Master's thesis

NTNU
Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Humanities
Department of Language and Literature

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Endangered Masculinities:

A Study of Masculinity Crises in Ian McEwan's On Chesil Beach and Enduring Love

Master's thesis in MLSPRÅK
Supervisor: Eli Løfaldli
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Abstract

Ian McEwan is an author who is widely admired for his ability to create diverse and believable characters. Many of his novels portray characters that struggle with finding their identity, often related to issues regarding gender and sexuality. *On Chesil Beach* (2007) and *Enduring Love* (1997) are examples of such novels. Both these novels have male protagonists who are subjected to what can be interpreted as masculinity crises, which have such damaging effects on their self-perception that it ultimately changes their lives. In *On Chesil Beach*, we meet Edward Mayhew, a stereotypically male character whose biggest fear is disappointing his new bride, Florence, on their wedding night. Edward and Florence have very different wishes and expectations about how this night will turn out, but like many couples in the sixties, they were not able to talk openly about this. His masculinity crisis is triggered by ejaculating prematurely and exacerbated by their inability to communicate, and it takes such a toll on their relationship that they end up getting an annulment. In *Enduring Love*, we follow the story of Joe Rose, an emotional and self-confident man who does not conform to the stereotypical definition of masculinity. Joe has been happily married to Clarissa Mellon for the last seven years, until he experiences a masculinity crisis triggered by Jed Parry's infatuation with him. Joe's crisis is made worse by the fact that Clarissa at first does not believe him, and later ridicules him for confiding in her. Joe and Clarissa almost separate, but find back together in the end.

In addition to illustrating how men may experience and navigate masculinity crises, these two novels also show that masculinity crises do not exist in a vacuum: they can be triggered and exacerbated by external factors such as partners, and may affect more than the individual man who experiences them.

Foreword

In 2020, society is far from equal in many aspects. However, when we talk about inequality, it is often restricted to the discussion about how men are at advantage because of their gender, and that this puts them it a position of power. It is clear that this feeling of being in power is not something that all men recognize, and many men feel the pressure of their role weighing heavily on their shoulders. During my five years in the Teacher's Education programme at NTNU, I have been privileged to meet and befriend a number of people, both peers I have met during my studies and students I have taught in teaching practice. I have seen first-hand how boys and men who do not conform to the stereotypical definition of masculinity can feel like square pegs being forced into round holes, and many of them feel like they are not good enough if they are not able to fit the mould of stereotypical masculinity. While we often talk about the damaging effect "good girl syndrome" can have on young girls, there is unfortunately a limited focus on the effects of the equivalent pressure experienced by boys to be good enough, a pressure that in many cases can lead to what Michael Kimmel defines as a masculinity crisis. In this thesis, I intend to discuss this exact topic through the analysis of two literary characters who can be seen to experience their own masculinity crises.

I wish to thank my supervisor, Eli Løfaldli, for all her guidance and support with this thesis. I also wish to thank my parents for their unwavering support throughout these last five years, and for supplying me with all the coffee I could drink during this last semester. Lastly, I want to thank my friends for sharing their thoughts on this topic with me, and for always encouraging me and reminding me that doing my best is enough.

Index

Chapter 1: Introduction

Sometimes, we may think of manhood and masculinity as something permanent and never-ending, as a specific quality or a set of characteristics that a man either has or does not have. This can lead to the belief that masculinity is based on biology – that it is something that comes with having a penis. However, most scholars today see masculinity as neither purely biological nor eternal, but as a socially constructed concept that has changed throughout the course of history and continues to change to this day. In contemporary Western culture, masculinity and the notion of being a real man has come to mean the characteristics that separate men from other groups, such as racial and sexual minorities. It is also used to describe the maturity that separate boys from men (Gardiner, 2005, p. 38). In other words, the standard for a "real man" in Western culture means being a cis-gendered, straight, white man. But most of all, it means being the opposite of the other sex, the opposite of a woman (Kimmel, 2005, p. 25).

