämberg & Dahlberg, 2013; Squires, 2009; Temple & Young, 2004; Wallin & Ahlström, 2006). Comprehensive reporting on the interpreter's role, interpreting style, and his or her impact on the findings increases the trustworthiness of the research (Squires, 2009; Wallin & Ahlström, 2006). Therefore in this section I briefly review the different roles an interpreter may play, before explicitly evaluating how my epistemology influenced the interpreter's role in this research.

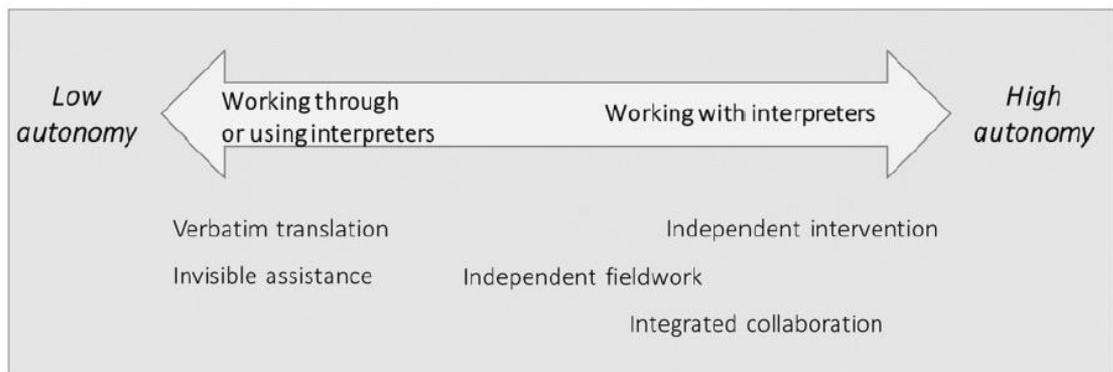
Firstly, to define: "an Interpreter is a person who conducts 'live' interpretation between two people. A Translator is someone who translates text- based documents between the source language and the target language" (Squires et al., 2019, p. 3). An interpreter can be seen to operate along a spectrum from low autonomy to high autonomy, see Figure 2. Interpreters operating at the low autonomy end of the scale are seen as "passive conduits" (Baker, 1981; Bergen, 2018). Researchers working with interpreters at this end of the spectrum tend to have a positivist outlook, advocating verbatim translation in order to limit any bias an intermediary may bring to the data through their own language interpretation. Interviews are carried out *through*, rather than *with*, an interpreter (Edwards, 1998). At the other end of the scale, interpreters work with high autonomy, which may include conducting interviews independently without the presence of the researcher; meaning is prioritised over word-perfect translation. Researchers at this end of the scale tend to have a social constructionist mindset, acknowledging the complexity within which an interpreter must operate. Consequently, interpreters are recognised as forming part of the process of knowledge production (Temple & Young,

2004). The 'ideal' interpreting style is thought to exist somewhere along the spectrum, dependent on the situation and stakeholders (Baker, 1981).

Language translation is not simply a linguistic exercise, but also requires cultural and contextual interpretation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Shklarov, 2007). The risk with over-reliance on verbatim translation is that the meaning is lost. This is exemplified by Baker (1981) who explains that an interpreter's close translation in juvenile court led unaccompanied minors to believe that they were being placed into slavery, rather than under the custody and guardianship of a resettlement agency. In less extreme cases, subtle nuances and cultural connotations may be lost in word-perfect translation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Shklarov, 2007). Thus, interpretation needs to incorporate cultural aspects of meaning, rather than simply words to increase the trustworthiness in cross-language interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Wallins & Ahlström, 2006). Cross-language interpretation is a complex

Figure 2

Conceptualizing Interpreter Roles in Research by Level of Autonomy



Source: Bergen (2018, p. 2)

process wherein the interpreter needs to understand the meaning in the source language, before reconceptualising and expressing it within the cultural context of the target language (Brämberg & Dahlberg, 2013; Esposito, 2001). The interpreter chosen for this research is well-versed in this process as she is an Emirati working in an English-medium environment. She is continually code-switching between Arabic and English, and is often asked to act as an interpreter between local students and non-Arabic speaking faculty.

The literature emphasises the importance of developing trust, rapport and, if possible, friendship with interpreters to facilitate the research process (Bergen, 2018) and the ability to work together as part of a close team (Baker, 1981). In this study, the interpreter was a colleague and friend with whom I had already worked on several research projects. Thus, the established friendship, mutual understanding, and trust between us added strength and legitimacy to the research process (Bergen, 2018), as did working together with her regularly (Edwards, 1998). Since she was from the same culture and ethnicity as the interviewees, she would be able to detect the cultural values and nuances of interpersonal communication (Thomas, 2008), that I may be unaware of as a “cultural outsider”. By using a “cross-cultural team”, I was able to take advantage of both aspects of ‘cultural insiderness and outsiderness’: benefiting from her shared culture with the participants; and the fresh perspective that I may bring to the topics (Dimmock, 2002). This reduces the risk of being “influenced by the tacit theories of respondents” that arises from insider research (Trowler, 2012, p. 276).

While the advantages of having an interpreter from the same cultural background are well-documented (Tsai et al., 2004), others consider that this might be a disadvantage as interviewees may feel that confidentiality cannot be ensured (Wallin & Ahlström, 2006). As with research conducted with female Emiratis in the UAE by Winslow et al. (2002), previous anecdotal comments from Emirati colleagues suggested that this could be an issue as they did not like to discuss personal problems outside of their family within the community. Thereby, having a female Emirati interpreter may have influenced the responses in Stage 1 and Stage 3 as participants may have refrained from making any comments that could appear disparaging. However, it was felt that the benefits of having an interpreter who shared a culture with the participants, with whom I had a trusting relationship, and had previously worked with on research projects, outweighed the potential disadvantages. Conducting the interviews via telephone helped to create a distance between the research team and the participants. In addition, the interpreter was not known to the participants and assurances were made around confidentiality, thereby limiting the impact of having someone from the same community as interpreter while retaining the advantages of having a cultural insider.

As recommended in the literature (Brämberg & Dahlberg, 2013; Edwards, 1998) the interpreter was informed of the research beforehand and actively involved by translating the written consent forms and information letters into Arabic for participants. Due to her interest in the project, her role extended to other stages of the research such as participant recruitment (Bergen, 2018),

wherein she used personal and professional contacts to approach potential interviewees. After each interview, we reflected upon the conversation and shared any observations. Although not considered an “expert” whose insights were privileged over those of participants or asked to comment on the transcribed interviews, the interpreter became a “key informant” in the research process (Edwards, 1998). She became a cultural broker (Squires et al., 2019) whereby I would often refer to her for background cultural knowledge, such as the usual practice of dowry in the UAE and the rise of virtual weddings during the COVID-19 lockdown, to inform my analysis and guide my literature research. During the interviews she would impart her local knowledge by adding value statements, facilitated by the conversational aspect of the interviews as below. These value statements helped to make her opinion explicit, increasing the transparency and trustworthiness of the research (Edwards, 1998), while adding further insight to the findings:

Interpreter (*translating interviewee’s words*): That means, with them in the work, they have to do something within five months and then after that they assign them a job, a real one for one year. Part of the military service. And then they will be having a letter that will, it will say that he finished military service.

Researcher: Right.

Interpreter (*adding a value statement*): This is different type. First time I hear about it.

Prioritising meaning over word-perfect translation (Brämberg & Dahlberg, 2013), and having discussed the translation in post-interview sessions with the interpreter on previous projects, I knew her work to be accurate. Having the texts professionally translated verbatim after each interview not only would have been prohibitively expensive and likely revealed little useful information, but it was also unnecessary as any “interpretation” on the her behalf during the interviews was acknowledged and valued. The interpreter was assigned a high autonomy, active role in line with the social constructionist epistemology of the research (Bergen, 2018; Edwards, 1998). She was made visible in the research by including excerpts of conversation between us in the Results section, and using the third person when quoting interviewees who had responded in Arabic (Edwards, 1998). This also made it clear when the information had been subjected to linguistic interpretation (Wallin & Ahlström, 2006), compared to quotes in the first person where participants had responded directly in English.

All interviews in Stage 2 were conducted in English without the interpreter, aside from the pilot interview. This was because all but the pilot participant worked in an English-medium environment and thus had proficient English language skills to express themselves fluently. Depending on the English language level and preference of the participant, interviews in Stage 1 and 3 were conducted with the interpreter either in English, in Arabic, or a combination of the two as outlined in Table 5. In the case of the latter, generally the participants’ English comprehension skills were stronger than their productive language. Thus, often participants understood the question

asked in English but responded in Arabic. Sometimes the participants would prompt the interpreter and ensure she mentioned certain details when translating into English, as with Edwards' (1998) experience. A consecutive interpretation style was used, wherein one person spoke at a time during the interview, rather than a simultaneous style. The former is recommended by Baker et al. (1981) for one-to-one conversations as the latter can be distracting since the interpreter is translating at the same time as the researcher and interviewee are speaking (Wallin & Ahlström, 2006). Consecutive interpretation was also more natural for the conversational style of interviewing. When it became apparent that the interviewee had a sufficient level to participate in English, on her own accord the interpreter would 'disappear' into the background, only offering language assistance when needed. Often she would encourage participants to converse with me directly if their language level permitted.

Table 5

Language in Which Interviews Were Conducted in Stage 1 and Stage 3

Language of Interview	Number of Interviews
Arabic	18
English	12
Arabic and English	6
Total	36

In line with the conversational aspect of the interviews and her active role, the interpreter was entrusted to build rapport with the participants to encourage participation, which I knew her to be naturally skilled at. The comment in the example below from one of the pilot interviews shows her complimenting the interviewee and creating a sense of equality between the research team and participant:

Researcher: What was your favourite subject at school?

Arabic

Interpreter: Math

Arabic

Researcher (*directed to the interpreter*): What did you say?

Interpreter: I told him, that I will ask you teach me Math! Because I am weak in Math.

In an active role, interpreters are empowered to initiate follow-up questions and probe further on a particular issue if they deem it useful (Edwards, 1998), as exemplified by the excerpt below:

Interpreter: His teachers when they studied, when they teach him, that they are giving them positive energy.

Researcher: Nice

Interpreter: Very nice. I wonder what his grades in his high school.

Arabic

Interpreter: His high school average 84.

As recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2012), the interpreter informed me when she had difficulty making direct translations. On these rare occasions she would write the phrase in Arabic to find the English equivalent later.

Researcher: With which company? With who?

Arabic

Interpreter: Ministry of somewhere in Abu Dhabi, but I don't know the name in English. Okay, so I will write it and then I will get the right name for you.

4.7 Transcription

After piloting the automatic transcription system on the Wreally web transcription platform, I decided to use the self-transcription service as it proved to be more efficient while necessitating more interaction with the text. As transcribing, I added nonverbal events such as emphases, hesitations, and laughter which indicated the speaker's meaning and supported interpretation of the text (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I also added notes, memos and questions highlighted in a separate colour as thoughts occurred to me during the transcription. When the conversation was in English, I directly transcribed rather than translated common Arabic words used by the participants such as

inshallah (God willing), *mashallah* (used to express thankfulness, appreciation, and praise) and *alhamdulillah* (praise be to God). These expressions are often used in conversations with non-Arabic speakers and I felt that trying to translate them to English equivalents would have reduced the authenticity of the text. Retaining them kept the original speaker and culture visible in the text, which can often be rendered invisible through the “methodological expediency” of translating and transcribing spoken language (Temple & Young, 2004). I also directly transcribed language as it was said, including fillers and linguistic errors when they did not affect the speaker’s meaning. However, where ellipsis, a common feature of spoken language, resulted in ambiguity once transcribed I inserted the missing reference, for example, “go to the women’s **[college]** you will hear of it”. Similarly, where fillers were numerous, or backtracking and corrections resulted in obscuring or detracting from the interlocutor’s meaning I adjusted the language when presenting the results. One such example is below.

Original excerpt:

like, you know, especially like our sheikhs, they have the challenge to make like a big changes in our in our environment or even our culture in our institutions.

Adjusted excerpt with bolded fillers and repetitions removed:

Especially our sheikhs, they have the challenge to make a big changes in our environment or even our culture in our institutions.

After transcribing each interview, I wrote a brief summary of the salient points and additional memos which included my thoughts, potential lines of inquiry, and any patterns or divergences between interviewee responses (Charmaz, 2014). As the names of participants were removed once transcribed, I kept track of the data by including the main features of each interview in an excel file identifiable only by the date and time of the interview. This record included procedural information such as the length of time, mode of interview, and the language in which it was conducted. It also included a summary of responses in order to facilitate comparison across interviews, as well as insights offered by particular participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To increase the accuracy of the results I self-transcribed the interviews in Stage 1 and 2 within a week of being conducted so that the information was still fresh in my mind (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In Stage 3, I transcribed and coded the interviews within a month.

4.8 Data Analysis Method

4.8.1 Coding

The data was coded and analysed in NVivo12 using an amalgamation of open coding in grounded theory described by Charmaz (2014), and the model proposed by Rubin and Rubin (2012). Although Glasserian or Strauss purists may not approve of deviating from the traditional process of grounded theory, Charmaz (2008, 2014) advocates that researchers should draw on the flexibility and versatility of the method's data collection, analysis, and

theoretical leanings. Both grounded theory and Rubin and Rubin's approaches employ abductive reasoning and theory generation, and have their roots in social constructionism (Charmaz, 2008; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Thus, the two models are epistemologically and methodologically compatible. By default, codes were initially suggested by the existing literature which had been used to formulate the original lines of enquiry, such as the influence of friends, family, and school experience. However, coding was extensive in an effort to remain open to the data, allowing concepts, themes, and new lines of enquiry to emerge (Charmaz, 2014). Other codes that emerged from the data included future plans, advising future children, and marriage. The initial coding in Stage 1 suggested "gaps" in the data (Charmaz, 2014), leading to the recruitment of participants in Stage 2 of the research to explain the concepts. Employing the grounded theory iterative process of moving back and forth between data collection and analysis, previously coded transcripts were recoded as insights and new codes emerged at each stage of the research. For example, in vivo codes (Charmaz, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012) such as "build my life" and "losing time", identified in Stage 2 of the research, were used to recode the data from Stage 1 as well as form new lines of enquiry in Stage 3 (Charmaz, 2014). A description of the culture was reconstructively formed by "weighing" and "combining" the data, using diagrams and flowcharts in an attempt to represent relationships between categories, before moving on to theory building (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The analysis became more theoretical as I questioned and probed the relationships between the "categories and fundamental aspects of human existence such as the nature of social bonds or relationships between choice

and constraint, individuals and institutions or actions and structures” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 321). Theories were formed and tested through theoretical sampling at each stage of the research, while referring to the literature. It was at this point, moving iteratively between the data and literature that the theoretical perspective of master narratives presented itself as a useful framework through which to consider the findings. “Saturation point” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was reached after conducting another 21 interviews in Stage 3 of the research and two participants from Stage 2 were interviewed again to clarify comments, and henceforth no new information was forthcoming. While auto-coding is significantly more time efficient, I chose to manually code the data in NVivo in order to remain “close” to the data in an effort to notice nuances and subtleties in participants’ accounts. Due to the sociocultural intricacy of the young men’s life choices which emerged, I felt it was important to retain a sense of each interview in order to keep the data within the context of participants’ lives. Thus, as well as keeping a summary of each interview in excel, I would often reread transcripts to maintain quotes within context. This approach complements Hammack’s (2011) call for the study of meaning in context with master narratives, taking a holistic stance towards the person instead of analysing “disembodied variables”. This is discussed further in the following section.

4.8.2 Discussion of Other Methods Considered

Initially a phenomenological approach was considered for the research design in order to emphasise the “students’ voice” since the demographic of eligible male school graduates who do not continue their studies at tertiary level has been neglected in the UAE. However, there are inherent issues with conducting phenomenology in cross-language studies in which the data needs to be translated (Squires, 2009). Also, as an explanation was sought rather than a primarily a descriptive account, grounded theory was deemed more suitable (Sayre, 2001). In addition, a grounded theory approach is appropriate for conducting research when little is known about the phenomenon (Chun Tie et al., 2019), as is the case with the missing men in higher education globally. Although the emergence of master narratives as a theoretical perspective from the data might suggest that narrative inquiry should have been employed as a research method, Syed and McLean (2021) maintain that this is not the case. Instead, they advocate that a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods are appropriate to use with the master narrative model including event narratives, in-depth interviews, life-script analysis, focus groups, experiments, and conversation analysis.

Nevertheless, while primarily a grounded theory approach was employed, elements of narrative inquiry were incorporated into the analytic process by rereading transcripts in order to retain the context of individual quotes.

Advocating the theoretical commensurability and methodological complementarity of grounded theory and narrative inquiry, Lal et al. (2012) explain that this combined approach is oftentimes employed by scholars in

order to “compensate for concerns regarding the fragmentation of text in grounded theory and consequent loss of participant stories” (p. 14). Preserving the context of an interviewee’s account and the broader sociocultural environment embraces the complexity of the social and psychological and does not seek to reduce them into isolated components (Hammack, 2011), thereby embracing the complexity of the issue. It also recognises that experiences are culturally and historically located, in line with Dewey’s (1958) thesis and the epistemological basis of master narratives, outlined in the Theoretical Framework chapter.

4.9 Robustness of Research Design

Several measures were taken to ensure the robustness of the research, some of which have already been interwoven into the preceding sections of this chapters. The way in which these strategies increased the trustworthiness of the data are explicitly outlined in this section, as well as highlighting other steps that were taken.

4.9.1 Establishing trustworthiness: my position

Akin to Charmaz’s (2008, 2014) and Rubin and Rubin’s (2012) thesis, Dewey (1958) notes that the researcher is not an objective observer but an active participant possessing intellectual habits formed through one’s spatial and temporal cultural assimilation. He advocates an “intellectual disrobing” of prejudices in order to achieve a “cultivated naïveté of eye, ear, and thought”

(p. 37). While not possible to achieve a complete “primitive naïveté”, Dewey states that where prejudices are made explicit they can become “organs of enrichment” in data analysis; whereas tacit theories can unknowingly influence a researcher’s methodological choices and data analysis (Trowler, 2012). I am drawn to Dewey’s “naturalistic humanism” as I ascribe to the humanism learning theory as a teacher, believing that students learn most effectively when affectively engaged. In line with this, my previous research has often revolved around topics related to the motivation and persistence of learners in the UAE. As a result, one of my tacit beliefs in embarking on this research was that the motivation to study may be lower for male college students due to a higher psychological cost (Jacob, 2002) resulting from prior negative learning experiences (Abdulla & Ridge, 2011; Ridge et al., 2013). Anecdotal comments from colleagues and the NAPO (2005) survey results suggested that perhaps there was less instrumental value in obtaining a higher education degree for male students, resulting in less motivation. Making my tacit beliefs explicit and employing a grounded theory design helped to approach the research topic with an open mind. Although challenging, allowing the theoretical perspective to emerge from the data and analysis instead of employing it from the outset, facilitated the generation of a culturally-relevant theory. In support of this contention, the intricacy of self and society that emerged, explained by the concept of a collective self and considered in terms of master narratives, differed from my own individualistic Western-orientation. Adding further credibility to the findings, the nature of the theoretical perspective intrinsically allows for the presentation of accounts that run counter to the master narrative through the articulation of deviations

and alternative narratives. Presenting this “contradictory evidence” not only strengthens the validity of the research (Creswell, 2014), but enriches the data by constituting part of the emerging theory, rather than being considered an exception to it.