Roger Horrocks argues that masculinity in Western society is in deep crisis. Going further, he argues that masculinity as a concept is a crisis in itself, and that trying to achieve the masculine standard is damaging for men (Horrocks, 1994, p. 1). This particular theme, of masculinity and its implications for men, has received increasing attention over the last decades, and Ian McEwan is one of the authors who has explored this theme. According to Dominic Head, McEwan's fiction is heavily influenced by his own personal experiences (2007, p. 2). Born on 21 June 1948, and living most of his life in Britain after the age of 11, McEwan experienced first-hand the effect of several important social and political changes throughout the seventies, eighties and nineties, such as decolonization, educational reform, changes in class structure and family life, and second wave feminism (Head, 2007, p. 5). The confusion and identity crises that these rapid political and social changes led to are thus mirrored in McEwan's fiction: he creates "a sense of liberal identity crisis" (Head, 2007, p. 7) that is typically illustrated through his key characters.

Many of McEwan's novels illustrate various sides of masculinity and the relationship between genders, as well as how men relate to their peers. Fatemeh Hosseini states that especially in his first four novels, namely *The Cement Garden* (1978), *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981),

The Child in Time (1987) and *The Innocent* (1990), he illustrates a post-patriarchal society where gender roles and gender identity are continuously challenged (Hosseini, 2015, p. 191). However, in my opinion, Hosseini's argument is also highly applicable to the two literary works I will be discussing in this thesis: *On Chesil Beach* (2007) and *Enduring Love* (1997), both of which include key characters that illustrate the complications that can arise from gender stereotypes.

Hosseini claims that, despite describing a post-patriarchal society, the term "post-patriarchal" is not accurate enough to account for the various gender identities expressed in McEwan's repertoire of literary characters. Instead, she proposes a new term, *filiarchy*, which she defines as "the reign of the sons", expressing the change from a society ruled by the older generation of men towards a society ruled by the men of the younger generation, i.e. the sons. In this generation, gender roles are not as rigid as in the previous generation, and a wider spectrum of gender identities are considered acceptable. She further argues that the filiarchal condition exhibits a plurality that the patriarchal condition lacks: while you can have only one father, you can have several sons (Hosseini, 2015, pp. 192-193). The father, in this metaphor, symbolises the perception of masculinity as one strict set of gender norms, whereas the sons represent the view on masculinity that most scholars have today, namely that a wide spectrum of masculinities coexist.

As mentioned above, McEwan's male characters illustrate a wide variety of gender roles, gender identities and various forms of masculinity. This leads to a collection of diverse, yet believable characters in his body of work. Dominic Head argues that part of the reason why McEwan manages to create such realistic character descriptions is his interest in psychology and science, particularly in how science can explain emotional responses (Head, 2007, p. 18). Since many of McEwan's key characters illustrate the process of searching for one's own identity, his knowledge of the various processes involved in forming one's own self increases the credibility of his narratives. That is not to say that McEwan looks to science for confirmation of facts, but rather that his characters and their journeys coincide with current scientific models on the subject (Head, 2007, p. 18).

Additionally, Head states that as a part of the illustration of this identity-finding process, McEwan often challenges his literary characters by exposing them to unforeseen events. These events often lead to both moral dilemmas and tests of personal strength, and the failure

to manage these events lead to negative consequences for the characters in question (Head, 2007, p. 12). An example of such negative consequences are identity and/or masculinity crises, which both Edward Mayhew and Joe Rose, the main characters in the novels I will examine, *On Chesil Beach* (2007) and *Enduring Love* (1997), can be seen to go through. Edward and Joe are two very different characters whose stories are set in completely different settings, and they thus illustrate possible outcomes of facing such masculinity crises in their respective environments. Edward's story is set in 1962, "in a time in when a conversation about sexual difficulties was plainly impossible" (McEwan, 2018, p. 3). Britain in the early sixties was still very much concerned with class, and the fact that Edward and his new wife Florence come from different class backgrounds may have contributed to their communication problems. Edward comes from a middle-class family and has a first-class degree in history, while Florence is an upper-class girl with a first-class degree in classical music. They are both young and inexperienced, and both still live with their respective parents – Edward even helps care for his disabled mother. Edward's masculinity crisis is triggered by ejaculating prematurely on their wedding night, a crisis which is further heightened by their inability to communicate. Unable to solve their problems, the result of his crisis ultimately becomes the downfall of their marriage.

Joe's story, on the other hand, is set in a much more contemporary setting. The plot presumably takes place in the late nineties, as the novel was published in 1997 and there are no specified dates in the novel. Joe is 47 and is married to Clarissa Melon. Joe works from home as a science writer, while Clarissa works as a literary historian. The nineties, in contrast to the early sixties, was a time in which the sexual revolution and feminism had had an impact on society. Even if Joe has a low-income and unstable job compared to Clarissa, he for instance never voices any complaints about it, and this might be indicative of the fact that it had become more socially acceptable for the woman in a heterosexual relationship to be the higher earner. For Joe, who questions his masculinity because he attracts the attention of a homosexual man, his ensuing masculinity crisis drives him into paranoia. This paranoia is heightened by the fact that even if Joe shares his concerns with Clarissa, she only answers by ridiculing him, and this almost leads to the demise of their relationship.

In this thesis, I will focus on Ian McEwan's exploration of the theme of masculinity in *On Chesil Beach* and *Enduring Love*, and how this is expressed in central characters who are made to go through what can be seen as masculinity crises. The paradigm through which I

will examine this is mainly gender criticism, where I will focus on the portrayal of masculinity and the identity crisis that ensues as the novel's main characters try to cope with the challenges they are presented with. In Chapter 2: 'What is masculinity?', I will provide a theoretical background for my analysis. In order to discuss how literature portrays challenges faced by real people, it is first necessary to have sufficient knowledge about the challenges in question. Since this thesis aims to discuss how literature portrays masculinity crises, a concept first and foremost discussed by sociologists, I have chosen to rely on sociology theory to provide a proper background on the concept. Additionally, men's studies as an approach to literature stems from sociology, and their terminologies overlap on several areas (Hobbs, 2018, p. 383). Also, considering that analysing literature through the lens of men's studies usually involves examining how literature describes *men,* it is natural to implement sociology theory discussing gender and gender roles. In Chapter 3: 'On Chesil Beach', I will discuss the character Edward in *On Chesil Beach,* focusing on how his character can be seen to inhabit some of the stereotypical traits associated with masculinity and how he deals with a masculinity crisis triggered by a failed sexual encounter. While *On Chesil Beach* was originally published in 2007, the edition used in this thesis was published in 2018 and will be referenced accordingly. There are disagreements as to whether *On Chesil Beach* is a novel or a novella. Here, I will treat it as a novel, as I believe it fulfils the criteria of that genre as explained by Charles E. May (2012, p. 265): it's primary focus is the social world, it pays great detail to individual characterization, and it does show character development despite the short period of time it covers, through the use of analepsis throughout the novel and prolepsis in the final chapter, which is set approximately thirty years after the period the novel primarily covers. In Chapter 4: 'Enduring Love', I will discuss the character Joe in *Enduring Love*, focusing on how he, despite his lack of stereotypically masculine traits, still experiences a masculinity crisis triggered by Jed Parry's infatuation with him. *Enduring Love* was first published in 1997, but the 2016 edition is used in this thesis and is referenced thus. My intention is not to analyse these novels as an illustration of sociological concepts, but rather to discuss how literature can be read in the light of sociological concepts described by various scholars. In Chapter 5: 'Conclusion', I will provide some concluding thoughts about the two novels. Lastly, in the appendix: 'Relevance for teaching', I will explain the relevance for this thesis in my future work as a teacher.

Chapter 2: What is masculinity?

In the contemporary Western world, most scholars believe that gender is shaped by historical and social discourse, not by biology alone. Clyde W. Franklin argues that there are three basic sex-role concepts: sex, gender and gender identity. Sex is often defined as the status of male or female assigned at birth, based on biological factors such as chromosome patterns, hormones, and genitalia (Franklin, 1984, p. 2). Gender and gender identity, however, are socially constructed. Gender is an achieved status, and is based on "the meanings ascribed to male and female social categories within a culture" (Wood & Eagly, 2015, p. 461). This perception of gender is also present in dictionary definitions. Merriam-Webster's definition, for instance, defines the concept as "the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In other words, gender is closely linked to whether one is perceived by the public as either masculine or feminine. Gender identity, on the other hand, refers to a person's own perception of their gender, and relates to how individuals place themselves in relation to the feminine and masculine axis (Wood & Eagly, 2015, p. 461).