4.9.2 Establishing trustworthiness: research design

Although part of the data collection, Stage 2 of the research emerged as a form of data analysis too. To explain, I felt that I did not have enough insider knowledge, or “special second record” (Hull, 1985), to situate the findings from Stage 1 within the larger sociocultural context; the favourable response of most of the participants in continuing their studies contradicted the reality wherein only a minority of young men attend tertiary education in the UAE. Thereby I conducted focus groups and interviews with older male and female Emiratis in order to gain their perspective and interpretation on the results. Referring to the Stage 2 participants who understood the culture of the Stage 1 participants increased the trustworthiness of the research by reducing the risk of me misinterpreting the results (Tsai et al., 2004), while adding much more depth to the data. As previously mentioned, rather than assume to understand the “tacit discourses” conveyed by participants’ terms (Charmaz, 2014), I explored them during the interlocution or conducted follow-up interviews when needed. In addition to illuminating the Stage 1 findings, new lines of enquiry emerged during this stage to explore in Stage 3 with the target demographic. Although conducting research with the Stage 2 participants diverged from my original aim of focusing on the young men who were eligible to study at tertiary level but were not doing so, their insight proved invaluable

in understanding the broader processes operating in society, considered in terms of master narratives in the Discussion chapter. In addition, establishing themes based on converging perspectives from different participants, rather than primarily one source, lends further credibility to the findings (Creswell, 2014).

Although male researchers trying to conduct research with Arab female participants can prove to be problematic, Western female scholars often consider themselves the “third gender” due to the ease with which they can readily access both male and female participants in the Middle East (Schwedler, 2006). The advantage of being a female cultural outsider and thus being assigned “third gender” status was evident in the candid remarks of some of the male participants in Stage 2, enriching the data. My outsider position was complemented by having spent nearly 30 years in the Gulf region, including 15 years in the UAE, meaning that I am well-versed in the customs and norms of communication and social behaviour. However, most of my teaching experience and all of my previous research experience in the UAE had been with female students; this study being the first to focus on male participants. The pilot interviews allowed me to pilot the interview questions, as well as gauge the dynamic interviewing male participants within a culturally gender-segregated society. I found that the older male participants were more forthcoming than the younger interviewees. This difference may have stemmed from maturity or the Stage 2 participants having a greater interest in the research subject. It may have also arisen from a lack of experience, on the part of some of the younger participants, in dealing with a female

interlocutor, resulting in a level of shyness. Moving to telephone interviews, which have been reported as a preferable mode of communication for shy or younger participants (Trier-Bieniek, 2012; Tucker & Parker, 2015), created a physical distance between the research team and participants, facilitating communication.

4.9.3 Establishing trustworthiness: cross-language research

Although previously discussed in detail, the ways in which “trustworthiness” of the data and the research process using an interpreter were established are summarised in this paragraph. Firstly, for transparency, the interpreter’s personal demographics, previous experience, competence, and extent of participation in the study were outlined (Bergen, 2018; Edwards, 1998). Secondly, the interpreting style was exemplified with excerpts from transcripts, and aligned to my epistemology and the methodology (Bergen, 2018; Edwards, 1998). In addition, the same interpreter was used throughout the study in order to increase consistency in translation and thereby reliability of the data analysis (Twinn, 1997). The interpreter was well-informed of the research beforehand and actively participated by translating the participant consent form and information letter (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). We work together regularly (Edwards, 1998), and thus have a well-established, trusting relationship (Bergen, 2018) enabling us to work together as part of a close team (Baker, 1981). We had an open dialogue during the research process, and she would let me know when she had difficulty translating aspects of the interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In line with the social constructionist nature of the research, she was recognised as forming part of the process of

knowledge production (Temple & Young, 2004), and any “interpretation” on her behalf during the interviews was acknowledged and valued.

4.10 Ethics and Data Security

Since the research qualified as low-risk, it was eligible for expedited review (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Thus, it was reviewed and approved by my thesis supervisor. It was also reviewed and approved by campus management at the higher education institute in the UAE from where the list of potential participants was acquired.

In face to face interviews, participants were informed verbally in Arabic and in written form in both English and Arabic of the study, their participation rights, and rights of refusal; written consent was acquired (see Appendix). Where phone interviews were conducted, participants were informed verbally in Arabic using a script succinctly explaining the information in the participant letter (see Appendix). Once verbal consent was acquired, the recording was started and the remainder of the script was read. Participants were told that they were free to change their mind and withdraw during the study and up to two weeks afterwards, in which case all corresponding data would be destroyed and removed. To protect anonymity, all names were removed from the interview transcripts and, in the case of the data in Stage 2, replaced with pseudonyms indicating the participants’ gender. Participants in Stage 1 and Stage 3 are referred to as “interviewee” with an alphanumerical code to

distinguish them from participants in Stage 2. The numerical element of the code refers to Stage 1 or Stage 3 of the research.

The interviews were audio-recorded using an app, Smart Recorder, on an iPhone. After each interview, I uploaded the recording directly from the app to OneDrive for storage. The OneDrive account is protected with Multi-Factor Authentication wherein both a password and a security verification code sent to a mobile device are needed to access the application. The laptop synced to the OneDrive account is password-protected. The password meets strong-password guidelines and is changed every two months.

Using the self-transcription service increased security of the data as no third party was involved; neither the audio file nor the transcription were stored on the website server. The audio files were played directly from the computer and the text remained on the local browser. After completion, I deleted all transcriptions from the website.

As discussed earlier, moving to phone interviews empowered participants as they had greater control over accepting and ending the interview. Conducting the interviews via telephone during the COVID-19 lockdown in Stage 3 ensured that no risks were taken regarding the health and safety of participants and the research team.

4.11 Claims to Originality

As the value of qualitative research lies not in generalizability, but in the richness of studying a topic in-depth within the particularities of a specific context (Creswell, 2014), the results of this research cannot be extended to other environments. Thus, the claims to significance lie in the nuanced understanding of the reasons young men do not continue their studies in this case study, as well as providing a broader understanding of Emirati society for cultural outsiders. Although the findings themselves are not generalizable, a case is exemplified in the Discussion for employing the master narrative model as a way to examine a societal issue such as the missing men in other contexts rather than focus on “identity” per se. With power and agency as central tenets of McLean and Syed’s (2015) and Hammack and colleagues’ models, I put forward an argument for utilizing the framework as a conceptual tool to “undress” patriarchy (Edström et al., 2014) and open up the discussion on hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), facilitating an interdisciplinary growth of theory. In the next chapter, the findings are presented in two parts reflecting stages of the research, before being considered within the framework of master narratives in the Discussion chapter.

Chapter 5: Results

As outlined in the Methodology chapter, the questions in Stage 1 of the research focused on themes previously identified as affecting male participation in higher education, including influence of friends, family support, school experience, perceived benefits of tertiary education, and difficulties in English. The main findings from Stage 1 are outlined briefly in this section, before being discussed in more depth with the results from Stage 2 and Stage 3. Finally, they are considered according to the literature in the Discussion section. First, a summary of the intentions or circumstances of all interviewees in Stage 1 and Stage 3 is presented in Table 5 below. As can be seen from the table, reasons related to employment permeate the tertiary-level educational choices that many young men make in the UAE. Eighty per cent of males who have not yet attended university or college prioritised finding work over studying. Work-related reasons were also the most commonly cited for withdrawing from tertiary level education, whether it be to find a job, difficulty balancing the work-study commitments, or to start a business.

Table 5

Intentions and Circumstances of Participants in Stage 1 and Stage 3

Categorized by their Tertiary-Level Education Experience

	Number of Participants
<hr/> Intention of interviewees who have not attended tertiary education	
find work then continue studies	12
study only	3
work only	1
<hr/> Circumstances of interviewees currently studying in tertiary education	
studying at an Arabic-medium university	1
working while studying (currently doing National Service)	1
<hr/> Reason given by interviewees for non-persistence in tertiary education	
to look for job	3
difficulty balancing work and studies	2
accepted to study at a vocational institute with guaranteed job	2
to apply for scholarship to study abroad	1
to start own business	1
low GPA (studying was his second choice – working was his first choice)	1
medical reasons	1
<hr/> Total	<hr/> 29

5.1 Summary of Stage 1 Findings

5.1.1 Influence of Friends

When asked about their friends' post-high school activities, interviewees usually responded that some were studying, some were working, while others were doing their National Service. When asked if they knew what their friends would do after National Service or why their friends had decided not to study, nearly all participants replied with "*wallah madri*" which translates as 'I don't know' or 'I have no idea', saying it was not something they usually discussed. Interviewee 3I thought his friends who had chosen to work in the army rather than study were "close-minded, they don't put in effort to try something new". Two of the interviewees who had withdrawn and were most negative about studying, "I lose my money... and I am feel bored" (interviewee 1J) "the college steal [my] mind!"(interviewee 1H), said that all of their friends and family were studying at university. These comments suggest the negligible influence of friends and high level of autonomy regarding the decision to study at tertiary level. This is further supported by comments made by Khalifa when talking about his secondary school experience. He spoke at great length about the efforts he made to change his group of friends after he failed and had to repeat a grade. Instead of sitting at the back of class with his "failing friends", Khalifa chose to sit at the front with the "star students" and emulate their behavior in order to improve his grades and be eligible for university admission. When asked if it was difficult to change his group of friends,

Khalifa said, “it was easy just to say hi for them, hello, how are you. And then I will focus with the good friends”.

5.1.2 Family Support

Families' support for their sons continuing their education at tertiary level was apparent when cold calling to recruit participants as 75% of parents responded without hesitation that their sons would continue their education after National Service. In the interviews, all participants said they had relatives who had completed higher education, and family members who advised them to continue their studies at tertiary level. Of the 13 interviewees who answered the question about family advice, 10 replied that their families encouraged them to continue their studies, highlighting the instrumental or intrinsic value, or both. Of the remaining three interviewees, one said that his father advised him to “choose what you want. So because it's my life and because I will build this, my life for the future” (interviewee 1E). Interviewee 1O, the older brother of one of the intended participants who was also interviewed by phone, said that he had not had anyone to advise him. However he chose to continue his studies after working for one year, and had since advised his 15 older and younger siblings to continue their education. Upon withdrawing and starting his six businesses, interviewee 1H from a family of engineers was told that he was “smart and thinking in the right way. The studying does not have any value. What you have done is *right*. Later on you can continue your studies, after your business”. Thus, overall the majority

of families appear to be very supportive of their sons continuing their education at tertiary level.

5.1.3 School Experience

Of the nine interviewees asked about their school experience, seven replied favourably with interviewee 1B saying that he loved studying as the teachers gave him “positive energy”. However, commitment to learning varied as interviewee 1E described how he had good grades and enjoyed school even though he often skipped class; “I enjoy [school] a *lot*. Because I do many problem there, in the school!”. Of the remaining two, interviewee 1Q said he didn’t like studying, describing difficulty in understanding, especially in English. Interviewee 1J who had withdrawn from college after calling it “boring” stated emphatically that he hated studying. In elaborating further about his school experience, he said “I love the school *more*. But I don’t like to attend the classes. I escape, and then I let others escape with me... I sit with my friends. I play [Uno] with them”. Khalifa who had graduated high school in 2001 spoke at length about his school experience, and how he loved learning. However, due to an overt focus on reading and rote memorisation, and little practical or group work, he said that he and his classmates often got bored. Nevertheless, this did not affect his desire to continue his studies at university.

5.1.4 Advice for Future Children

Of the 13 interviewees asked about the advice they would give their future children, 11 replied without hesitation that they would advise their children to study before working. Reasons given were for better employment prospects, “to be better than me”, and to learn English and other languages. Interviewee 1E responded that he would guide and support his children according to their strengths and interests, as his father guided him. Interviewee 1H who had withdrawn to start his own business said “I will not let them to study. [I] will guide them to business immediately so they can get little bit mature... After the business, they can continue studying”.

When probed about why the advice for their children differed from the educational choices most of them had made, interviewee 1D responded, “I will advise them to continue their studies because nowadays, the kids are getting to know English better than us before. They are quick learners.” Another interviewee replied:

Because, our time *now*, different than [the] generation in the future.

Now we don't have the jobs, not many. Difficulties to find a job. But in the *future* from when they are young, they will study until they get *old*.

So I will *push* for them to study. Better and the *best* for them. Maybe that time they would have opportunity for the job. But now we don't have the good strong opportunity to work. (interviewee 1D)

While presenting a positive perception on the value of tertiary level education, these latter comments are quite revealing of some of the issues these young

men face. Therefore they are discussed in further detail with the rest of the data in the following sections.

5.2 Findings from Stages 1 to 3

As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, interviewees in Stage 1 and Stage 3 are referred to by an alphanumerical code reflecting the stage of research in which they had participated. To distinguish them, participants in Stage 2 were assigned a pseudonym to indicate their gender, listed in Table 6.

Table 6

Pseudonyms assigned to participants in Stage 2

Male Interviews	Male Focus Group	Female Focus Group 1	Female Focus Group 2
Abdulla	Humaid	Aisha	Hajar
Khalifa	Rashed	Bashayer	Maryam
Salem	Saif	Fatema	Muna
		Zainab	Sara

In the male focus group, Humaid succinctly summarised the transition of young Emirati males to manhood thus:

The main thing is the dependency and independency, from my point of view. Independency where I feel that '*khalas*, I am a *man* now. Why should I take money from my family?'. And dependency, where you *have* someone who is relying on you to pay, to do, to have a car.

(Humaid)

This dichotomy provides a useful lens through which to consider the findings. Thus the results in the following section are discussed by themes under the prevailing headings of 'Independency' and 'Dependency'.

5.2.1 Independency

When explaining why they chose to look for employment before or instead of studying, many interviewees cited "to rely on myself" and to "be independent", which were explanations also offered by the male and female participants in Stage 2 for low male participation in higher education. Interviewees equated having a job and thus being financially independent from their families as relying on themselves, as typified by interviewee 3A's comment below:

I will rely on myself, I will not let my family to give me money. *Khalas*, I am this age, I need to rely on myself, to be responsible on myself. I will earn money and then I will depend on myself. (interviewee 3A)

The use of the Arabic word *khalas* in the previous two quotes translates as “enough” or “finished”, suggesting the end of adolescence and start of adulthood. One participant specified “this age” as 18; “I have to rely on myself. As we heard about the human being after 18, they need to work. After working they will earn money” (interviewee 3G). Another referred to the physical characteristics associated with manliness in Arab cultures (Thompson, 2019, pp. 197-198) as denoting “this age”; “when our moustache and beard start coming, we start feeling that's enough, we have to take care of now for the family,” (Abdulla).

In the comments above, there is an allusion to the collective nature of this knowledge through the use of “we” in both quotes, hinting to the cultural expectation of Emirati males to be self-reliant and financially independent at this stage of life. This ‘knowledge’ was also evident during an interview with a student continuing his studies at tertiary level. When asked if he received an allowance from his family he was quick to defend his position, emphasising that he had not asked his family for the financial support; “yeah, they give me by themselves, allowance. I don't tell them. Only by themselves” (interviewee 3C).

However, it was clear from some of the other interviews that it was not the same for all families. Interviewee 1E said that some of his friends were at home, not working or studying. When asked how they felt about staying at home, he replied that they felt good; they were under no pressure from their family and were living in the present moment rather than thinking about the future. Interviewee 1J and interviewee 3O had withdrawn before completing

their bachelor's degree said that they were neither working nor studying. They described spending their time "walking around", enjoying the moment, doing nothing, spending time with friends, going from café to café, and wasting life.

5.2.2 Securing Employment: "no one will eat the salad"

In contrast to much of the literature that claims the ready availability of well-paying public sector jobs lures young men away from obtaining a university degree (Abdulla & Ridge, 2011; Ashour, 2020; Hatherley-Greene, 2012; Ridge & Farah, 2012; Ridge, Kippels, & Chung, 2017), the interviewees in this study presented a different story. Several interviewees spoke of the difficulty of finding employment after having unsuccessfully submitted many job applications. This was exemplified by interviewee 1D's comments in the previous section wherein he would advise his children to study before finding work, in contrast to the path he had chosen. In describing the competition for jobs, Abdulla employed a metaphor of sharing a family meal:

The first thing we focus for [is] something that you are *sure* everyone will take it from you. You have to take [the chicken legs] first and eat it first. And you will leave the salad and everything, because you know no one will eat the salad. (Abdulla)

Through the interviews it became apparent that desirable jobs (the chicken), especially in the public sector, are perceived to be in short supply.

Interviewee 1B related how his brother had told him that the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), where older generations had often found employment, was “kicking out people. They don't want crowded”. Previously, many young men also found employment with the military or police, especially in more rural emirates such as Ras Al Khaimah. However, in the interviews, many participants spoke of difficulties in the recruitment process nowadays, with one interviewee mentioning the need for *wasta* (social connections and influence) to be accepted onto the police force. Two interviewees explicitly stated that the only reason they had decided to study was because they had not been able to find a job; “Because there is no future, only studying. Because no work” (interviewee 1Q). Thus, they were obliged to ‘eat the salad’ as the ‘chicken’ had already been taken. Interviewee 3O, one of the young men who was currently neither working nor studying, spoke of trying to study for two years but he soon started missing classes which affected his GPA, so he withdrew. He admitted in the interview that his motivation to study was low as becoming a police officer had been his dream since he was six years old:

[Studying is] wasting time in a benefit way... You are doing *something*, achieving something. Not staying sleeping at home until 2PM... I was a little bit careless, I used to sleep, going with my friends, roaming, and then I wasn't do well. That's why I stopped my studies. (interviewee 3O)

He had since applied to the police academy again and was hoping to be admitted the next academic year. In comparison to the shortage of jobs, there

was a strong sense among participants that higher education (the salad) was readily available; "Later on you can continue your studies" (interviewee 1H).

5.2.3 Reason for Studying

When asked for the reason for wanting to continue their studies, 71% of interviewees (20 out of 28) spoke of the instrumental value of post-secondary educational qualifications for employment including promotion and a higher salary. Of the 20 interviewees, seven were currently studying or said that they were planning to study before working, including two who had been accepted to study at diploma-level at a government vocational institute (ADNOC Technical Institute). In explanation, they emphasised that they were guaranteed a job with ADNOC upon completion of the two year course; "when I finish there, I can get a job on the same day" (interviewee 1E). In addition to gaining a certificate for work, interviewee 3F also mentioned wanting to continue his studies in order to improve his level of English as "some of the work stations require English language". Of the seven participants, five mentioned intrinsic reasons for studying, as did eight other interviewees. These included personal gains such as increased knowledge, life experience, to open your mind, and to achieve a personal goal. Interviewee 1I dreamed of becoming a scientist, estimating it would take 15 years of post-secondary education to achieve his goal. Two interviewees also spoke of a love for studying. Akin to previous research in the UAE (Engin & McKeown, 2017; Matherly et al., 2017) other reasons put forward were of a collective nature such as being able to share knowledge with others, to give service to the

country, and it was “good for people to be educated” for the country as well as themselves. Three interviewees described reasons related to fulfilling family expectations: “it’s something we are strict about in my family” (interviewee 1L); “[my parents] say it’s important for myself and them. Everyone in our family should have a degree” (interviewee 3C). Interviewee 3C continued to say that the subject of the bachelor’s degree was unimportant as, once graduated, he was guaranteed a job in one of his grandfather’s many companies. Interviewee 1H, who had withdrawn to start his own business, said that he wished to continue his studies later to gain the prestigious title of “Engineer” as all of his friends and family had, even though he had no interest in the subject. Although this may suggest a lackadaisical or acquiescent attitude, he presented as very passionate and focused. He had started six businesses, and planned to wed in seven years’ time after having researched the ideal age to marry. Initially, interviewee 1H had wanted to become a pilot, but after not meeting the physical criteria he thought to continue his studies to doctorate level in order to achieve the title of Doctor, in addition to Engineer. Both male and female focus group participants spoke of the perceived status of becoming a doctor or engineer, which is in line with other studies in the region (Jenns, 2019; Thompson, 2019). Focus group participants said the title improved a man’s reputation, and brought prestige to the family; “we still think that the *best* thing to be is a doctor. And the second best thing to be is an engineer” (Humaid); “most families, they push their kids to go to doctor or even engineer. So they have good reputation or even prestige for their family: ‘oh, you have lots of engineers in your family, you have lots of doctors’ and so on” (Maryam).

However, the level of commitment varied between participants who expressed a wish to continue their studies. Interviewee 3N who spoke of the value in gaining personal and professional experience, and the need for higher education qualifications for work, stated that he thought he would *probably* study as his older siblings had. However, he said that he had not given his future much thought as he was still doing National Service. In contrast, interviewee 3P who quoted the proverb, “my degree is my weapon” was determined to study at tertiary level. He explained that “in the future I don’t know what will happen. If something happens, or something went wrong or something, I have my degree to fight. I have the right. I can choose my own option for work.” Interviewee 3P had been denied access to federal institutes on the basis of his high school grade average and so had spent the last three years studying to improve his grades and gain entrance to a private university. Some of the male focus group participants also noted that sometimes male students applied to college to appease their family. However, genuine difficulties or low motivation often meant that they were withdrawn for poor attendance or low GPA; “They want to show their *family*, that I *joined* but I failed. So I have to take another thing” (Salem).

5.2.4 Dependency

As previously mentioned, for many male Emiratis independency is intertwined with dependency. Due to their family circumstances, young men may not have a choice to continue their education as participants explained that

traditionally it is the responsibility of the eldest male in the family to become the provider and help support the family in the father's absence:

There are some *severe* cases, where you are the *man* of the house.

Your father is not here, your father passed away, your father divorced your mother, or he's in another house, or he just don't care. You will be taking care of your mother, your brothers, your sisters. (Humaid)

It was evident through many of the interviews that this practice is still prevalent. Two interviewees said that they had withdrawn in order to support the family, as did two other students who did not want to participate in an interview but consented to their reason for withdrawal being included in the research. This highlights one of the challenges of doing research in an Arab culture wherein privacy is highly guarded and information sharing is tightly controlled in order to protect the family's reputation (Abokhodair & Vieweg, 2016). For example, when initially requesting to withdraw, the two students said that they wanted "to find a job". Further inquiry led to the disclosure that the father of one of the students had passed away recently. Financial difficulties and family responsibilities meant that the male students, from the same extended family, were seeking employment to help support the family. However, they didn't want "financial reasons" recorded on the institute's administrative form as the reason for withdrawal, instead requesting that "employment" be selected.

Abdulla explained that the retirement policy for nationals may also contribute to a strained family financial situation. In the UAE, Emiratis are entitled to

pension and retirement benefits after the age of 49 or after serving a minimum of 20 years (u.ae, 2020). This means that family finances may be put under pressure as many children reach university age around the same time as their fathers approach retirement:

[When] the students reach to the college, most of their fathers retire at this age. So the salary will be less, less support, less everything and limitation for their father's salary. (Abdulla)

This was this situation Khalifa described when he requested support from his father to go to university in 2001. Having just retired, his father instead asked that Khalifa, as the eldest son, work to help provide for his eleven other siblings, to be his father's "right hand". Khalifa did so dutifully, meanwhile supporting and encouraging his brothers to "continue their studies rather than going direct to work", as he will advise his sons in the future, "because the studies is very important". However, he described himself as a "victim" being the oldest son when comparing himself to friends whose older brothers had given them cars and supported them financially to study.

5.2.5 Locus of Control

On asking whether the need to financially support the family came from within or was due to external pressure, the male focus group responded:

It can be both. But usually it's from him. Because, it's the family. You can't enjoy studying, or the *privilege* of studying while your mother is hungry, or she's not feeling well. (Humaid)

This sentiment was reflected by some of the young men, such as interviewee 1M who had withdrawn to support the family by earning money and driving his younger siblings to school and college. When asked about what advice his family had given him, he said that his father and uncle had encouraged him to continue his studies and find work afterwards.

Abdulla also explained that the feeling may be due to the anticipation of future circumstances and responsibilities rather than the present need:

He should prepare himself for the responsibilities. Especially when their father or mother got sick and take them to hospital. Then he starts feeling that I'm now the leader in the house to take care of the family. I don't know what will happen in the future. Maybe they will get sick more, they will die, something will happen. So better to have my own work and salary just to be sure in case if something happens. (Abdulla)

Although responsibility traditionally falls to the eldest male in the family, recognition was given in both the male and female focus groups that in the present day it depended on the family's situation. Although described as still unconventional, if the eldest child was a female, then she may become the main provider if circumstances dictated. To exemplify this, in one of the focus groups Fatema talked about her female cousin who was the eldest sibling of the family, and whose parents had divorced. She was offered a well-paying

job in Abu Dhabi, and although at first her mother had protested as there are cultural restrictions on unmarried women living alone, the cousin was now working and living in Abu Dhabi on her own:

[My aunt] didn't accept it at the beginning. But what can they do? She doesn't have any source of money, she's not working, and this daughter already finished her studies. So this is the only hope to change their standard of living. So [my aunt] accepted it. (Fatema)

5.2.6 Transitioning to Adulthood: to build my life

In explaining the transition to adulthood for young men, Saif typified the comments from most of the interviewees:

As a male when I graduate from high school, I don't want to still be under my father, or my parents. I want to start my new way. So I want to start to depend on myself. (Saif)

In Stage 1 and 2, several participants mentioned “to build my life” as a reason to work rather than or before studying. To explore this concept in more depth, it was added as an explicit line of enquiry in Stage 3 of the research, of which two main definitions arose. When asked for their understanding of the expression, the majority of participants in Stage 3 who planned to work described “to build my life” as “to get that car, to build a house, to get married, to have my own family” (interviewee 1H). Having an income was therefore integral to “continue my life” for these young men:

Researcher: Why does he want to stop and have his own business now, in the middle of his studies?

Interpreter: Because [interviewee 1H] would like to earn money to get a car, for him to get married, and to get a house, a big house. After that, [he] will complete [his] studies.

The two interviewees in Stage 3 who said that they planned to prioritise their studies offered definitions related to developing skills, gaining experience, and building their character. Interestingly, when further prompted about getting married and building a house, they said that they had not considered these things.

5.2.7 Marriage

Participants explained that in the UAE it is customary for the groom to pay for the wedding, with a government grant available for Emirati males on a low income provided the prospective bride is Emirati. When asked about the cost and time needed to save for a wedding, interviewees' responses varied from two to ten years, and 100 000 to 500 000 dirhams (£20 000 to £100 000).

There are also several government schemes in place to support Emirati newlyweds such as free housing, construction loans, or land allocation depending on an individual's financial and family situation (u.ae, 2019).

Abdulla mentioned that many Emirati males wanted to get married younger

these days as they had heard that it was becoming more difficult to obtain government housing:

People scared them. They [are] scared the housing will be difficult to get. The rules, before the government used to give us house easily. Now you have to get married and bring proof you are married to get your house. So everything getting worse now with these things. For this reason, most of them want to finish very fast. (Abdulla)

By “finish fast” Abdulla was referring to finding work, saving money, getting married, and obtaining a home. Out of the 12 participants asked about the age they intended to marry by, six answered between the ages of 23 and 25, and three others stated before 30 which was deemed “too old”. In further discussion in the male focus group, the participants noted that the age of marriage was an important issue in the Arab world with the late-twenties considered too old by many, thus there was pressure on young men to marry by their mid-twenties.

We **really** care about this topic in the UAE, and in the Arab world in general. So, if you are 25, they will start telling you “You *don't* want to get married?? You're 25! If you start thinking about it now, you will marry in one year, 26. Then you will have a kid. You are 27. When he's 20, you are 47. You are *old*. (Humaid)

However, not all participants agreed with this sentiment. Humaid continued to explain that he had married at the age of 31, despite family concerns that he would be over 60 when his firstborn was 30. Two interviewees responded

that they may get married after 40, or perhaps not at all; “Actually, I'm not planning to get married after 40 even! I'm enjoying life, yeah, *wallah*. That's why {laughs}” (interviewee 3O). Aged 22, interviewee 3O said he would have been content “to stay single till the end of the life”. However, in recognition of the cultural expectation to marry, he resigned himself while inhaling deeply saying that “we all agree that marriage is an important thing to do.”

Aside from the practical element of saving for a wedding and building a marital home, there is also the issue of having a marriage proposal accepted. In Stage 2 and 3, participants were asked about the qualities of a prospective groom. Character, behaviour, and friends were listed, but the most important aspect was deemed to be a man's job and salary; “without job, he will not get married. For sure he will not. No one will accept [him]” (Salem). This sentiment reflects other research in the MENA region wherein “a permanent job, a high status profession and financial resources all improve a groom's eligibility” (Singerman, 2007, p. 32). In contrast, the male and female participants in Stage 2 described the limited value in having higher educational qualifications for improving young men's marital prospects, exemplified by the comments below:

Researcher: So you could have bachelor's and master's and doctorate, but if you don't have a job [you will not get married]?

Salem: No, *khalas*. Nothing means, these kind of the degrees you have. It will not mean anything. Should be a job, with a specific salary.

Excerpt from female focus group:

Researcher: So the education is not really important? Or it's not something that [prospective in-laws] look at specifically?

Hajar: It depends. But honestly, yes. They are more likely to look at where he works, his title, how much he earns.

Muna: How much he earns basically.

These sentiments support Matherly et al.'s (2017) findings on the perceived benefits of tertiary level education by Emirati university students and their parents in the UAE. Out of the sixteen items in their survey, "can attract a better marriage partner" was consistently rated as one of the lowest by participants regardless of socioeconomic status or generation.

When asked about the family finances, all focus groups described the traditional patriarchal concept of the man as breadwinner being the norm.

Excerpt from female focus group:

Hajar: Our culture is still, like, the male is the responsible person. Even though we're sharing everything, but based on our religion, and based on the thought. Like even ladies, if they participate it's from their own-

Muna: Voluntary basis.

Hajar: Yeah, it's not mandatory. They're doing it just to help. But for the male, it's mandatory. That's why they are looking for the best jobs, they're looking for the best title. And majority of the families, when some proposals are coming for their daughters, they will look for everything. They will ask about every single thing {referring to finances}.

Sara: He's the provider... He's the man who is working and should provide for his kids and the wife.

5.2.8 Taking a Shortcut

Rather than studying, participants in one of the female focus groups spoke of male students wanting “the easy quick way” by working directly after high school, often with the military or police. Salem described this approach as a “shortcut,” with getting married as the ultimate goal:

The students think that maybe I will do like a shortcut. I will go work. Then I will get married. Then I will think that I will continue my studies. So he thinks that he will do a shortcut, like 20, 22, 23 years he will get married. (Salem)

At the UAE's largest federal tertiary institute, recent changes mandating a year's work experience in the penultimate year mean that a bachelor's degree requires five years to complete. When preceded by sixteen months of compulsory National Service for males, the students would be aged at least

24 or 25 when they graduate with their degree which is the age at which many interviewees planned to be married by. The length of time may be extended if students enter university without the English requirement and need to initially complete a bridging programme or English preparatory course. If they have not been working while studying, the young men will have been unable to save for a wedding and marital home, or indeed have a wedding proposal accepted, as exemplified by the quote from interviewee 3E:

[I] want to work and study at the same time to minimize [the years]. It's good for me because I would like to get the good level [at work]. And at the same time I'm studying so I can finish from studying to earn a good salary to get married.

One of the female focus groups also recognised the need to save for marriage and "build their life" as a reason why many male students did not continue at tertiary level:

He is the one who has to provide the house, he has to pay money, he has to make all these arrangements and so on. So, he chooses just to work five, six years, and get himself ready. So maybe not wasting time on education. (Sara)

5.2.9 Wasting Time

"Wasting time," as in the quote above, was a recurring theme in many of the interviews and focus groups; "He'd like to earn money... because in the

college [he's] wasting *time*, not getting so fast money" (interviewee 1H).

When probed further, participants commented on a perceived lack of utility of a bachelor's degree for finding employment. When male interviewees spoke of the instrumental value of education for work, they tended to refer to benefits such as promotion and higher salary while employed, rather than providing an advantage for finding work. Several interviewees spoke of knowing friends and family who had graduated with a bachelor's and had been unemployed for several years. This reflects the issue of youth unemployment in the wider MENA region, discussed at length in recent years in the Development literature (Dhillon et al., 2009; Dhillon & Salehi-Isfahani, 2009; Dhillon & Yousef, 2009; Salehi-Isfahani & Dhillon, 2008; Salehi-Isfahani, 2013).

Participants in the male and female focus groups spoke of a saturated job market wherein graduates were "overqualified", as typified by the quote below:

You are *overqualified*. People think, why I will bother myself and spend five years in higher education, when I can graduate and get the *same* job? Especially the type of job that you will get after you graduate [in the Northern emirates]. (Hajar)

Some of the participants spoke of young men actually being disadvantaged professionally by studying at tertiary level when seeking employment after graduation. Although they may have higher qualifications, they did not have the same years of experience as their peer who had been working since high school, which was deemed more important:

For these four years, the one who started working [directly], he already got experience. Whereas the one who continued studying, he didn't get that experience. At the end he will work in a place [where] the salary will be actually *equal* or less than the one who didn't study. (Saif)

Adopting the perspective of an employer, Humaid talked about the advantages of hiring someone with a high school diploma rather than higher education qualifications. These included offering a lower salary, greater retention of employees, and relevant skill training:

I'll not pay 44 [thousand dirhams] for bachelor's [graduate], I'll pay 25 [thousand dirhams] for high school [graduate], but I will teach him *exactly* what I need. And I know that he will not *leave* me because he don't have a bachelor's; he don't have other options. From a business point of view, I don't care about your bachelor's. I don't care about master's or PhD. I want someone who can finish the job. To finish the job in an efficient way, I will teach him what to do. (Humaid)

By working and studying, young men are able to save for a car, wedding, house and therefore "continue with their lives". This was described as the sensible or "smart" option during one of the female focus groups:

The smart kids secure a job. They try to find out what is the major *required* for this job, then they go back and study. And then they get a promotion. So it's a smart way sometimes. (Sara)

The male focus group described how if young men were working while studying, then they would be earning years towards their retirement:

One important thing, *we*, this community, in general they work so they can reach their retirement here... So, for me to [go] work somewhere, *then* start my bachelor's somewhere else - it's good because I'm adding five years. So if I start working when I am 20, I will be retired [at] 45. This is amazing! (Humaid)

However, the male participants in Stage 2 highlighted the difficulty in working and studying, especially once married with children, with several of them citing this as a reason male students often requested to withdraw. To exemplify this, Salem, who worked while getting his bachelor's degree, describes the difficulties he has experienced in returning to his studies since getting married and starting a family:

Don't believe anyone if he said that after married I will continue my studies. I was planning also to continue my master's degree after getting married. But still till today I didn't get any time to, but I'm trying inshallah maybe by next semester, maybe. I'm trying. Really, *really* I want to continue my studies. But it takes time for me. Now two years I'm just postponing, postponing. Maybe within this year, maybe inshallah I will try to continue my studies. (Salem)

5.2.10 The Effect of Social Media

Although not mentioned by any of the interviewees in Stage 1 or Stage 3 of the research, participants in Stage 2 spoke at length about the effect of social media on the youth today. Articulating thoughts also expressed in the female focus groups regarding the impact of social media, Humaid described the motivation of some young men for prioritising work over studying, and the ensuing difficulty in working and studying at the same time:

Seeing on social media people showing their cars, their lifestyles, this make the youth wants to get money faster, and easier, quickly. That's why they say, "okay, I'll study later... Now, let's collect money, let's have money. I want a car. No matter what, I want a car. I will be able to work and study". But once he starts studying, "Oh this is hard, I can't. Okay, what I will keep, and what I will take away? Study or *money*? No need to study! I'll just collect money". Social media played a *big* role in changing the mentality. (Humaid)

As older participants, both the men and women recognised that the lives people portrayed on social media "don't give the true life" (Fatema), describing how influencers were often gifted items to advertise, or people borrowed items for the purpose of taking a photo to post then returned it. However, they stated that young people, male and female, are heavily affected by the lifestyles they see portrayed on social media; "unfortunately, we have to be honest, the kids are affected by everything in the social

media... these generations think this is the life. They are not very simple in their life,” (Fatema).

The Stage 2 participants identified a second way in which social media has affected the educational choices young people make, male and female alike, namely by presenting an alternative route to salaried employment:

Maryam: [The youth today] say “why should I study in this school and university for five years, and then I *may* get a job, I *may* not. What about I just open up a new business immediately? Being a makeup artist, fashion designer,” for example.

Hajar: All of [the youth] now, they want to become a YouTuber.

Maryam: YouTuber! And they believe that they will get the money, yeah! My son is telling me “mum, you need to open an account for me. I’m going to be a YouTuber because I’m able to get the money easier.”

The above excerpt from one of the female focus groups reflects other comments made by interviewees regarding “wasting time” in higher education, the lack of utility of higher education qualifications for securing employment, and the desire to “get money faster, and easier, quickly”. The male focus group described how these perceptions sometimes appeared to be confirmed through the actions of society:

Rashed: One student told me, “I want to be a fashionista, social media influencer”.

Humaid: Yeah, yeah, yeah! “I want to be an influencer! I don’t need to study”. Because all of the examples who have cars, who have money, who’s going everywhere, they don’t have, I don’t think even a high school degree. They are just nobody, came to social media and start talking. {indecipherable} himself and became famous. And on the other hand, you see all big entities and officials calling them for big openings and treating them like this V,V,V,V, V, V VIPs – it affected the youth. It affected their minds. Oh the doctors in the 20th row, but this nobody is in the first row.