Another important concept relating to this is the notion of gender roles. According to Brendan Gough, gender roles were originally tied to biological factors, and thus corresponded to sex rather than gender. The reason for this is that the concept of gender roles were established long before it became customary for most scholars to separate gender from sex, which did not happen until the seventies. Previous to this, the common perception was that only men could be masculine and only women feminine. With this division of gender and sex, then, came the perception of femininity and masculinity as expressions of gender rather than something that was tied to biology (Gough, 2014, p. 1149). The traditional gender roles, which saw men as active providers and women as passive carers, have developed alongside society at large, making the division between them less rigid. However, these old stereotypes still affect our perception of what is considered to be masculine and feminine to this day (Santore, 2009, p. 374): even if women are expected to work, it is often in caring professions, jobs that typically have lower wages than male-dominated professions such as engineering, medicine and law (Hinze, 2009, p. 617).

Parallel to this development came the idea that masculinity and femininity, as well as sex role orientation, could be measured. An example of a scale of measurement was the Bem Sex Role Inventory, created by psychologist Sandra L. Bem in 1974, which listed several characteristics that were perceived as masculine personality traits. This list included both factors that are biologically based, such as being athletic, and characteristics based on personality, such as being aggressive and assertive (Davies, 2009, pp. 58-59). Even if many scholars may argue that this checklist of characteristics is outdated, it illustrates an important point: what is perceived as masculine relates to a complex set of gender norms that has been in constant development through the years. This is what makes gender and gender identity socially conditioned and underlines the complexity of the term 'masculinity'. Additionally, the historical developments in gender studies show that it is also a temporal term, and its contents change based on where you are historically, socially and geographically (Franklin, 1984). Several feminist scholars therefore choose to use the term "masculinities", to account for the wide spectrum of different identities possessed by men in various contexts (Horrocks, 1994, p. 3). While the notion of masculinity is not constricted to apply to persons who identify as male, I will use the term to refer to masculinity as experienced by men, as this thesis is about men experiencing masculinity crises.

A large portion of the factors we associate with masculinity are, in one way or another, connected to sexuality. Sociologist Michael Kimmel, one of the leading scholars in the field of masculinity studies, states that "sexuality is the location of the enactment of masculinity; sexuality allows the expression of masculinity" (Kimmel, 2005, p. 143). The connection between masculinity and sexuality is a recurring theme throughout Kimmel's research, which highlights how men are expected to be sexually experienced, to be initiators of sex, and to perform well. However, masculine sexuality is not only connected to sexual performance and being desirable to a potential partner. It is also linked to men's need for peer approval. Since the connection between sexuality and masculinity is so strong, being perceived by his peers as being sexually experienced equates acceptance as a "real man" (Kimmel, 2005, p. 146). Another relevant point connected to men's sexuality is that many men have phallocentric tendencies. These tendencies lead to men and women having completely different ideas of what counts as sex. For men whose sexuality are centred around the phallos, only intercourse can count as sex, while women's definitions tend to be broader and include other sexual acts as well (Kimmel, 2005, p. 6).

Additionally, Kimmel addresses how women's sexual liberation has had a profound effect on male sexuality and its relation to masculinity. Whereas men had previously been assigned the role of initiator in most kinds of heterosexual relationships, women are now more freely claiming their sexual agency. In Kimmel's words, sexuality has been masculinized (Kimmel, 2005, p. 3). Considering that sex and sexuality has played such an important role in the notion of masculinity, this sudden equalization of roles in sexual relationships has subsequently led to changes in the perceptions of what masculinity entails. Kimmel further argues that this change, in which women's sexuality is becoming increasingly similar to men's experience of sexuality, is both frightening and exciting for men (Kimmel, 2005, p. 11).