5.2.11 The Effect of National Service

As mentioned in the Contextualisation chapter, National Service is mandatory for all male Emiratis aged 18 to 30, whereas the service is optional for women. Although having a significant effect on university enrolment in the initial years as nearly all male high school leavers were required to defer university entrance when conscription was introduced in 2014, several participants indicated that the effect has endured. Interviewee1C noted that many of his friends had decided not to continue their studies after completing their military service as “they got in the mood of working”. He described how after being away from studying for 16 months he and his friends had “forgotten many things about studying” and their level of English had declined. These three factors acted as a deterrent for many of his friends to continue their studies. In support of this, Abdulla described how young men become

acculturated to the military, and rather than “starting from zero [by going] to college or somewhere else”, many decided to continue with the military employing the skills and experience they had developed over the 16 months. However, Khalifa, the older participant who has been working in the military since graduating high school in 2001, presented a different story. He noted that many of the young conscripts were turning down full time jobs offered by the military upon completion of their National Service in order to continue their studies at tertiary level. Khalifa felt this was because in general families were encouraging their sons to complete their studies more nowadays, as well as offering to support them financially. He also explained that before the year 2000, the military was the state’s primary employer for young men. However, he said now there was a greater diversity of potential employers such as ADNOC, Emirates transportation and other public entities in which a tertiary-level qualification would entitle employees to a higher salary. Interviewee 3L who intended to continue his studies after completing National Service said that he wanted to have “a normal life different to the military life”. He described the former as “studying, going to college. Yes, and learn more stuff, different. Like engineering or something like that.” When asked if he had always wanted to continue his studies after high school, he explained that he had only decided after experiencing military life during his National Service:

Interviewee: No, I thought that I only wanted the military. But since I joined the National Service, I seen how military works, and how their daily life. That little bit changed my mind.

Researcher: Okay. And what was it about the military life that changed your mind?

Interviewee: Pressure. It's hard work. Like this.

Thus, National Service can be seen to have a positive and negative effect on young men continuing their studies, although more research would be needed to determine which is more pronounced.

5.2.12 Language of Study

Of the 21 interviewees asked about whether they would prefer to study in English or Arabic, 11 chose the latter. Four interviewees said that they were comfortable studying in either language. Six interviewees replied that they would prefer to study in English, two of whom had attended a private English-speaking secondary school and one of which was currently applying for a scholarship to study in London. Generally, the participants who preferred Arabic cited having difficulties in English, stating that it would be easier to study in Arabic. While 11 out of 21 participants would appear to be a significant number, only two of the no shows had registered in an Arabic-medium higher education institute. Three interviewees were still completing their National Service, one of whom said that he intended to register in an Arabic-medium institution upon completion, while the other two said that they would prioritise work over studying. Of the remaining six, two planned to continue their studies in English at a vocational institute, and four had not

persisted with their English-medium tertiary-level education for employment related reasons. Thus, out of the 21 interviewees asked about their preferred language of study, only three were actually studying or intended to study at an Arabic-medium institute. Prioritization of work, rather than language of study, appears to be a more influential factor.

5.2.13 Regretting Later

As previously mentioned, there was a sense among the young men that they could always continue their studies later. Unlike the perceived scarcity of jobs, tertiary education was thought to be readily available, as exemplified by the salad in Abdulla's metaphor of sharing a family meal; "you will leave the salad and everything, because you know, no one will eat the salad". Several interviewees who said they planned to continue their studies after finding work, spoke of the support given by the military and police for young men once employed to continue their studies, exemplified by interviewee 1D's comment below:

Interpreter: The military and the police, they are giving time to study because I know, he said, because I know some family members they have done the same.

However, several of the participants in Stage 2 mentioned the regret expressed later by male relatives for not continuing their university education as they are passed up for promotion and a pay rise. The salary system in

government institutes is very hierarchal, based on the number of years of service and qualifications. Thus after a certain period, employees without higher education qualifications would be ineligible for advancement.

Even my family. I saw many, many males, they didn't complete [higher education]. After a period of time of work they think that they are losing opportunities of promotion and all these things. (Fatema)

When [his brothers] went to work in the military, they felt 'why I did not continue my studies?'. They regret from inside, they had this feeling 'I need to continue myself studying'. Now they are upset, why I did not continue my studies before? So they are realising very late. (Khalifa, through Interpreter)

Aside from the challenge in balancing work and studies, the male focus group also spoke of the difficulty of returning to education as a mature student due to its unconventionality in the UAE. Although they said the community would be impressed, the individual may feel reluctant or "shy", worried about how society may view him:

It's hard, for UAE citizens, if I'm above 30 and go back to university, where I will be sitting with 18s. Here they really care too much about how the community will look at me and how they will criticise whatever I'm doing... Actually everyone will be impressed. But inside the guy who wants to study he will be like "what they will say?". We do *care* about how people *look* at us. (Humaid)

In contrast to the account relayed by several participants quoting the experience of friends and family, Khalifa and interviewee 1A described difficulty in being granted release time from the military to study due to the specialisation of their work. Additionally, one of the female focus groups explained that after an individual has been away from federal education for a year then they are no longer “first priority”. This means that if they were to be accepted, either the individual or the entity they work for would have to pay the academic fees. In the case of the latter, the employer will likely select the degree and the institute according to the enterprise’s needs, as explained by Aisha when talking about her husband’s situation.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Analysis

6.1 Chapter Structure and Objectives

As outlined in the Results chapter, it became apparent during data collection and analysis that the reasons young men do not continue their studies are varied and often complex. Although the circumstances may differ for each individual, common themes arose between the different accounts which together depict prevailing master narratives that impact the decisions of young men to continue their tertiary level studies. Of great importance was the biographical life script of young Emirati men, as well as rapid socioeconomic changes in the UAE in the last fifty years. For the purpose of transparency and as a way to summarize the main themes from the Results chapter, the manner in which the theoretical framework emerged from the findings is presented in the first part of this chapter. Lending support to Demuth and Keller's (2011) thesis, the biographical master narrative described by participants can be seen to reflect two basic human needs of autonomy and relatedness. Although not using the term "master narrative", Demuth and Keller (2011) contend that:

autobiographical narratives reflect prevailing cultural norms and values that can be understood in terms of the two basic human needs for autonomy and relatedness, and that people aim to construct self-narratives that are coherent with these cultural models. (p. 15)

Proposing that “prevailing cultural norms and values” is synonymous with the concept of master narratives, in this chapter I seek to further develop the links between master narratives and autonomy and relatedness. I expand on Demuth and Keller’s (2011) thesis by proposing that patterns of interdependence, and consequently the ways in young men “build a life”, are underlined by the need for security. In this research “security” is considered in terms of physical and social survival achieved through social cohesion (McLean, 2019), wherein the first denotes having the financial means to support the household and start their own family, and the latter refers to maintaining one’s, and by extension the family’s, status and reputation. Thus, the second part of this chapter discusses the needs of autonomy, relatedness and security drawing on Kağitçibaşı’s (2005) work on family models of interdependence while highlighting the impact on the decision of young men to continue their studies at tertiary level.

In the third section of the chapter, the findings are discussed within the features of the traditional biographical master narrative of patriarchal practices while integrating literature and theories from a variety of academic fields, as encouraged by Hammack and colleagues (Hammack, 2008; Hammack, 2010; Hammack, 2011; Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; Hammack & Toolis, 2015).

Having previously focused on school to work transitions, more recent development research in the MENA region has advocated the importance of looking at youth transitions from school to work and family formation (see Dhillon & Yousef, 2009). Prevalent is the conclusion that the high cost of marriage is causing delayed marriages, which in turn impacts social patterns

and norms (Singerman, 2007; Salehi-Isfahani & Dhillon, 2008; Dhillon & Yousef, 2009). While this may accurately reflect the situation in many countries in the Middle East, interview responses indicate that rather than delaying marriage, many young men in the UAE are delaying or forgoing higher education in order to find a job, prepare themselves financially and marry 'on time', intimating the importance of the biographical master narrative.

In part four of the chapter, deviations from the master narrative are identified highlighting the effect on young men's participation in higher education. In part five, changes to the traditional master narrative are outlined. Linking the socioeconomic history of the UAE with sociocultural patterns of relatedness and interdependence, I outline the consequential impact on the perceived value of higher education.

As is traditional with grounded theory studies, the fundamental question on embarking on this research was "what is happening here?" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 87); Why do the young men who persevere and complete their high school, not continue their studies at tertiary level in the UAE? The research questions which emerged during the research process are re-stated below. The Results chapter focused on research question 1, outlining the reasons young men gave regarding their decisions to study at tertiary level. This chapter considers their responses according to the broader sociocultural environment outlined by other Emirati participants in Stage 2, using master narratives to frame the discussion. In the final part of this chapter, a case is presented for using master narratives to open up the discussion on masculinities and research the missing men in other contexts.

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- i. What are the reasons given by male Emiratis of university age in the case study for not continuing their studies at tertiary level?
 - ii. What further understanding can other Emiratis in the case study provide as to the reasons young men do not continue their studies?
 - iii. What theory can be generated from the RQ1 and RQ2 findings?
 - iv. What are the implications of RQ3 for researching the phenomena of the “missing men” in higher education in other contexts?

As the master narrative model is proposed as a way to connect processes operating at an individual and a structural level, I employ the term “mindset” as a way to conceive of the outcome of these converging processes. Drawing parallels between mindset and identity is not new, having already been linked in the field of positive psychology (e.g. French, 2016). With an existing body of knowledge on collective mindsets (e.g. Chang & Cheng, 2015; French, 2016; Yolles & Fink, 2013), there is also a theoretical basis for adopting the term to consider the “collective self”.

6.2 How the theoretical perspective of master narratives emerged from the findings

There were four main ways in which the master narrative framework presented itself during the data analysis as a useful way to consider the

findings. Firstly, the theme of “to build my life”, which emerged in Stage 1 and Stage 2 and was added as an explicit line of enquiry in Stage 3, resonated with the theoretical concept of developing an identity in adolescence and young adulthood. Thus, the metaphorical applicability and temporal pertinence pointed towards an identity theory. Secondly, In line with Erikson’s initial thesis, participants’ comments suggested a need to attend to the sociocultural environment in which young men were making their higher educational choices. To exemplify, throughout the research there was an allusion to the collective nature of the information participants were sharing, either implicitly through the use of the plural first-person pronouns “we” and “our” or explicitly stated:

When our moustache and beard start coming, we start feeling that's enough, we have to take care of now for the family. (Abdulla)

As we heard about the human being after 18, they need to work.
(interviewee 3G)

We all agree that marriage is an important thing to do. (interviewee 3O)

So, *we know* this. *All locals* know this. (Humaid)

When combined, recurring statements such as those above started to depict part of the Emirati cultural life script, or biographical master narrative, indicating the cultural expectation of young men to start taking responsibility for the family, work, and marry. These three themes were dominant throughout much of the data and were almost ubiquitous, in line with the first

of McLean and Syed's (2015) five principles of master narratives previously outlined in the Contextualisation chapter. Thus, the three themes pervade this chapter set within the framework of the traditional biographical narrative to highlight the impact on young men continuing their post-secondary studies. The recurring use of plural pronouns also alludes to the concept of a collective self rather than focusing on the individual, thus hinting to the greater relevance of the theoretical basis of Hammack and colleagues' framework. Akin to the collective trait of family honour, *a'ardth*, outlined in the Contextualisation chapter in research by Abokhodair et al. (2017), participants' accounts depicted the aggregate significance that an individual's life events such as a job title and choosing a degree major have for conveying his or her family's reputation. Exemplifying this theme, the significance of getting married and hosting a wedding is discussed in detail in the third part of this chapter concerned with the biographical master narrative. Comments by participants extend the need for relatedness beyond the family unit to wider Emirati society. They indicate the importance of status and image, as well as finances, which was described as the quintessential quality of a prospective groom by one of the female focus groups.

Thirdly, although not employing the model, the language used by several of the scholars in all three stages of the literature review was congruent with the concept of master narratives, such as "prevailing cultural norms and values" (Demuth & Keller, 2011, p. 5), "advancing societal norms" (Arthur et al., 2019, p. 523), and references to "discourses" (Archer, 2001; Archer et al., 2001; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, Jackson & Dempster, 2009; Warin &

Dempster, 2005) as well as addressing “identity” (Abokhodair et al., 2017; Abokhodair & Vieweg, 2016; Abudi, 2011; Arthur et al., 2019; Jackson & Warin, 2000; Lundberg, 2020; Maisel, 2018; Wanucha, 2018; Warin & Dempster, 2005). As outlined in the Theoretical Framework chapter, master narratives provide a framework to integrate literature from a variety of academic fields, which was a challenge in this thesis. By employing master narratives to frame the discussion, I exemplify how they can provide a valuable theoretical perspective to analyse a societal issue such as the missing men in education, shifting the focus from “identity” per se. This proposition aligns more with Hammack and Pilecki’s (2012) use of master narratives in exploring political problems, rather than maintaining an exclusive focus on identity.

Finally, it became apparent when analysing the data that patriarchy significantly influences the individual processes and structural factors of the narratives. Thereby the framework employed needed to allow for consideration of a patriarchal lens. While there have been calls to “un-dress” patriarchy in order to uncover underlying drivers of gender equality (Edström et al., 2014), there have also been challenges with resurrecting it as a theoretical tool (Hunnicut, 2009). I contend that the master narrative framework is a suitable tool as, having already been employed to look at gendered identity development, it places emphasis on “understanding the individual psychological processes so central to development, as embedded within *socio-cultural systems that include power and hierarchy* [emphasis added]” (McLean et al., 2019, pp. 124-125); power and hierarchy provide the

basis for most discussions of patriarchy. The framework also provides an opportunity to open up discussions on masculinities, particularly hegemonic masculinity which was originally formulated to “conceptualize how patriarchal relations are legitimated throughout society” (Messerschmidt, 2012, p. 63), by allowing further connections to be drawn between different academic fields. Furthermore, by incorporating a fourth “individual” level, master narratives add an extra layer of dimensionality to Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) local, regional and global framework of hegemonic masculinity, encouraging a deeper analysis on the interplay of processes. Additionally, I contend that by framing the master narrative in terms of autonomy, relatedness, and security, greater insight can be gained into the motivations behind these young men’s educational choices and behaviour.

The following section discusses the patterns of interdependence described by participants while drawing on the literature of basic psychological needs within the framework of the master narrative model to outline the impact on young men’s higher educational choices

6.3 Autonomy and Relatedness: driving master narratives

While autonomy and relatedness comprise two of the three basic psychological needs that Deci and Ryan (2000) maintain require fulfilling for growth, personality integration, and well-being, each are sometimes perceived as being in opposition to the other when considered in terms of culture.

Although Deci and Ryan contend that both needs must be satisfied, autonomy

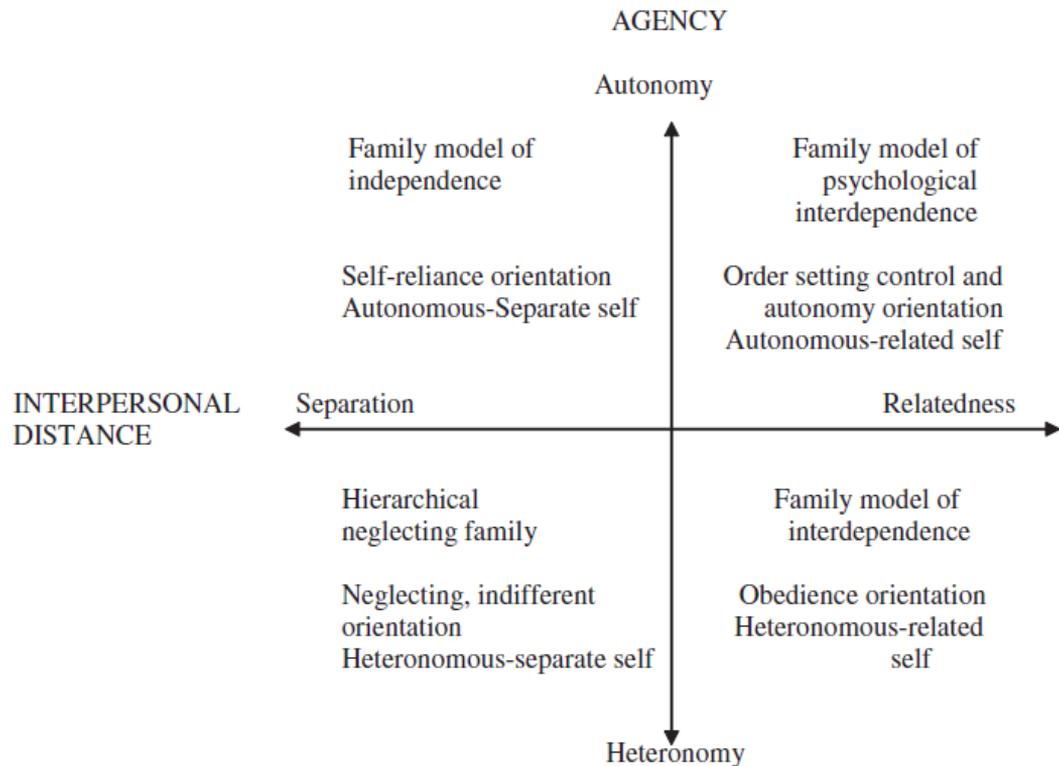
is generally associated with the independence and separateness of individualistic societies, while relatedness is affiliated with the interdependency of collectivist cultures (Kağitçibaşı, 2005; Kağitçibaşı & Yalin, 2015). Thus, Humaid's succinct summarisation of "dependency and independency" which provided a structure to the findings in Part 2 of the Results chapter initially appears to present a paradox which is discussed here. Turning to independency first, similar findings in research on the perceptions of transitioning to adulthood in various cultural contexts have led scholars such as Arnett (2003) to surmise, akin to Erikson's (1950/1962) work, that "there appears to be a consensus among emerging adults across ethnic groups that becoming independent from parents and learning to stand alone as a self-sufficient person is an immutable requirement for adult status", thus reflecting autonomy (p. 70). As mentioned in the Contextualisation chapter, this sentiment was also echoed in Russell et al.'s (2005) research on Emirati male and female high school students wherein participants rated being independent, being able to do things for themselves, and being confident and clear about their aims in life to be very important for successfully transitioning to adulthood. However, while the aspiration to become independent seems to be similar across cultures, the underlying motivation differs. In their study on the perceptions of emerging adulthood among Chinese college students, Nelson et al. (2004) noted that while the criteria "becoming financially independent from parents" was marked similarly, there was a stark difference in the importance of being "capable of supporting parents financially" between their results in China, and the white American respondents in Arnett's study; in Arnett's study, 29% of the participants

ranked the item as a requisite of adult status, compared to 89% of Nelson et al.'s Chinese sample. Both studies attribute the difference between the ethnic groups to the individualistic and collectivist structure of the societies respectively. The results from this study reflect Nelson et al.'s (2004) findings as, in explaining their motivations for independence, interviewees outlined reasons concerned with relatedness including a present need or future aspiration to support their families.

In her work on the self and family, Kağıtçıbaşı (2005) seeks to review the conceptual polarity of autonomy and relatedness often associated with individualism and collectivism societies. Instead, she presents an orthogonal model with Agency (autonomy-heteronomy) on one axis and Interpersonal Distance (separation-relatedness) on the other as outlined in Figure 3 (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005, p. 412). Using the model, Kağıtçıbaşı draws a distinction between material dependence and psychological dependence identifying three prototypical family interaction patterns. The first she characterises as the "traditional family" in which generations are materially and emotionally interdependent, called the "family model of interdependence". The second, Kağıtçıbaşı (2005) labels the "individualistic model" which is based on material and psychological independence, normally associated with Western, individualistic cultures. She says that the third model is a "dialectical synthesis of these two, involving material independence but psychological interdependence between generations" (p. 411).

Figure 3

Agency, Interpersonal Distance, and the Types of Selves and Families



Source: Kağıtçıbaşı (2005, p. 412)

In explaining that they sought to become financially independent to support their families, most of the interviewees alluded to a situation aligning with the first model which is typically associated with collectivist cultures. Kağıtçıbaşı (2005) explains that the “obedience” orientation is the prevalent parenting style in these environments as encouraging independence, and thus the risk of a child prioritising their own self-interests and leaving the family, is undesirable. Although Keller (2012) argues that heteronomy, the end of the Agency axis associated with obedience orientation, is the “expression of a communal identity” rather than “unhealthy adoption of other’s wishes and

intents” (p. 14), examples of both were evident in the responses of some interviewees. One interviewee spoke of two of his friends, explaining that one was “*forced* by his family to go [work in] the police” and another “his parents forced him to go for studying Business” (interviewee 1E). Thus, in guiding their offspring, parents can be seen to have a positive and negative effect on higher education enrolment. However, when enforced, the positive effect may not be longstanding if young men do not have the same motivation to continue their studies at tertiary level. This was discussed in both the male and female focus groups, exemplified by Fatema’s comments below:

I will give you an example of one of the students. He withdrew ...
When I saw him, I was surprised, why you did this for yourself? He said “[my family] forced me. I have to follow them but it's not my [preferred] Major. What can I do?”. So... sometimes still the families force them to study specific Major... When they are forced, after a while if they don't like it, you will find out that they are not studying anymore. (Fatema)

In contrast, other interviewees described motivations more akin to an “expression of a communal identity” (Keller, 2012), exemplified by the comment below:

Interpreter: He says good for people to be educated... for themselves, and the country.... [His parents] say [getting a degree] is important for myself and them. That’s why. Everyone in our family should have a degree. (interviewee 3C)

The two examples above suggest that both forms of heteronomy exist, with the first perhaps representing the extreme end of the Agency axis of autonomy-heteronomy presented by Kağıtçıbaşı (2005), while interviewee 3C above outlined having a greater degree of autonomy. Interviewee 3C's account indicates the importance in having more freedom of choice as he had originally started studying Business at an English-medium higher education institute, but had since moved to an Arabic-medium university to study Media. Interviewee 1E, who had stated that one of his friends had been forced to study a specific major, and another had been forced to work, described having a much greater sense of autonomy explaining that his family let him choose his own path in deciding whether or not to continue his studies at tertiary level:

[My father] said choose what you want. So because it's my life and because I will build this, my life for the future. (interviewee 1E)

This level of autonomy was also evident in the responses of several other interviewees such as 3L who said:

My parents give me a lot of choices. They just told me, where do you want to join, where you believe that your hopes will be achieved, you join wherever you want. (interviewee 3L)

In both accounts having a greater degree of autonomy had positively influenced the post-secondary education choices of these two young men. Although originally planning to work with the police and study at the same time, interviewee 1E was continuing his studies to diploma-level at a

government vocational institute wherein he reported being guaranteed a job with ADNOC on completion. Interviewee 3L said he planned to apply to a private university once he finished National Service.

This form of parenting which promotes increased autonomy is said to be indicative of the third family model called the “model of psychological interdependence” (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005; Kağıtçıbaşı & Yalin, 2015). Increasing affluence of a society and alternative resources for old-age security such as a social welfare and pension system are said to reduce material interdependence in families as parents are no longer reliant on their offspring for financial security and survival (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005). The situation in the UAE may be seen to reflect this thesis as oil wealth distributed among the local population in the form of generous grants and subsidies has significantly improved the living conditions of citizens (De Bel-Air et al., 2018), as well as pension and retirement benefits (u.ae, 2020). Another reason put forward is that as workplace specialisation increases in society, skills such as decision-making become an asset, and thus parents may seek to foster increased autonomy in their children (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005). This situation can also be seen in the UAE wherein the government is heavily promoting innovation, entrepreneurship, and critical thinking as the country seeks to move to a knowledge society. Thus, the improved socioeconomic situation of citizens and national narrative promoting innovation and entrepreneurship are favourable conditions for transitioning to a family model of reduced material interdependence, and increased promotion of autonomy. However, Kağıtçıbaşı (2005) emphasises that “relatedness continues to be valued, given

the enduring influence of the culture of relatedness” (p. 412). From participant comments throughout the research it was clear that families remain highly interdependent psychologically in the UAE, reflecting research from the Arab world in general. In exemplification, Aisha said “we cannot live without them” and Rashed explained:

In different countries when you are 18, that's it. You go out of the house, you go depend on yourself. You come at Christmas, you come at Thanksgiving. No, for us here, family is always important. (Rashed)

In some cases, this continuing psychological interdependence initially presented as material interdependence. For example, interviewee 1M said he had withdrawn from his studies in order to look for a job and support the family by driving his sister to college. When asked for the reason, he said “for myself” rather than a need to support the family financially. He further reported that both his father and uncle had advised him to continue his studies, contrary to his chosen course of action. As way of explanation, male participants in Stage 2 described how the feeling of young men needing to support the family usually came from within, outlined in the Results chapter. Thus, interviewee 1M’s case exemplifies that, while perhaps material interdependence between generations may be reduced, the prevailing patriarchal system and psychological interdependence may mean that some young men still feel the need to become self-reliant and “prepare himself for the responsibilities” (Abdulla) in order to be able to support the family if needed; “Because they feel that, in our culture, we feel that we have to pay back for our parents” (Abdulla). This indicates the ingrained nature of

hegemonic masculinity wherein many young men strive to fulfil societal expectations and meet their responsibilities.

These results provide new insight to the participant responses in Ridge, Kippels and Chung's (2017) study on the non-persistence of male high school students in which they concluded that socioeconomic factors were a prevailing cause. Out of the three items reported in their research, only the first can be seen to directly relate to socioeconomic reasons, the other two may actually be sociocultural: 11% of participants stated that they could not afford to continue with their secondary education; 55.7% reported choosing to support their family over studying, and 48.3% said they preferred to work and earn their own money. While the reason for the latter two items may be that participants preferred not to discuss having difficulties in family finances, results from this study suggest that sociocultural conditions rather than socioeconomic may be the prevailing factor affecting higher education participation for many young men.

6.4 Security: the underlying foundation of human needs

As McLean and Syed (2015) and Hammack and colleagues' models highlight the manner in which master narratives impact agency and constrain individuals, so male participants in Stage 2 indicated that with the responsibility of being the "provider", men were not afforded the same security in the family as women. The three examples from separate interviews below highlight the importance of young men gaining employment and becoming

financially secure in order to meet their responsibilities and advance their lives beyond adolescence:

The girls always feel that she is *part* of their family. She's part [of the family] to be [a] student. She's still young and she [can] still study.

Boys, no. It's like he should prepare himself for the responsibilities.

(Abdulla)

Without job, he will not get married. For sure he will not. No one will accept [him]. (Salem)

[The girls] have the security. Males, they don't have the security. If you don't have that amount of money, you will never get married.

(Humaid)

Abdulla's comment in particular resonates with Mazon's (2003) work on gender role differences in German universities wherein "manhood" is considered as gaining independence whereas maturity for women is perceived as "moving from one family into another through marriage and child-bearing" (Leathwood & Read, 2008, p. 96). While Emirati women (Jenns, 2019) and Qatari women (James-Hawkins et al., 2017) are reported to pursue higher education to secure their future, most of the young men in this study described securing themselves as becoming financially independent in order to support their families and get married, aligning with the biographical master narrative. This is exemplified in the comment by interviewee 3D; "He said that work is **everything**. I will secure my life. I will

secure my family. I will secure everything that I have... he will provide everything that they want with the money”.

While Vansteenkiste et al. (2020) argue that ‘security’ is not a basic human need akin to autonomy, relatedness and competence, but a symptom of a lack thereof, other scholars have disagreed (e.g. López-Rodríguez & Hidalgo, 2014; Sheldon et al., 2001). In seeking to identify which psychological needs are most fundamental, Sheldon et al. (2001) expanded on Deci and Ryan’s (2000) self-determination theory to include seven other needs in their cross-cultural studies across varying timeframes. While autonomy, relatedness and competence were consistently among the top four needs identified by participants in the United States sample and South Korean sample when describing “satisfying events”, lack of security was found to be an important predictor when relaying “unsatisfying events”. Sheldon et al. (2001) concluded that “security may also be a need, which becomes salient in times of privation” (2001, p. 337). Although saying that more research is needed to confirm their model, they suggest conceiving of the needs in a two-tier hierarchy wherein autonomy and relatedness occupy the higher “enhancement” level and security occupies the lower “deficiency” level, thus representing the strength of each’s affiliation with satisfying and unsatisfying events respectively. Competence and self-esteem, they argue, are influential at both levels. Conceiving of needs in this tiered manner revisits Maslow’s (1943) seminal hierarchal model in which he proposed that the basic needs of safety (security) and physiological needs of food, water, sleep, and reproduction provide the foundation on which other needs in the hierarchy

rest. In continuing Sheldon et al.'s (2001) thesis, López-Rodríguez and Hidalgo (2014) argue that rather than being a sub-component of autonomy, relatedness, and competence; 'security' meets all of the criteria outlined by Deci and Ryan (2000) to be defined as a basic need in its own right. Arguing that security is needed for optimal functioning, they maintain that the lack thereof may result in poor health and well-being. In summarising findings from Sheldon et al. (2001), López-Rodríguez and Hidalgo (2014) conclude that:

The negative consequences of insecurity, which hinder psychological (and physiological) well-being and growth, not only determine its inclusion among the basic needs, but also prioritize it... We cannot focus on relatedness, competence and autonomy as the needs showing a positive relation with growth and well-being without taking into account what hinders their fulfillment, i.e. insecurity. (p. 49)

This proposed relationship between security and basic psychological needs is supported in other work such as Otto et al.'s (2020) research on small business owners in Germany. In their model on work-psychological stress for small business owners, Otto et al. position insecurity and autonomy at opposite ends of a spectrum of well-being. The common theme in the models' by Maslow (1943), Sheldon et al. (2001), and Otto et al. (2020) is the tiered relationship wherein security provides the foundation on which the other basic psychological needs rest. Based on this premise, the need for security may only become apparent when it is absent such as in times of privation (Sheldon et al., 2001) or in times of uncertainty, such as COVID-19 pandemic.

The global health crisis has prompted increased interest in the relationship between uncertainty and psychological needs, such as a study by Vermote et al. (2021) who surveyed 5118 people in Belgium during lockdown. Although not categorising it as a “need” in the same way as autonomy, relatedness and competence, in recognition of the potential importance that security may play, Vermote et al. (2021) specify it when recommending that psychological theories like Basic Psychological Need Theory should consider studying other needs in order to evolve. Findings from this study lend support to these theorists, and build on Demuth and Keller’s (2011) thesis; male participants in Stage 2 explicitly stated striving for security as a motivator for prioritising work over studying, whether to gain financial independence to support the family, or secure a marriage proposal. These aspirations can be seen to exemplify both autonomy and relatedness, and were repeatedly relayed by interviewees in Stage 1 and Stage 3. However, they both appear to be founded on “security”, in this case financial circumstances, in order to achieve the desired state of autonomy and relatedness, thereby lending support to Sheldon et al.’s (2001) two-tier model. López-Rodríguez and Hidalgo (2014) advocate that the need for security is higher in societies which are less individualistic, such as egalitarian, hierarchal and fatalist; as risk taking, associated with uncertainty, is perceived to be less desirable. Thus, according to their theory, security may be more important in a hierarchal collectivist culture such as the UAE.

Earlier, I defined “security” in terms of physical and social survival achieved through social cohesion. Due to the importance placed on marriage in the

biographical master narrative for social cohesion in the UAE, it is discussed in detail in the following section.

6.5 Biographical Master Narrative: the importance of securing a job for marriage

Also located at the foundational level of Maslow's (1943) model of human needs, marriage and family formation (reproduction) are said to be critical for full social inclusion in Middle Eastern societies (De Bel Air et al., 2018; Dhillon & Yousef, 2009; Puschmann & Matthijs, 2015). Thus, marriage can be seen to epitomize both autonomy and relatedness. The timeline of the biographical narrative became noticeable during the male focus group discussion as participants talked about the importance of getting married and having a family young, ideally in their mid-twenties. Asking participants in Stage 3 of the research for the ideal age to marry confirmed the ubiquity of this narrative. These results support previous findings in Ashour's (2020) survey of Emirati undergraduates in which 89% of male respondents and 91% of females agreed with the statement "Families believe that males should marry early and establish their own families". Sixty-nine per cent of the male respondents also agreed with the statement "Early marriage of males affect males' tendency to complete their education". Unlike some countries in the MENA region where marriage costs may be shared between the groom, bride and the respective families such as Egypt (Singerman, 2007), all marriage costs in the UAE are traditionally borne by the prospective groom. The lavish modern-

day celebrations are in stark contrast to weddings of the pre-oil era, described by older Emirati women as being a cooperative occasion between extended families who usually lived close to the subsistence level (Bristol-Rhys, 2007). Local media in the UAE largely reports that the rising cost of weddings is a result of increased opulent spending and consumerism since the discovery of oil. Lending support to this thesis, Arthur et al. (2019) reported in their grounded theory study on materialism among Emiratis that:

Omnipresent materialistic displays are evolving the habitus of UAE nationals. Dispositions and sensibilities dictating what is tasteful, attractive and desirable are being recast and are placing greater value on the luxurious, prestigious and expensive ... These advancing societal norms are developing a consumer society wherein cultural and economic capital are constantly being judged through conspicuous consumption. (p. 523)

In her study on marriage and money in the UAE, Bristol-Rhys (2007) directly draws parallels with the significance of a wedding and conspicuous consumption, outlining the importance for conveying a family's status and social standing. Comments by the male focus group support these studies explaining how the groom would be judged by how extravagant the wedding was:

Based on society, if you do a *normal* night, they will say 'see they gave their daughter to someone who is...' {facial expression and gesture to

show disapproval}... they will say, 'what is this? This is ugly. He didn't spend. Those are poor people'. (Humaid)

The increase in marriage costs has the effect of acting as a “screening device” of a groom's socio-economic status and financial means (Salehi-Isfahani & Dhillon, 2008). The consequence thereof is that young men need to save for longer in order to afford to get married, estimated from two to ten years by the interviewees in this study. Prioritising work rather than “wasting time” on education was perceived by participants as the most efficient way to achieve the desired state of relatedness through marriage. However, the opposite is true for women in Emirati society who have been reported as pursuing higher education for reasons such as personal growth and fulfilment (Sim, 2020) and as security in case of unsuccessful marriage (Abdulla, 2007; Abdulla & Ridge, 2011; Ashour, 2020; Lauglo & Liu, 2018). These distinct differences in gender marriage patterns underline the strength of the patriarchal system in the UAE, delineating the potential repercussion on men's participation in higher education.

However, deviations from the biographical narrative were evident in two interviewees' responses. When asked about marriage, interviewee 3K said he had not thought about it, and might marry when he was aged around 40. Interviewee 3O stated emphatically that he was “not planning to get married after 40 even!”. He then added, “Actually I want to find the love of my life” which diverges from the traditional practice of female family members finding a suitable bride. When questioned further, he spoke of intergenerational differences and changes to consanguineous marriage patterns. His

comments allude to some of the broader sociocultural changes that are occurring in the UAE. However, marriage remains a fundamental institution of Emirati society, and the only legitimate means to meet society's reproductive needs. Early marriage maintains the values and culture of Emirati society, as exemplified by Abdulla's comment below when talking about a friend:

[His father] told him, "I want you to get married early, because I don't want you to go to Dubai and play and you know break the culture, and go with girlfriends and like this. Just I want you to control yourself".

(Abdulla)

In the following section, further deviations of young men from the traditional patriarchal master narrative and the consequential impact on their participation in higher education are discussed.

6.6 Deviating from the Master Narrative

While the main reasons given for young men prioritising work over continuing their studies at tertiary level were to rely on themselves, to support their families (present or anticipated future need), and to save for marriage, not all young men appeared to be following the same narrative "building their lives" in order to prepare themselves for their responsibilities. Referring to her experience of dealing with male students at tertiary level, in one of the female focus groups Muna said:

So we were speaking about those who *need* to support their *families*, and there is the opposite story: those who are actually very much dependent on their families. They have all the financial resources, their parents spoil them. I've seen a lot of students who would get cars every year, and would travel, always traveling, and they're all over the place. So these students to me are even more of an issue. They are more about, sorry to say that, but they're more of a bad apples. They spoil their friends. (Muna)

In a follow-up interview, Muna explained:

[The bad apples] don't have a goal of *getting* a good job because they don't need the money because their families are already wealthy enough. They have everything they want right here, right now when they are students. So they are *not* aspiring to *become* more, let's say because they *are* more. They already have what they want now. So, because of this attitude, they couldn't care less about studying. Some of them come to college because it's the thing to do, basically. It's a requirement by the society. Because if you graduate with a high school diploma, and you stay like so, there is sort of, it's not a good look in society you know, when you're less than a university degree ...

Becoming friends with those [bad apples] can somehow affect those who *came* with the objective of being enthusiastic enough to *become* an engineer to do this, to do that. Even though they might be wealthy enough just like the other guys. However, it's that sense of wanting to achieve something. They kind of *lose* it, being affected by those, as we

call them, bad apples. They kind of inject the feeling of 'you have everything. Why do you work hard? Just sleep, play, you don't need to study hard, you can cheat'.... So, this is the kind of attitude keeps growing, and so the student loses the sense of responsibility. They take everything for granted. Again, they don't work hard for things because they already have it. And they don't see that in the near future they're going to have to ... Because I mean, they have to understand that their parents are not going to be there for them forever.

In contrast to the youth today, Muna continued to explain that if she had wanted a "fancy" item such as a PlayStation when she was younger, she would have had to work hard for the academic year and achieve high grades in order to receive it. In a separate interview, Abdulla described a similar situation in which he would receive a new game for his Nintendo Famicom games console, worth about 50 dirhams (£10), at the end of the academic year if he had applied himself to his studies. He further explained that it was part of a "reward and punishment" system. When he failed the first grade of secondary school, instead of receiving a reward, he had to clean out the cow enclosure on his family farm every morning. Both Muna and Abdulla explained that these practices instilled a sense of responsibility in them and working to achieve a goal. They explained that the situation was different for the youth today who "want everything immediately" (Abdulla). Reflecting comments made in the other female focus group on a similar topic, discussed in section 6.7 below, Muna drew on her personal experience saying that she believed parents were well-intentioned and "don't want their children to go

through the same hardships. That's why they give them everything, they spoon-feed them everything; 'I suffered to get this, you don't have to suffer to get it as well' ". The dramatic change in socioeconomic status of citizens since the discovery of oil has enabled many parents to provide a comfortable lifestyle to their offspring. The changes also explain the reduced intergenerational material dependence outlined at the beginning of the chapter. However, both Muna and Abdulla noted how these practices often resulted in a lack of responsibility in young people, affecting their motivation to study. Exemplifying this, interviewee 1E spoke of having friends who "feel good" doing nothing: neither working nor studying. He explained they were under no pressure to work from their family and still received an allowance from their father. The two interviewees mentioned in the Results chapter as "walking around" and "enjoying the moment" are discussed in more depth, detailing their deviations from the hegemonic masculinity master narrative of becoming financially independent and preparing themselves for their future responsibilities.