There is a complicated relationship between the stereotypes to which men are expected to conform and subsequent feeling of inadequacy many men feel for not living up to those standards. According to Alishia Huntoon, one of the many stereotypes men face is that they are supposed to be "sturdy oaks" and that they should be able remain calm and rational even in face of distress (2009, p. 379). It might therefore feel as if they are an even bigger failure as men if they feel upset about not conforming to other stereotypes, such as being the breadwinner or being able to perform sexually. Women, on the other hand, are perceived as emotional and irrational, and are thus "allowed" to feel angry or upset when they are expected to conform to stereotypes they do not identify with. Feeling as if they are not able to meet the requirements of masculinity may thus create a vicious cycle for many men, where they feel inadequate for not being masculine enough, and that feeling of inadequacy causes a sadness that causes them to feel even more emasculated. It is this complicated cycle that often leads to masculinity crises that Kimmel (2005) describes.

Masculinity in crisis

In this thesis, when I apply the term *masculinity crisis*, I refer to Michael Kimmel's definition: "a general confusion and malaise about the meaning of manhood" (Kimmel, 2010, p. 18). This confusion often stems from men's realization that they are incapable of living up to stereotypical standards of masculinity. For many men, being perceived as masculine is crucial to their gender identity. The feeling of being emasculated may therefore lead to an identity crisis, in which they feel that they are not able to live up to the male standard. As more and more men started to feel this way, scholars such as Horrocks began to see this as an

indication of that masculinity itself was in crisis, and saw a need to redefine masculinity in a way that includes more aspects and nuances, in order to give men more room to stray from masculine archetype without feeling inadequate as men (Horrocks, 1994).

As mentioned above, scholars note that most men who experience a masculinity crisis do so as a result of feeling emasculated. What is considered as emasculating varies according to the definition of masculinity, as it is connected to the perceived loss of the male role or male qualities. In a Western, contemporary context, emasculation is most often associated with feminisation: possessing qualities usually associated with women (Lorentzen, 2007, p. 173). Seen in light of Kimmel's comment about phallocentrism, emasculation becomes a metaphorical castration: men who are perceived as feminine are seen as lacking what distinguishes them as men in the first place, namely functioning male reproductive organs. Since masculinity is often equated with power, emasculation is connected with being stripped of power and authority.

Horrocks argues that this crisis of masculinity is a product of the sixties' 'new wave' feminism of the 1960s. The increased focus on gender and gender identity, rather than biological sex, led to an increased awareness of how both men and women were expected to behave in a certain way. The increased focus on misogynistic attitudes in turn led to the discovery of just how unjust and harmful some of the gender stereotypes were (1994, pp. 6). However, Horrocks argues that it is possible to trace these crises back all the way to the Renaissance, as part of the fundamental crisis that people experienced as the concept of reason, science and objectivity were developed. He argues that men may long have thinking about and possibly criticising the nature of masculinity, only in an unconscious, unsystematic way, and not necessarily conceptualized in gendered terms. It is thus the systematic and theorized study of the topic that is new and contemporary, not the crisis itself (Horrocks, 1994, p. 7).

Masculinity in literature

The study of men and masculinities was practically non-existent up until the eighties and early nineties. Since then, this field of study has increased rapidly. Horrocks argues that 'men's studies' can be divided into four subcategories: sociological/political, confessional,

spiritual and popular. In the popular arts, the main idea is not necessarily to study masculinities, but rather to mirror the perception of masculinity, both as perceived by the individual man, but also by society at large (Horrocks, 1994, p. 17). Horrocks uses male images and stereotypes in film as an example, and discusses characters like Superman, Terminator and Freddy Krueger represent male dreams and nightmares. Superman and Terminator are seen as desirable role models: strong, well liked and always able to save the maiden in distress. Freddy Krueger, however, becomes an image of what most men dread: a savage without sympathy and self-control who is capable of inflicting great harm (Horrocks, 1994, pp. 145-146).

Recently, using masculinity studies as a way of approaching literature has become an increasingly popular approach to literature. However, given its recent emergence, it does not have the same well-established roots as that of feminist theory. Similarly to feminist theory, however, it stems from sociology, and is largely based on men's studies, and the terminology of men's studies and literary masculinity studies therefore overlaps on several areas (Hobbs, 2013, p. 383). According to Hobbs, masculinity in literature tends to highlight masculinities that stray from the stereotypical masculine character. Novels often include flawed protagonists, in the sense that they in one way or another do not conform to the gender norms often associated with the stereotypically masculine man. If novels do include characters that fulfil the stereotype, they are often deconstructed throughout the plot (Hobbs, 2013, p. 387). Despite only being flawed in relation to the reader's perception of masculinity and what it entails, the fact that these male characters are often assigned the role of protagonist suggests that literature advocates other masculinities than the stereotypical hero (Hobbs, 2013, p. 387).