Classified as a "no show" student, interviewee 3O had decided to discontinue his studies four months previously without notifying the higher education institute at which he had completed two years of a bachelor's degree. Hoping to be accepted into the police academy in four months' time, interviewee 3O said that he was "enjoying life at the moment [going] from cafe to the café, wasting life, watching movies". His demeanour was relaxed and jovial, laughing throughout the interview. He was quite frank about his lack of motivation for studying, explaining that he had been "careless" as his goal

was to become a police officer rather than study. He explained that the reason he had enrolled in higher education was to “waste time in a good way” after having submitted his application to the police force too late. Interviewee 3O is the same participant previously outlined as not planning to marry until age 40, unless he finds “the love of his life”. Thus, he can be seen to be deviating from the biographical master narrative in two important ways.

Interviewee 1J described how after withdrawing from college he had spent two years “walking around”, spending time with friends in cafés before starting work in the police force. Asked why he did not start work directly after withdrawing, he said “I don't know. I didn't think about this before”. Initially he said that he had withdrawn from tertiary education as he found it boring and he hated studying. However, later in the interview, he stated that he had withdrawn because “I lose my money” on petrol travelling to college. He explained that if he had been sponsored to study, a practice that used to be commonplace, “then maybe I will like studying” and “it will be easy”.

Interviewee 1J's remarks perhaps reflect comments made in the male and female focus group regarding the daily expenses some students face in attending college, despite there being no tuition fees. Explaining from a student's point of view, Aisha said:

And this is a daily struggle... I have to think about, from where I get money to go to the college? And how I will eat? From where I will bring my food? How I'll go back home? From where I will get my laptop?
(Aisha)

The male focus group also discussed the costs students faced when going to college while not working:

No one can live in the UAE without a car. Don't tell me I will ride a bicycle in *June* at 2 p.m., no way! And even to go for taxis and those things, it's expensive. You need to *work*. If you don't have money, how you will come to *free* college, let's say. You need to eat. You will need to print. You will need to go *there* with the guys. (Humaid)

While some young people may be faced with financial difficulties in attending tertiary education, interviewee 1J's actions and words appear to be contradictory as he reports being motivated by money (sponsorship) but does not seek salaried employment for two years after withdrawing. Interviewee 1J's deviation from the narrative was clear as he explained that everyone in his family advised him to continue his studies and he had many family members and friends who had graduated or were currently studying. When asked about the advice he would give his future children, interviewee 1J said:

The most important thing in the life, is studying. [My future children] all will be studying to the bachelor's [level]. Then if he want to complete to the master's it's no problem, but he must get the bachelor's degree.

In explanation for why the advice for his future children differed from the path he had taken, Interviewee 1J said:

Interpreter: They are different. They have to continue, I don't *have* to...
He said it's by my mind, if I would like to study or no. But my kids, I will
force them to study.

Interviewee 1J's comment above perhaps suggest that he was provided relative autonomy to choose his own path. As he had been neither working nor studying for two years, it appears that he was not under pressure to contribute to the family financially, similar to the friends described by interviewee 1E. This is tentatively supported by a comment made by interviewee 1J's father who, when initially contacted and asked for the interviewee's phone number, said he was "curious" about his son. This situation appears to reflect Kağıtçıbaşı's (2005) family model of psychological interdependence wherein autonomy is tolerated or indeed fostered by parents and material interdependence is reduced. However, by saying that he would force his children to study, perhaps interviewee 1J is indicating that he struggled with the extent of autonomy he was afforded.

As Kağıtçıbaşı (2005) contends that material independence arises in societies of increased affluence, the following section outlines the changes in Emirati society since the discovery of oil. Drawing links between socioeconomic conditions and sociocultural patterns, I outline how the traditional master narrative is changing. This has several ramifications which include evolving perceptions of wealth, status and relatedness, increased societal pressure on some young men in seeking to belong, and undermining the value of higher education.

6.7 Changing Narrative: the cost of relatedness

As outlined in the Contextualisation chapter, citizens of the UAE have benefitted from significant improvements in healthcare, education and a generous social security system provided by the rentier state since the discovery of oil. However, some older Emiratis in Lancaster and Lancaster's (2011) narrative work on changes in the UAE, reported feeling devalued as they moved from actively participating in a moral economy founded on personal reputation and social networks to a modern economy based on money. They lamented how life had been "turned upside down" that money had become the only means of personal valuation, rather than strength of character and behaviour:

People valued each other from what each person did, their behaviour, their character. Now, nobody has any way of valuing anyone except through money, and everyone wants more and more money.

(Lancaster & Lancaster, 2011, pp. 1-2)

While the comments above may not necessarily be representative of the Emirati population, the male focus group who had attended secondary school at the beginning of the twenty-first century expressed similar sentiments regarding the increased importance placed on socioeconomic status. They recalled how they had not differentiated between their peers at school, unlike the youth today:

Our groups before, there was a very big gap between the people *socially*, and even economically. So high income people with low

income people, and *nothing*, there's nothing even to discuss. Like not even to compete about. (Rashed)

[Our generation] didn't think about [if] he's from a rich family, poor family, his car, his clothes. We didn't care! It wasn't something that we really thought about, at all. Now, it's one of the *main* things. (Humaid)

Both of the female focus groups also spoke nostalgically about how life in the past was simpler and less materially-oriented, in contrast to the lives of the youth today. The women in one of the groups reminisced about the joy of having a new dress to celebrate Eid when they were young:

One dress, and I was happy. At the end of the day I have to wash it because the next day I am so happy I want to wear it again. It was a simple life. It changed. Now, [young people] are thinking how many times they will change [their outfit] in one day. (Fatema)

The same female focus group went on to describe how life in the present day was a "luxury life", surrounded by material aspects and validated through social media. They described how well-meaning parents, not wanting their children to forgo anything, supplied their children with luxury items such as new phones and video games while they went without:

Fatema: We will not buy for ourselves, we will buy for [our children] because we think that [not having the items] hurts them. They will not go out with their friends because they want something ... I don't want to

buy all these nice luxury things [for myself]. But for my kids, it's fine, let them.

Zainab: This is the truth you know. I have the oldest phone in the home. All my kids, they have the updated version.

Fatema and Zainab explained that parents bought their children what they wanted because “we want them to be like their friends”; they did not want their children to feel deprived when comparing themselves to their peers. They recognised that this habit acculturated their children to a “luxury life”, unlike the upbringing they had in which they were often told by parents “no we don't have money this month... just delay or forget about it” (Fatema).

Inadvertently by buying everything their children ask for, parents are creating a culture which normalizes conceding to the social pressure of having the latest technology and most fashionable products in order to be accepted.

When common practice, these actions form a master narrative which McLean et al. (2019, p. 117) explain acts as “template for the kinds of experiences one should be having, and how to interpret them”; thus one should have the latest mobile phone in order to be accepted amongst one's peers. Early acculturation to this mindset is suggested by Fatema's comment that her children would rather not socialise than be seen without, equating materialism to acceptance and relatedness.

Similar practices were reported by male and female Emirati participants in Arthur et al.'s (2019) grounded theory study on materialism in the UAE wherein parents were described as often “spoiling” their children with material

possessions. Within the collectivistic Emirati culture, Arthur et al. found that there was a great deal of status competition through materialistic behaviour leading to a “preoccupation with the acquisition of luxury goods” (p. 516). In further elaboration of the materialistic behaviours found among their sample of Emiratis, Arthur et al. differentiate between “status consumption” and “conspicuous consumption”. They explain that:

status consumption refers to the consumption of products to provide status to oneself through the development of a prestigious identity, whereas conspicuous consumption is characterised by overt consumption driven by a desire to enhance one’s status in comparison to others. (Arthur et al., 2019, p. 517)

The female focus group’s example of purchasing mobile phones “to be like their friends” can be seen to exemplify conspicuous consumption, with the need for relatedness being the underlying motivation. Arthur et al. (2019) suggest that in the UAE materialistic behaviours have merged with traditional values, becoming intertwined with national identity as their participants described them as projecting a “modern, successful and desirable image to the outside world” (p. 519). To exemplify, participants in their study described practices of extravagant gift-giving and providing an over-abundance of food when receiving guests at home, which Arthur et al. (2019) surmise are the traditional values of generosity and hospitality displayed through materialistic means. Although not employing the theoretical framework of narratives, Arthur et al. (2019) describe how the merging of material values with traditional Emirati values “generates materialistic expressions of ostensibly

'good' values" (p. 519), as a master narrative would prescribe. They continue by warning that "materialism can co-opt traditional values within collectivist hierarchical cultures, trapping citizens into following new markers of status and generosity" (p. 527). While some Emiratis in their study noted positive effects of material behaviour such as happiness, satisfaction, prestige and boost to self-esteem, Arthur et al. caution that individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who are unable to fulfil their materialistic desires and thereby enact their national identity may be negatively affected. This sentiment is supported by comments made in the male focus group, discussed below.

Continuing their conversation on socioeconomic differences between young people today, the male focus group participants described the way in which having affluent classmates at school could negatively affect students from less wealthy backgrounds. Humaid and Rashed talked about the common practice at the start of a new school year in which teachers asked students about their summer holiday. They described how some students would be tempted to lie in order to keep up appearances after hearing their peers relay jet-setting tales of visiting foreign countries, yachting, and buying horses:

He will start lying, because he didn't go [anywhere]. So, he will say, okay, we went to there, we did this. So we start creating this in our kids' mind that **you** need to be like others. *You* need to be like *everyone* else. When they reach high school, he don't have the money? He will do his *best* just to be like others. By working [in] the

first job he can get. And then taking a *big* loan and just buy *this* car.
Because they will *judge* you from your car. (Humaid)

In line with the female focus group's conversation on mobile phones, Humaid's comment highlights the relationship between outward measures of wealth and conferring one's right to "belong", reflecting the need for relatedness discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Offering an explanation for Humaid's comment on being judged by one's car, Arthur et al. (2019) maintain that:

As material values are cultivated, society increasingly judges others, as it becomes more extrinsically focused, generating another cycle where materialistic judgment leads to more conspicuous consumption creating further consumption cues, again focusing Emiratis on extrinsic measures of worth. This is particularly pronounced in a collectivist, hierarchical and tribal nation where comparisons are mostly made between other Emiratis, both as individuals and families. (p. 524)

Reflecting Humaid's earlier comment and Arthur et al.'s (2019) study, there are government reports of young people becoming indebted due to luxury spending (UAE National Youth Agenda, n.d.). Car ownership is particularly important as it is said to be a sign of masculinity as well as prestige (Thompson, 2019). The combined effect of actions such as relaying stories of luxury holidays, fabricating tales to hide less wealthy means, and well-intentioned parents buying their children the latest phone serves to from and validate a master narrative in which outward measures of wealth signify "good

values”, thus “trapping citizens into new markers of status and generosity”, as warned by Arthur et al. (2019). Spending beyond one’s means in order to be accepted into the group lends support to the “compulsory nature” of McLean and Syed’s (2015) master narrative model wherein “those whose personal narratives do not align with these master narratives are telling stories that are less valued and less ‘good,’ and are in a more marginalized position in society” (McLean et al., 2018, p. 633). The male focus group explained that even if one did not share the same mentality, there was societal pressure to conform to the prevailing narrative of status, wealth and image:

If you are from a *certain* family, people expect you to *dress* in a certain way, to drive certain cars, to live in a certain way, even if you don't like this. *Yanni*, they reach to a level where if you go to the *normal* cinema, they will be like, “oh you are son of this, and you are in this 30 dirhams cinema?! No, no, you go to the Gold [cinema]!” Just apply this [example] to everything. (Humaid)

Although a “good look in society” to be educated (Muna), participants indicated that for many young men, the strength of the hegemonic masculinity narrative which prioritises the earning of money overrode the impetus for obtaining higher education qualifications. While it is possible to deviate from the master narrative, as outlined in the previous section, one risks “social survival” (McLean, 2019) which may result in a “loss of belonging” (McLean et al., 2018) or relatedness. The importance of social media in fuelling conspicuous consumption, as well as further devaluing the importance of higher education is discussed in the following section.

6.7.1 Social Media: presenting an alternative narrative to higher education

The significance attributed to social media by participants in Stage 2 aligns with Erikson's (1962/1988) theory as, citing the motor engine and motion picture, he stressed the importance of taking into consideration the role that technological advancements play when trying to understand contemporary youth and their transition to adulthood. In looking at the impact of digitalisation on Millennials' identity, Kay (2018) proposes differentiating between the pre- and post-Web 2.0 period of which the latter denotes the emergence and proliferation of social media platforms. This transition timeframe, around 2004 onwards, is pertinent as it relates to the demographic of young men currently of university age. Kay (2018) explains that "Millennials came of age along with the Internet and social media, undertaking identity formation in the shadow of the new reality of social media" (p. 267). This may be of particular relevance in the UAE due to the high rate of mobile penetration, and alternative narratives potentially presented on social media. Referring to creating a self-defining life narrative, McAdams and Guo (2017) posit that "under the aegis of cultural modernity, we are our stories, as much as we are anything else" (p. 193). Although metaphorical, this thesis is perhaps particularly pertinent for younger generations, having taken on a literal sense in the virtual world. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook all offer "story" functions whereby users can share a curated collection of photos, comments, and videos with the world. Participants in Arthur et al.'s (2019) study described the influence of seeing a

life of luxury portrayed on social media by friends and celebrities, with the former being more influential:

(My friends) post pictures to show off an upper-class lifestyle that revolves around wealth and being able to have most expensive and luxurious things. It is kind of tempting and makes me want more than what I have and need just because it's there. (p. 516)

Although more research is needed to determine the effect of social media networks on identity development (Kay, 2018; McLean & Breen, 2015), all of the focus groups emphasised that social media has significantly impacted the mentality of the youth in the UAE. As well as promoting materialistic behaviours, comments included in the Results chapter indicated that social media presents alternative routes to salaried employment such as becoming a YouTuber or social media influencer. This highlights the disruption that is occurring in education nowadays wherein higher education qualifications may not be deemed necessary anymore. Coupled with an environment in which basic education was only made compulsory 50 years ago and a systemic culture of studying is still being established, the disruption may be even more significant. It is possible that the mindset of wanting to become a YouTuber or social media influencer may also be reflective of the new narrative that the U.A.E. government is pushing to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship. Enculturing these values and behaviours is thought to support the country's transition to a knowledge society, whilst also having the effect of reducing the population's reliance on public sector jobs. However, when combined with a desire to "take a shortcut" (Salem) or "get money faster, and easier, quickly"

(Humaid), young people may be inadvertently disinclined to study for four to five years at tertiary level if other income-generating options appear to be readily available. This was the sentiment communicated by interviewee 1M, mentioned in the Results chapter, who had left tertiary education to set up six businesses. However, if resulting in a general trend, this practice may hinder the UAE's aspirations to transition to a knowledge economy, although it would result in reducing the demand on public sector employment.

6.7.2 Perceived Lack of Utility of Higher Education Qualifications

Further devaluation of higher education qualifications occurs when young people have personal experience of knowing someone who has been unable to find work after graduating with a bachelor's degree. Abdulla explained how shared experiences of having family members who have been unable to find work created a collective mistrust of the system, which undermines the utility of undergraduate qualifications:

Because every student here, for sure hundred percent, one of his sisters or brothers in house cannot find a job. So for sure, they will not trust the system when they said: "you will find job, we will give you a hundred percent job". (Abdulla)

Parallels can be drawn between the collective mistrust described by Abdulla and Marks' (2000) research on the lack of participation of working-class males in higher education in Merseyside, the UK. Marks contends that rather than

being perceived as “some sort of concrete value reality”, the rejection of higher education may be “experiential in nature and born as much out of the structural failings of the education system and working-class life in general as it is out of some cultural rejection” (2000, p. 306). In explanation, Marks describes a misalignment between the perceived costs and returns of a market-orientated education system, whereby skilled workers can make a comfortable living without the need for higher education which offers a “vague, and getting vaguer, promise of a well-paid job at the end” (p. 309). Young working-class men in Archer et al.’s (2001) London-based study echoed similar sentiments, describing tertiary-level study as “a high-risk strategy with no certainty of secure employment at the end” (p. 437).

During the interviews it became apparent that when seeking work, many of the young men had only applied to public sector institutions such as the police, military, and immigration. This supports other research in the UAE wherein government institutes or government-owned enterprises remain the preferred employers of Emiratis of university age (Gulf Talent, 2016). It also follows the patterns of a rentier state, outlined in the Contextualisation chapter, in which the public sector has traditionally been the primary employer for the local population. Wanting to join the police force was a common response among participants, as several of the young men reported that the majority of their male relatives were employed therein. Unwittingly, by reducing the job market to the public sector only, unsuccessful applicants are given the impression that employment opportunities are scarce. With a rapidly growing local population and the automatisisation of many government

due to the “digital transformation” that the UAE is currently undergoing, this perception is likely to increase. While encouraging young people to seek alternative pathways to careers, such as through vocational training, the government recognises that there are challenges with this avenue due to a lack of awareness in career opportunities and, perhaps more significantly, perceived sociocultural undesirability of vocational education (UAE National Youth Agenda, n.d.). Thus, as with efforts to change the narrative regarding private sector employment, efforts need to be taken to increase the appeal and improve the perception of vocational education and the ensuing employment as the choice of job has not only individual consequences, but also affects the family’s reputation. While higher education qualifications are likely to become more important as public sector employment diminishes, paradoxically, as young people see relatives who have been unable to find work after gaining their undergraduate degree, they may be disinclined to study, thus exacerbating the situation and creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of unemployment. The potential impact of ‘shared experiences’ is discussed in more depth in the following section on the contribution of “rumours” to master narrative formation.

6.7.3 “Rumours”: contributing to master narratives

While discussing the challenging reality of working and studying at the same time, the male focus group raised the issue of “rumours”, identifying it as “one of the main problems we have here” (Humaid). Interviewees and participants

in Stage 2 outlined how young men made decisions based on word of mouth, as explained by Humaid below:

One of the main problems we have here, is the rumours. You know what I mean? "Go with your high school [certificate] to ADNOC, you will get a salary [equivalent] of something with a master's. No need to study, you will waste your time with the studying. Start working. It's easy to study [at university] and work." But when he start, the reality will say that your courses will be in the morning, so you will miss them. You will fail ... he will stop studying. Rumours is something that is killing the youth here because they just hear from other people.

(Humaid)

This practice was evident in many of the interviewees' responses in Stage 1 and Stage 3. When asked how they garnered their information, all interviewees replied that family members or friends were the source. None of the interviewees referred to other sources of information such as public announcements or the institute in question. For example, when asked how they knew they could continue their studies when working with the police or military, several interviewees referred to relatives who were doing so. Other interviewees who reported applying for scholarships, transferring to a different school system, and being guaranteed jobs after completing their studies at a vocational institute also quoted family and friends as the sources of information in the process and decision making. These descriptions started to outline a culturally valued knowledge system based on word of mouth and personal experience. Arguably, rumours may be a by-product of this system.

This idea supports Al Lily et al.'s (2018) work in Saudi Arabia in which they contend that that social networks provide alternate sources of information to official media outlets. They suggest that rumours "form 'books' in which the emotional formula of a society is written and may be transmitted to succeeding generations" (p. 8). Adopting this perspective, rumours can be considered as cultural artefacts contributing to the master narrative of a society, in the same way as media, literature, and movies.