Jane Tompkins states that the emergence of the American Western genre also is closely linked to the notion of masculinity, counteracting the rise of women's literature. Literature produced by, for and about women often emphasized typically feminine values, such as sentimentality, friendship, benevolence and sensibility. Tompkins argues that culturally and politically, these novels had the effect of asserting women as soul savers, thus highlighting their importance in society at large. Additionally, the widespread popularity of these novels contributed to allow women to occupy more both of the moral and the cultural space that had previously been dominated by men (Tompkins, 1993, pp. 38-42). According to Tompkins, this emergence of women as important figures in society, occupying what had previously been male spheres, led to a feeling of suppression among American men. The American Western genre, she argues,

emerged almost as an act of counterviolence: men felt supressed and devalued as the male experience was increasingly being forgotten in favour of the female experience and female values. The Western genre thus became a way of re-establishing the hypermasculine image of the male experience, with little expression of emotion, physical struggle and a hero who expresses himself with his fists rather than with words (Tompkins, 1993, p. 39).

David Buchbinder provides a more nuanced view on this, believing that there are few contemporary readers that would uncritically accept that literature "unproblematically reflects a prior social reality" (Buchbinder, 2007, p. 368). Buchbinder states that even if most literary works tend to take on the masculine point of view, they do not necessarily provide an accurate picture of the male experience. This can for instance be seen by not only examining what a literary work says, but also what it leaves out. An example of this could be the typical lack of emotional responses from male protagonists in prose fiction written by men. A male character may experience something that one would expect to provoke a strong emotional reaction, such as heartbreak, but shows little emotional response in the text. This exemption of explicit expression of emotion is likely to be the author's attempt at suppressing the fact that men *do* have emotional responses, rather than being how the author perceives the common man. Buchbinder thus argues that by examining both what is *in* the text and what is missing, readers are able to uncover how texts supress some things and imply others, trying to hide anxieties and uncertainties about masculinity by leaving out the cause of them, such as being emotional (2007, pp. 368-369).

Literature is, in other words, an important constituent in the creation of plural masculinities and in expanding the axis of gender expression. Literature can illustrate the many various masculinities, offering men alternatives to the stereotypical masculine man. According to Stefan Horlacher, literature

> possess[es] a kind of knowledge about masculinity that is not only relevant for a better understanding of its construction or specific configuration, functioning, and supposed defects, but also features a co-constructive potential which enables the reader to critically re-construct their masculinity. (Horlacher, 2015, p. 4)

Literature therefore has both interpretive and formative abilities in relation to masculinities and men's studies, as it has the capability to reflect and construct at the same time (Horlacher, 2015, p. 7). Horlacher also states that the more popular a literary work is, the more likely it is

that the work in question will affect and help shape the current construction of masculinity and male gender identity (Horlacher, 2015, p. 9).

By looking at how various scholars describe gender and gender identity, and masculinity in particular, what is brought to the fore is that masculinity is still commonly defined by stereotypes. While there is an increasing acceptance for a wider spectrum of gender identities, men are still often expected to conform to these stereotypes: being the breadwinner, the sexual initiator, and the sturdy oak. While many men find such traits desirable and aim to conform to these stereotypes, there are also a number of men who feel inadequate due to their incapability to live up to them. This feeling of inadequacy can in turn trigger a masculinity crisis: confusion and anxiety about manhood and identity. The ensuing analyses will show Edward in *On Chesil Beach* and Joe in *Enduring Love* experience and navigate such crises.