Employing the definition proposed by DiFonzo and Bordia (2007), rumours are defined as "unverified and instrumentally relevant information statements in circulation that arise in contexts of ambiguity, danger, or potential threat and that function to help people make sense and manage risk" (p. 13). Each of these constructs is discussed in turn, considering their importance in the U.A.E. context and contribution to a master narrative which diminishes the importance of higher education for some young men. To start, research on rumour psychology has indicated the main motivations behind rumour transmission are fact finding, self enhancement, and relationship enhancement (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007). Regarding the latter, sharing rumours is thought to develop and strengthen relationships (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007; Dunbar, 2004; Miller, 1992) in the same way that sharing stories is said to have a social function in narrative identity literature. Referring to rumour transmission in Saudi Arabia, Al Lily et al. (2018) advocate that studying rumours in a collective society is different, and thus needs to be considered from a communal perspective rather than individualistic mode of thinking. However, the literature they cite to endorse the significance of

rumour sharing in developing social bonding, solidarity and community stems from a Western context thereby intimating the importance across cultures.

While the function may be same, perhaps Al Lily et al. are alluding to differences in social structure as they describe Saudi Arabia as “a collective and communicative community where everyone cares about everyone, which makes it easier for rumours to spread” (p. 3). Although having a much larger population than the UAE, Saudi Arabian society is similarly composed of close-knit extended family networks. Al Lily et al. (2018) explain that Saudis tend to forward any information which contains a warning, without validating the authenticity, out of “over-concern and over-care for friends and family” (p.3). This reasoning may explain Abdulla’s comment on obtaining government housing in the Results chapter wherein “people scared them”, perhaps as a means to motivate young men to secure housing (shelter) which is located at the most basic level of Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs. Getting married in order to be eligible for government housing funding and subsidies, as well as legitimately fulfil the need for reproduction also located at the base of Maslow’s model, intimates its importance over studying.

Dewey (1958) talks at great length about the precarious and perilous nature of the world, advocating that fear is a natural function of the environment. He advocates that certainty, or assurance, “is immensely valuable in a world full of uncertainty and peril” (p. 25), stating that “striving to make stability of meaning prevail over the instability of events is the main task of intelligent effort” (p. 50). Functioning under the motivation of “fact finding”, rumours are thought to serve as a collective form of sense-making in order to manage risk

(DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007). Thus, as well as being a product of anxiety and uncertainty, they can be viewed as a strategy for dealing with these feelings, stemming from a need for security, or assurance. Serving this function may be more important in hierarchal societies, such as the UAE, which López-Rodríguez and Hidalgo (2014) describe as having a lower tolerance for risk and insecurity. However, in a society which tends to experience rapid and sometimes radical change in national policies, relying on word of mouth may inadvertently result in sharing inaccurate information with ensuing consequences for continuing studies at post-secondary level. This is exemplified by the excerpt below wherein interviewee 1G had stopped attending a federal higher education institute after one week at to support his ailing father. Seventeen months later, he had now lost his priority status meaning he was liable to pay fees if he wished to return. Although saying he was motivated to study, interviewee 1G had not previously considered validating the information ascertained from friends and family regarding the admissions policy at the institute at which he had been studying.

Interpreter: He said that because he heard from people, maybe he means his classmates, if we stop the student from the college, he cannot come back.

Researcher: But why listen to friends rather than go direct [to the administration to ask]?

Arabic

Interpreter: He said you are right. I did not think in this way.

Researcher: Why?

Arabic

Interpreter: He did not think to follow this way, and to come and ask the administration. At that time.

The above excerpt perhaps suggests that interviewee 1G had a lackadaisical attitude to continuing his studies, which is why he did not validate the information. However, now that his father's health had improved, he stated that he would prioritise studying over working if he had to choose between the two. Considered from this perspective, interviewee 1G's comments tentatively lends support to the strength of the culturally valued knowledge system. It may be that to be seen as seeking to validate information received through the network is viewed as undermining the authority of those from whom it was derived. The potential impact of rumours in the close-knit society of less than one million people is perhaps reflected in the UAE's strict laws in which individuals may be imprisoned and fined up to one million dirhams (£190 000) for sharing rumours on social media. To remind citizens and residents alike, there are often reports in the local media regarding the negative effects of rumour proliferation which include spreading panic and fear, undermining the security and stability of society, and threatening the development of the country (e.g. Sebugwaawo, 2020). Thus, it stands to reason that rumours may have a significant impact in the UAE due to a low tolerance for uncertainty and a reliance on word of mouth for information. The timeframe may also be important as rumours tend to flourish in times of

uncertainty and ambiguity (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007; Pelletier & Drozda-Senkowska, 2020; Rosnow & Foster, 2005). As described in the Contextualisation chapter, currently the UAE is going through another period of transition seeking to diversify its economy from an over-reliance on oil and reduce the local population's dependence on the public sector. As outlined earlier on, there was a sense among interviewees that public sector jobs were in short supply and many interviewees noted that a bachelor's degree did not provide a competitive advantage in gaining employment. Shared knowledge of these issues and rumours generate a master narrative in which young men should prioritise work before studies, especially when coupled with the additional pressure of marrying 'on time' and striving to conform to the material expectations of society in order to be accepted amongst one's peers.

6.8 Employing Master Narratives to Open Up the Discussion on Masculinities and Patriarchy

Although rapid sociocultural changes, the demographic situation, and the socioeconomic features of the rentier state offer explanation for the situation of the missing men in the UAE, they do not necessarily provide any insight to the global phenomena of the missing men in education due to their context-specificity. However, the theoretical framework which emerged from this study enables similarities to be identified in the underlying reasons behind the educational decisions of young men in different contexts. Thus, this final section of this chapter explicitly reviews how masculinity has influenced the

higher education participation of young men in the research context, while presenting a case for employing master narratives as a way to explore and draw connections between the missing men in other environments. I contend that the framework is well-suited for “undressing patriarchy” to uncover underlying drivers of gender equality (Edström et al., 2014) and open up the discussion on masculinities, meeting Connell and Messerschmidt’s call “to reduce the isolation of men’s studies [and] emphasize the relevance of gender dynamics to the problems... being explored in other fields of social science” (2005, p. 848).

6.8.1 Summary of Thesis Findings

Recognition has been given in this chapter to the variety of reasons that many young men prioritise seeking income-generating activities over studying at tertiary level. Reflecting patterns of autonomy and relatedness, these include a need or desire to support their family, save for marriage, as well as own a car and home. Being autonomous and independent is said to reflect the patriarchal expectation of being a “real man” (Johnson, 2005), conceptualised as hegemonic masculinity by Connell (2005). A master narrative formed in part from a culturally valued knowledge system based on word of mouth and others’ personal experience indicating that government housing and employment are scarce has intensified the prioritization of securing work. It is suggested that an acculturated rise in materialism among Emiratis wherein status and character are increasingly judged by extrinsic means has changed patterns of relatedness, increasing pressure on young men to confer their status and correspondingly establish their right to belongingness through

outward measures of wealth. This supposition was most apparent in the discussion of weddings in the male focus group. While fulfilling the need for relatedness and autonomy are acknowledged as important driving forces behind these behaviours, akin to Sheldon et al. (2001) I argue that striving for security is the underlying motivation. By being financially responsible in the absence of the father, and the need to save for a marriage in order to start their own family, participants in this study indicated that traditionally men are not afforded the same security as female relatives. Thus, ironically while being described as having “more options”, some young men may have less choice to continue their education. By neither working nor studying, those who were deviating from the master narrative in this study appear to support this theorem as they described living life “enjoying the moment” carefree with little responsibility. Interviewee 3O’s deviance was particularly noticeable as he stated that he was “wasting life” and that he never wanted to get married. This contrasts starkly with the majority of young men who described having family responsibilities and needing to save financially to “build their life”, highlighting the strength of the patriarchal narrative which heavily influences the employment-seeking behaviours of these young men.

6.8.2 The Breadwinner Ideology

While scholars have theorised that patriarchy in the labour market and family life may be a contributing factor to the reverse gender gap, this work has tended to focus on the increased incentives for girls in gaining post-secondary qualifications (Lauglo & Liu, 2018). Offering an explanation from the male perspective, Humaid described the pressure that patriarchal responsibilities

placed many young men under, outlining the consequential impact on their post-secondary studies. While pointing to a different area of his head each time he said “here”, Humaid explained:

Here, they have ‘oh I need to support my family’. Here, ‘I need to buy a car’. Here, ‘I need to marry after six years’. Here ‘I need to build a house’. So they don’t take hundred percent of anything. He’s not good with education. His mental health is bad. He’s always stressed. He will get diabetes because of the stress, because it’s *too much* for someone who’s 18 to think about all those things. (Humaid)

Although based in a different socioeconomic and cultural environment, the results of this study are strikingly similar to that of Archer et al. (2001). In their research on young working-class men’s (non)participation in higher education in the UK, they note that “almost without exception, they address educational choices and decision-making through discourses that privilege work and money” (p. 437). Drawing similar conclusions, Archer et al. note that many of the young men in their study appeared to be motivated by the lower order needs in Maslow’s model, describing concerns in securing employment:

the young men voiced considerable fear of the longer-term insecurity involved [in studying at tertiary level]. Degree study was seen as a high-risk strategy with no certainty of secure employment at the end. (2001, p. 437)

While this perception reflects the wider disruption occurring in higher education in the present day wherein higher education qualifications provide

no guarantee of employment, Archer et al. (2001) note that “there was a pronounced fixity to these discourses of masculinity, which closed off options in ways that were not so much the case for women” (p. 438). Similar sentiments were echoed in Marks’ (2000) research on the lack of participation in higher education by working-class males:

given the high levels of unemployment in Liverpool, many find the ‘breadwinner’ role an impossibility. Yet, this is the very role to these men cling—in its cultural sense, if not actually its economic reality. Thus, we are dealing with cultural constraints here—the nature of ‘masculinity’ as it is applied to the ‘provider’ role. Such a role leaves little room for a return to education. (Marks, 2000, p. 313)

While the patriarchal structure of society remains evident in the Arab world (Joseph, 1996), young men in studies on working-class masculinities and higher education have reported feeling similar pressure in other regions such as Canada (Ward, 2019), England (Archer et al., 2001; Trowler, 2019), Scotland and South Africa (Trowler, 2019). The prevailing notion of man as the primary breadwinner has also been reported in broader studies on masculinities in diverse cultural contexts such as Singapore (Wong et al., 2016), Egypt, Kazakhstan, Turkey and Ukraine, (Edström et al., 2019), as well as other Western countries. For example, in his research on masculinities and care giving in Ireland, Hanlon (2012) concluded that many men interpreted being the primary carer as a “moral judgement of their inferiority” as it contradicted publically constructed masculine identity (pp. 129-130). In the United States, when outlining the qualities of a good spouse, a study by

the Pew Research Centre found a significant difference in the expectations of men and women to financially support a family (Parker & Stepler, 2017). Seventy-two per cent of men and 71% of women responded that a man had to be able to provide for his family in order to be a good husband or partner. However, only 25% of male and 39% of female respondents agreed that it was important for a woman. This ideology of a male-breadwinner persists in the US, despite trends which show an increasing number of women earn more than their husbands, recorded at 28% in 2017 (Parker & Stepler, 2017). Analysing data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, Baxter and Hewitt (2013) concluded that the male-breadwinner institutional framework is even stronger in Australia than in the US.

Referring to Hakim's (1991) research on women's work commitment in Western industrialised societies, Marks (2000) explains his findings by saying that women are "freer" and can choose to work or be a home-maker, an option, he maintains, not perceived to be available for men. However, Hakim's (1991) article has met with much controversy since publication; criticised for homogenizing women and negating the importance of practical, financial and structural obstacles in women seeking full-time employment (e.g. Ginn et al., 1996; Procter & Padfield, 1999; Walters, 2005). Explicitly exploring perceptions of breadwinner-roles, masculinity, and security between genders in regions which have a higher education gender gap would be an interesting avenue for future research. While not necessarily universal, the enduring concept of a male-breadwinner can be conceptualised in terms of

hegemonic masculinity as delineating the idealized characteristics of 'being a man'. The strength of the concept can be understood in terms of McLean and Syed's (2015) principles of rigidity and the compulsory nature of master narratives, outlined in the Theoretical Framework chapter. To briefly recap, the "good values" and group ideologies are said to ultimately maintain structural power and the status quo in society (Hammack & Toolis, 2015; McLean & Syed, 2015), and are discernible through the legal architecture of rights in a society in institutions such as marriage (McLean et al., 2017; McLean et al., 2018). While in some countries the male-breadwinner ideology may persist in a moral or cultural sense, as described by Marks (2000) above, in the UAE it is a legal requirement. Perhaps indicative of this, the reverse gender gap in higher education is one of the most significant globally.

6.8.3 "Laddishness" and Marriage: the same underlying motivations

Initially much of the research on the (non)participation in education of young men in other regions may appear to be irrelevant to this research context. For example, "laddish" behaviours in U.K. universities which revolve around drunken, misogynistic behaviour are a world apart from local Emirati society in which alcohol is forbidden by Islam and local society is highly gender-segregated. Historically-systemic rejection of higher education by working-class young men in the UK and elsewhere appears to be immaterial to a young nation wherein compulsory education was only introduced 50 years ago, a class system is primarily delineated by a person's citizenship rights rather than between nationals of the country, and the young men reported being in favour of continuing their studies after finding work. However, I

contend that when considered in terms of master narratives framed by psychological needs, patterns can be recognised in the educational choices and behaviours of young men in these different contexts. For example, in their work on the enactment of laddish behaviour of young men when transitioning to higher education Warin and Dempster (2005) note that:

Underlying fears about being lonely and having no friends were made explicit by many respondents and hinted at by others. The performance of hegemonic forms of masculinity is, then, born of anxieties about fitting in. (2005, p. 896)

Although not employing the language of psychological needs, Warin and Dempster describe how a need for relatedness (fitting in) and security (anxieties) drive these young men's behaviour. Thus, although the outward behaviour and contexts differ significantly, the reason for young men prioritising work and marriage in the UAE and the underlying reason for laddish behaviours in transitioning to higher education in the UK can be seen to motivated by the same needs for relatedness and security; "the performance of masculinity arises from insecurities about social inclusion, about being lonely and powerless" (Warin & Dempster, 2005, p. 896).

Similar comparisons can be drawn in Jackson's (2002; 2003) work on laddish behaviours at secondary school in the UK. Jackson concluded that "laddish behaviours may act to protect the self-worth and/or social worth of many boys" surmising that "laddishness may be prompted by both a fear of academic failure and a fear of the 'feminine'" (2003, p. 583). I maintain that

the underlying motivation for needing to be seen as aligning with the hegemonic form of masculinity pervading the school may be the same as that in Warin and Dempster's (2005) study. Specifically, the boys seek to protect their social-worth to promote social inclusivity and mitigate risks of exclusion. This viewpoint stems from an evolutionary perspective of identity theories in which co-authoring a life narrative facilitates socialisation into a group while increasing group cohesion and harmony through the conveyance of shared values, and expectations (McAdams, 2019; McLean, 2019). It is argued that as social cohesion became important for survival, stories told within the group legitimated convention and authority, while communicating the expectations of each group member, thereby identifying their place within the community (Hammack, 2008; McAdams, 2019; McLean, 2019). This perspective forms the basis of master narrative theory, outlined in detail in the Theoretical Framework chapter, wherein co-constructed narratives provide templates for, or on a "malignant" level dictate, culturally-valued life stories, functioning to make the group cohere (McLean, 2019, p. 66). As previously argued, originally this stemmed from a need for physical survival, but in the present day may be about social survival motivated by a need for relatedness.

In addition, similarities can be identified in Jackson's (2003) theory that the secondary school boys were rejecting academic work to protect their self-worth and Marks' (2000) study on nonparticipation of working-class males in higher education in the UK. Akin to Jackson, Marks concluded that young men's rejection of the value of higher education may in fact be "either a form of bravado, or a defensive explanation for their failure to achieve the

standards for which they were initially aiming” (p. 306). When considered through Deci and Ryan’s (2000) seminal model of psychological needs, these behaviours can be seen as a strategy for protecting or attempting to subvert the need for competence. Although not identified as a motivating factor in this study, this perspective complements the model proposed in this thesis, adding an extra level of dimensionality by suggesting that other psychological needs may be of greater significance when considering the master narratives constructed in other contexts. It also supports the contention that striving for security is the underlying motivation. To elucidate, outwardly rejecting the value of education functions as a mechanism for exerting control over the uncertainty of succeeding in their academic studies by predetermining the outcome, namely through nonparticipation.

6.8.4 Summary

Thus, I contend that expanding on Demuth and Keller’s (2011) thesis and considering master narratives through panhuman needs provides a deeper insight to the educational attitudes and choices of young men, while allowing for similarities to be identified in different contexts despite distinct variances in outward behaviour. I suggest that as the overarching framework of master narratives allows comparisons to be made across different contexts and topics, it is well-suited for “undressing” patriarchy and opening up the discussion on masculinities, facilitating an interdisciplinary growth of theory.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Although gender research still tends to focus on female access and equality, in recent years there has been an increasing amount of research on the missing men in higher education. Studies, primarily from the West, have focused on masculinity juxtaposed against the perceived femininity of academic study, noncognitive differences, and the socioeconomic background of young men. Locally, previous research has drawn on the latter, as well as highlighting lack of family support, English language difficulties, and disengagement from schools as reasons for the lower participation of males in education. While these may be factors that exacerbate the issue, this research has shown that insights can be drawn from the Development literature in the MENA region, which focuses on school-to-work-to-family formation, and thus transitioning to adulthood. While not generalizable to other environments, the research findings provide a nuanced understanding of why many young men do not continue their studies at tertiary level in the research context. These findings build on the local body of knowledge on the educational experiences of young men in Ras Al Khaimah in the UAE. Cultural outsiders can also gain a deeper understanding of the sociocultural processes operating in Emirati society. This chapter summarises the main findings of the research, highlighting how the issue of the missing men in higher education can be better understood within the confines of the case study. After considering the local claims to significance, I outline the wider implications of the study which lie in the development of theory and employment of the theoretical perspective which emerged from the findings. Recommendations for change are then suggested.

The questions which emerged from and guided the research process were:

- i. What are the reasons given by male Emiratis of university age in the case study for not continuing their studies at tertiary level?
- ii. What further understanding can other Emiratis in the case study provide as to the reasons young men do not continue their studies?
- iii. What theory can be generated from the RQ1 and RQ2 findings?
- iv. What are the implications of RQ3 for researching the phenomena of the missing men in higher education in other contexts?

7.1 Understanding the Missing Men in the Local Context

Young men in the UAE are often cited as not continuing their studies at tertiary level because they have “more options” (Findlow, 2013, p. 122) lured away by well-paying public sector jobs, a feature of the rentier state said to diminish the necessity of educational qualifications (Abdulla & Ridge, 2011; Ashour, 2020; Hatherley-Greene, 2012; Ridge & Farah, 2012; Ridge, Kippels, & Chung, 2017). In line with global studies, previous research in the UAE has also reported socioeconomic status to be a predictor of enrolment (Abdulla & Ridge, 2011) and completion (Ridge et al., 2013) of males in higher education. However, while finances may be a deciding factor in some cases, the accounts of participants in this study indicated a much more complex situation grounded in sociocultural customs and behaviours. Many of the young men outlined reasons related to family responsibilities, alluding to the

different roles that sons and daughters held in the family. Participants' accounts depicted a biographical master narrative imbued with patriarchy in which finding employment to secure a marriage proposal and position themselves to support the family financially overrode the importance of continuing their studies at tertiary level. Considering participants' accounts through the needs of autonomy and relatedness, as advocated by Demuth and Keller (2011), alluded to the importance of the concept of the collective self in the research context as opposed to Western-derived theories that tend to focus on the individual element of identity. A family model of psychological interdependence (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005; Kağıtçıbaşı & Yalin, 2015) was described by many of the young men wherein they were granted a greater degree of autonomy to choose their own path, stemming from reduced material interdependence between generations as a consequence of the improved socioeconomic status of citizens since the discovery of oil. While participants described some situations in which parents may still rely on their offspring for financial support, psychological interdependence initially presented as material interdependence in many other cases; intimating the ingrained nature of hegemonic masculinity, participants explained how the feeling of wanting to be able to support the family often came from within. Even when advised to continue their studies by family members, it would appear that the strength of the patriarchal narrative and prevailing psychological interdependence means that many young men still feel the need to prioritise work over studying in order to prepare themselves for their responsibilities and achieve the desired state of autonomy and relatedness through salaried employment. The accounts of two participants who were deviating from the master narrative,

neither working nor studying, support this theorem. These young men appeared to be under no pressure to meet any family or financial obligations, with one of them stating emphatically that he would be content to remain single for the rest of his life. Thus, while the favourable socioeconomic position of many citizens since the discovery of oil has reduced material independence between families meaning that parents can support their sons to study, participants described how in some cases it had also removed the motivation to study, sense of responsibility, and aspiration to achieve; “they don’t work hard for things because they already have it” (Muna). Drawing parallels with Arthur et al.’s (2019) research on materialism amongst Emiratis, participants described sociocultural changes wherein status and character were increasingly judged by extrinsic means, such as salary being considered as the quintessential quality of a prospective groom. It is proffered that these outward measures have changed patterns of relatedness, increasing pressure on young men to confer their status and correspondingly establish their right to belongingness through ostentatious pecuniary displays such as buying expensive cars and hosting lavish weddings.

7.2 Theorising the Missing Men

Adding to the existing body of knowledge on psychological needs and expanding on Demuth and Keller’s (2011) original thesis, I propose that a need for security is the driving force behind the young men’s autonomy and relatedness seeking behaviours. In this research “security” is considered in

terms of physical and social survival achieved through social cohesion (McLean, 2019), wherein the first denotes having the financial means to support the household and start their own family, and the latter refers to maintaining one's, and by extension the family's, status and reputation. Participants outlined how gainful employment rather than higher education qualifications is the means by which to achieve these, at least in the short term. This theory builds on Maslow's (1943) seminal model and more recent work on psychological needs such as Sheldon et al. (2001) which depict security as the foundation on which other human needs rest. The theory is also supported by the contrasting account of one interviewee who was determined to study at tertiary level citing the Arabic proverb "my degree is my weapon". Thus, contrary to the young men who prioritised work over studying, this interviewee described how he perceived gaining higher qualifications as the means to securing his future; "in the future I don't know what will happen. If something happens, or something went wrong or something, I have my degree to fight... I can choose my own option for work." In contrast to the ready availability of public sector jobs, anecdotally blamed in the literature for luring young men away from higher education, participants described a scarcity of jobs as the impetus for further prioritising finding work over continuing their studies. In addition, while most young men expressed a desire to continue their studies once employed, there was a sense that only studying was "wasting time" for several reasons including losing years of work experience compared to peers who started work directly after high school, as well as prolonging the time needed to save for marriage and "build their lives". Although many participants noted the instrumental value of higher education

qualifications for promotion, knowing friends and family who had been unable to find work after obtaining a bachelor's degree undermined its advantage in securing work.

7.3 Exploring the Missing Men in Other Contexts

A case for using the theoretical perspective of master narratives to consider a societal issue rather than identity per se was exemplified in the Discussion in which the findings were interpreted and situated within the literature using the framework of master narratives, deviations thereof, and identifying changes in the narrative. While diverging from the original intent of McLean and Syed's (2015) model, employing the theoretical perspective in this manner is analogous to Hammack and Pilecki's (2012) framework of master narrative engagement in which they focus on political issues, proposing the framework as a way to link context and mind. Indicating the wicked nature of the issue, one of the challenges with this research was finding a way to coherently integrate the array of contributing factors such as the country's demographic situation, socioeconomic history, and evolving sociocultural practices which combine to influence the participation of young men in higher education in the UAE. Thus, while providing a case study of the missing men in Ras Al Khaimah, this thesis also demonstrated the capacity of the theoretical framework for incorporating research and theories from different academic fields, in line with McLean and Syed's (2015) and Hammack and colleagues' (Hammack, 2008; Hammack, 2010; Hammack, 2011; Hammack & Pilecki,

2012; Hammack & Toolis, 2015) intentions, and meeting the call from several of the cited scholars for a greater integration of scholarly research. While Syed and McLean (2021) maintain that a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods are appropriate to use with the master narrative model, I propose that it is a particularly valuable theoretical perspective for grounded theory studies since it is in part founded on symbolic interactionism, the main perspective associated with grounded theory. However, by expanding its epistemological basis to incorporate theory from perspectives such as narrative and identity, cultural-historical activity theory, Foucault's theory of discourse and subjectivity, and others (Hammack & Toolis, 2015), master narratives provide a broader "way of knowing" to interpret meanings, actions, and events. I contend that this broader perspective not only facilitates analysis of a wicked issue, but also supports the generation of a culturally-relevant theory grounded in different milieux. While the reasons that emerged in the case study are context-specific, I suggest that master narratives can provide a valuable conceptual tool to compare and contrast the missing men in other environments, "undressing patriarchy" to uncover underlying drivers of gender equality (Edström et al., 2014) and open up the discussion on masculinities. This meets Connell and Messerschmidt's call "to reduce the isolation of men's studies [and] emphasize the relevance of gender dynamics to the problems... being explored in other fields of social science" (2005, p. 848). Complementing Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) local, regional, and global framework, by incorporating a fourth "individual" level I contend that master narratives facilitate analysis and articulation of the interplay of structural and personal processes operating within a context. I maintain that

framing the model in terms of the psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness and security encourages looking beneath the surface of young men's educational choices and behaviours, providing deeper insight as to the underlying reasons, and allowing for similarities to be drawn between different environments despite variances in outward behaviour. Examples of these were outlined at the end of the Discussion chapter.

Although widely employed, "narrative" has met with some contestation. As mentioned in the Contextualisation chapter, the founding premise of narrative identity theories is that a narrative mode of thought is human nature (Demuth & Keller, 2011; Hammack, 2008; Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; McAdams, 2018; Murray, 2003). While the way in which the metaphor of "narrative" has transcended disciplinary boundaries such as history, sociology, and psychology lends support to this contention (Hammack & Toolis, 2015), other scholars have disagreed. For example, Strawson (2004) contests that self-understanding necessitates a narrative form, instead arguing that people may understand themselves in episodic terms. Thus, he contends that narrative mode is a false universal claim about human life, as does Phelan (2005) who continues his argument. However, even as self-proclaimed "Episodics", both give recognition to the "biographies" and "stories" one tells about oneself, reducing the strength of their argument (Eakin, 2006). The theory of master narratives, especially the manner in which employed in this thesis, moves away from psychological arguments about the understanding of "self", focusing instead on the relationship between self and society. Strawson's (2004) final comment, citing the short story writer V.S. Pritchett, "we live

beyond any tale that we happen to enact” (p. 450), serves as a reminder appropriate for all research regarding social bias, but perhaps particularly pertinent when employing a master narrative perspective. Considering the “utilitarian” principle, master narratives provide guidance on living a “good life” (McLean & Syed, 2015); thus the “tale presented” may not always reflect the “life we enact”. This situation presented in Stage 1 of this research wherein 94% of participants who had not attended higher education indicated they intended to continue their tertiary level studies, albeit after finding work for most. This favourable response contrasted starkly with the low numbers of enrolment and high incidences of “no shows” annually among young men in higher education in the UAE, leading to Stage 2 and Stage 3 of the research. While higher education qualifications are viewed favourably in the UAE, with the title of Doctor or Engineer in particular bestowing status on an individual and his family, participants described how the financial situation of a young man was of foremost importance when being considered as a prospective son-in-law. Young men also delineated the importance of being gainfully employed in order to position themselves to support the family; thus explaining the prioritization of work over studying and the difference between the “tale presented” and the “life enacted”.

7.4 Recommendations for Change

While the majority of young men in this study reported prioritising work, as mentioned above, most also expressed a desire to continue their studies.

Offering more flexible study options, such as part-time and remote learning, may support the young men who genuinely wish to study while working. Changes would also need to be made regarding the classification of “priority status” and the government funding system. To recap, new high school graduates, and those returning from National Service, are assigned “priority status” to study at federal institutes. Delaying registration may cause a potential student to lose their priority status meaning that acceptance will depend on availability and that they may be liable to pay fees. This likely further disincentivizes young men to continue their studies since working and studying simultaneously, especially once married, is a challenge in itself. Waiving or offering a reduction in fees to potential students who have never enrolled in tertiary education and who can demonstrate that they have been actively employed since leaving high school may help incentivise young men to enrol in higher education. Ultimately this will support the U.A.E. government’s current strategy wherein “more Emiratis will enter higher education, where they will enrich their minds with the skills that their nation needs to fuel its knowledge economy” (UAE Vision 2021, 2014, slide 20).

7.5 Final Note

In acknowledgement of “the fundamental problem of homogenization” (Martino, 2011), it must be kept in mind that this thesis sought to focus on the young men who had completed their secondary education, but had not continued their studies at tertiary level. Thus, while representing the views of

participants in the case study and providing insight for future research, the sample is not generalizable to young Emirati men in general. Conducting interviews with some of the “no show” students revealed that some young were highly motivated to continue their studies in the UAE and further afield. For example, one participant who was studying in an Arabic-medium university intended to continue his studies to doctorate level, while another was studying for a scholarship in the UK; one young man had spent the last three years trying to improve his high school grades to be eligible for university entrance. The participants’ accounts highlight the multifaceted and individual nature of each young man’s situation while living within a society prescribed by a master narrative imbued with patriarchy and sociocultural changes, which have affected patterns of relatedness and consequently the priorities of the “collective self”.

Chapter 8: References

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Chapter 9: Appendix

9.1 PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Researcher: Christine Howling



Hello, I am a PhD student at Lancaster University and I would like to invite you to take part in a research study about the educational choices male Emiratis make after high school.

Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide if you would like to take part in this study.

What is the study about?

This study aims to explore why many male Emiratis choose not to continue studying after high school in the UAE.

Why have I been invited?

I have approached you because I am interested in understanding the reasons why many young male Emiratis choose not to continue their education past high school. I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in this study.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you decide to take part, I would like to ask you questions about your life and why you chose not to continue studying after high school. The interview will be about 30-50 minutes, depending on your answers. If you don't mind, I would like to audio record the interview so I can listen to the information later. An interpreter will be present during the interviews so you can talk freely in Arabic.

What are the possible benefits from taking part?

Participating in the research is a chance for you to share your experiences and will help us to understand young people in the UAE.

Do I have to take part?

No. Your participation is voluntary. You can choose to take part or not.

What if I change my mind?

If you change your mind, you are free to withdraw from this study. If you want to withdraw, please let me know, and I will remove your information from the study and destroy it. However, it is difficult to identify and remove your information after it has been transcribed and anonymised. Therefore, you can only withdraw up to 2 weeks after taking part in the study.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no risks or disadvantages to the best of my knowledge.

Will my data be identifiable?

All reasonable steps will be taken to protect your anonymity. A professional transcriber will listen to the recordings and produce a written record of the interview. The transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement. To protect your identity, your name and any other revealing personal information will be removed from the transcripts and replaced with a pseudonym. After this, only my PhD supervisor and I will have access to the ideas you share with me.

How will we use the information you have shared with us and what will happen to the results of the research study?

I will use the information you have shared with me for my PhD thesis. When writing up the findings from this study, I will only use anonymised quotes. Although I will use your exact words, **all reasonable steps will be taken to protect your anonymity**. I may also publish the study in a journal article and present the results at an academic conference.

How my data will be stored

During the research, your data will be stored in an encrypted folder on a password-protected computer. In accordance with University guidelines, I will keep the data securely for a minimum of ten years.

What if I have a question or concern?

If you have any questions or if you are unhappy with anything that happens during the study, please contact me, Christine Howling, chowling@name_of_institute or my PhD supervisor Paul Trowler, p.trowler@lancaster.ac.uk, Telephone: +44 (0)1524 592879
Address:

Educational Research
County South
Lancaster University
Lancaster
United Kingdom
LA1 4YD

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with someone not directly involved in the research, you can also contact the Departmental Officer, Kathryn Doherty, kathryn.doherty@lancaster.ac.uk, Telephone: +44 (0)1524 593572, at the same postal address as above.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Lancaster Management School's Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you for considering your participation in this project.

For further information about how Lancaster University processes personal data for research purposes and your data rights please visit our webpage:

www.lancaster.ac.uk/research/data-protection

9.2 CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Exploring the missing men in higher education in the UAE

Name of Researchers: Christine Howling

Email: chowling@name_of_institute

Please tick each box

<p>1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>1-أقر بأنني وفهمت ورقة المعلومات للدراسة المذكورة أعلاه. لقد أتيت لي الفرصة للنظر في المعلومات ، وطرح الأسئلة وقد أجبت بصورة مرضية.</p>
<p>2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during my participation in this study and within 2 weeks after taking part in the study, without giving any reason. If I withdraw within 2 weeks of taking part in the study my data will be removed.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>2-أدرك أن مشاركتي تطوعية وأنني حر في الانسحاب في أي وقت أثناء مشاركتي في هذه الدراسة وفي غضون أسبوعين بعد المشاركة في الدراسة ، دون إبداء أي سبب. إذا قمت بالانسحاب في غضون أسبوعين من المشاركة في الدراسة ، فستتم إزالة جميع بياناتي.</p>
<p>3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic articles, publications or presentations by the researchers, but my personal information will not be included and all reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>3-أتفهم أن أي معلومات قدمتها لي قد تُستخدم في التقارير أو المقالات الأكاديمية أو المنشورات أو العروض التقديمية في المستقبل ، لكن لن تضم معلوماتي الشخصية وسيتم اتخاذ جميع الخطوات المعقولة لحماية سرية المشاركين.</p>
<p>4. I understand that my name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentation without my consent.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>4-أدرك أن اسمي لن يظهر في أي تقارير أو مقالات أو عروض تقديمية دون موافقتي.</p>
<p>5. I understand that any interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>5-أتفهم أن أي من مقابلات سيتم تسجيلها وأن البيانات ستكون محمية على الأجهزة المشفرة وستبقى آمنة .</p>
<p>6. I understand that data will be kept according to University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>6-أتفهم أنه سيتم الاحتفاظ بالبيانات وفقاً لإرشادات الجامعة لمدة لا تقل عن 10 سنوات بعد انتهاء الدراسة</p>
<p>7. I agree to take part in the above study.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>7-أوافق على المشاركة في الدراسة المذكورة أعلاه</p>

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

<p>I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.</p>	<p>أؤكد أن المشارك قد أتيت له الفرصة لطرح أسئلة حول الدراسة ، وتم الإجابة على جميع الأسئلة التي طرحها بشكل صحيح وبأقصى قدر من الإمكان. أؤكد أنه لم يتم إجبار الشخص على إعطاء الموافقة. تم منح الموافقة بحرية وطوعية .</p>
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Signature of Researcher _____
_____ Day/month/year

Date

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of
the researcher at Lancaster University

9.3 TELEPHONE SCRIPT



<p>Hello, my name is [name of interpreter removed]. I am translating for Christine Howling, a PhD student at Lancaster University and [information removed]. We would like to invite you to take part in a research study about the educational choices male Emiratis make after high school.</p>	<p>[information removed]</p> <p>ندعوكم للمشاركة في دراسة بحثية حول الخيارات التعليمية التي يتخذها الإماراتيون الذكور بعد دراسة الثانوية.</p>
<p>We would like to ask you questions about your life and your studies. The interview will be about 10-30 minutes, depending on your answers. If you don't mind, we would like to audio record the interview so Ms Christine can listen to the information later and transcribe it.</p>	<p>نود أن نسألك أسئلة عن حياتك ودراسك. ستستغرق المقابلة حوالي 10 إلى 30 دقيقة، فإننا نود تسجيل المقابلة صوتياً حتى تتمكن الأستاذة كرسيتين من الاستماع إلى المعلومات لاحقاً ونسخها.</p>
<p>Do you have 10 minutes to talk now? Is it ok to record?</p>	<p>هل لديك 10 دقائق للتحدث الآن؟ هل تقبل بأن نسجل هذه المقابلة صوتياً؟</p>
<p>START RECORDING</p>	
<p>Your participation is voluntary.</p>	<p>ستكون مشاركتك تطوعية.</p>
<p>There are no risks or disadvantages to the best of my knowledge.</p>	<p>لا توجد أي مخاطر أو عيوب على حد علمي.</p>
<p>To protect your identity, your name and any other revealing personal information will be removed from the transcripts and replaced with a pseudonym.</p>	<p>لحماية هويتك سيقوم المستمع بالتوقيع للحفاظ على السرية، سيتم إزالة اسمك وأي معلومات شخصية واستبدالها باسم مستعار.</p>
<p>Ms Christine will use the information for her PhD thesis. When writing up the findings from this study, she will only use anonymised quotes. Although she will use your exact words, all reasonable steps will be taken to protect your anonymity. She may also publish the study in a journal article and present the results at an academic conference.</p>	<p>الأستاذة كرسيتين ستستخدم المعلومات في دراستها للدكتوراه. عند كتابة هذه الدراسة، ستستخدم اقتباسات مجهولة الهوية، على الرغم من أنها ستستخدم كلماتك بالضبط، إلا أنه سيتم اتخاذ جميع الخطوات المعقولة لحماية هويتك. يجوز لها أيضاً نشر الدراسة في مقال صحفي وتقديم النتائج في مؤتمر أكاديمي.</p>
<p>If you change your mind, you are free to withdraw from this study. However, it is difficult to identify and remove your information after it has been transcribed and anonymised. Therefore, you can only</p>	<p>إذا غيرت رأيك، لك الحرية في الانسحاب من هذه الدراسة. ومع ذلك، يصعب تحديد معلومات وإزالتها بعد نسخها وإخفاء هويتها. لذلك لا يمكنك الانسحاب إلا بعد أسبوعين من المشاركة في الدراسة. إذا كنت ترغب في الانسحاب، يرجى الإتصال بالأستاذة كرسيتين هاولنج على 02 206 7025 .</p>

<p>withdraw up to 2 weeks after taking part in the study. If you want to withdraw, please contact Christine Howling 02 206 7025.</p>	
<p>If you have any questions or if you are unhappy with anything that happens during the study, please contact Christine Howling, or her PhD supervisor Paul Trowler, p.trowler@lancaster.ac.uk</p>	<p>إذا كان لديك أي أسئلة أو إذا كنت غير راض عن أي شيء يحدث أثناء الدراسة، يرجى الاتصال بكريستين هاولنج، أو مشرف الدكتوراه بول تلولر p.trowler@lancaster.ac.uk</p>
<p>Are you ready to start?</p>	<p>هل أنت مستعد للبدء؟</p>

I confirm that the complete Consent Form was read and explained to the participant in Arabic before receiving the participant's consent, and the participant has knowledge of the research project and appeared to understand it.

Researcher _____ Date _____