Chapter 3: On Chesil Beach

On Chesil Beach was first published in 2007, and is a novel about a young couple, Edward and Florence, and how they experience their wedding night. Edward and Florence come from very different backgrounds and have vastly different wishes of how their wedding night should turn out. Whereas Edward has been longing for the day that he and Florence can finally consummate their marriage, Florence has been dreading that day like the plague. There are hints that indicate that Florence has been sexually abused by her father in her adolescent years, which has led to a general disgust towards physical intimacy. In addition to this, they are both sexually inexperienced and have little knowledge about sex, which is illustrated by the handbook for young brides Florence has read in preparation for their wedding night (pp. 7-8). Consciously or by accident, Florence ends up overstimulating Edward so that he ejaculates on her thighs and stomach. She is disgusted and frightened and runs off, and Edward eventually runs after her. They both blame the other for what has happened, and they end up getting an annulment due to lack of marriage consummation.

This novel has previously been subject to several analyses, most of which have focused on two, often overlapping aspects: communication and sexual intimacy (Abbasiyannejad & Talif, 2012; Head, 2013; Hsu, 2014; Ndiaye, 2019). These analyses often argue that the reason Edward and Florence's relationship does not last is either their incapability to communicate, their incapability to engage in a sexual relationship, or a combination of the two. In this analysis, I argue that there is a third aspect that must be taken into account, namely masculinity. Edward believes that in order to be good enough for Florence, he has to be manly. He also believes that his masculinity relies heavily on his ability to perform sexually. Therefore, when he ejaculates prematurely on his wedding night, Edward starts questioning his manliness, causing him to experience a masculinity crisis. Edward's self-doubt both contributes to, and is made worse by their incapability to communicate, and can thus be interpreted as an important factor in the downfall of their relationship.

On Chesil Beach has an omniscient third-person narrator. This form of narration allows for an interesting point of view in relation to the notion of masculinity, because it provides insight into all Edward's feelings and concerns. Given that masculinity stereotypically is associated with withholding feelings and being emotionally distant, the narration gives depth to

Edward's character by showing the reader his fears and desires even if they are hidden from the other characters in the novel. Additionally, this omniscience enables the narrator to describe not only Edward's inner thoughts, but Florence's as well. This oscillation between perspectives creates a striking contrast in how the two characters experience the various situations they approach together. By dividing the focus between Edward and Florence, the narrator enables the reader empathize and be frustrated with both characters at the same time, especially in regard to their lack of ability to communicate. It also underlines how both Edward and Florence are governed by the standards of masculinity and femininity, as it becomes clear that they both believe they have to live up to their respective stereotypes in order to be good enough for the other. The description of Florence's fright and aversion to sex in parallel to Edward's obsession with the matter, makes it clear that Edward acts the way he does not because he does not care about Florence's feelings, but because he does not have the slightest idea how frightened she is.

Shou-Nan Hsu points out that the narrator also has another important feature in the text, namely being an example of all the things Edward *should* be. While the narrator is all-seeing and enquiring and expresses genuine care for what happens to both characters on their wedding night, Edward is by contrast closed off, fails to ask Florence about how she is feeling and seemingly cares only about protecting his own self-esteem (Hsu, 2014, pp. 104-105). This contrast is underlined as Edward briefly considers the possibility that Florence might be frightened: "He also had to hold off the thought that she might be terrified of him. If he believed that, he could do nothing" (p.97). He thus chooses to ignore the possibility that she feels scared in order calm his own nerves.

Edward is, in many ways, a stereotypically masculine character. He is presented as being very aware of how society views the notion of masculinity, and this has affected him greatly. He often expresses his concern of not being good enough for Florence, and these worries are linked to him worrying about not being "man enough", e.g. due to lack of sexual experience or his impulsive behaviour. However, mirroring the masculine stereotype, he is not able to tell Florence about these worries in fear of appearing unmanly. This illustrates the vicious cycle many men feel trapped in when it comes to masculinity: they fear being inadequate as men, and that fear heightens the feeling of inadequacy because men are not supposed to have strong emotional responses. Edward also shares the common perception of what masculinity should entail and has a clear understanding of gender roles. This becomes particularly visible when

he reminisces back to a friend of his who got a girl pregnant. In addition to talking about this friend as unfortunate, and serving as a "cautionary tale" (p.39), it is stated that he was "'dragged to the altar' and not seen for a year, until he was spotted in Putney High Street, pushing a pram, in those days still a demeaning act for a man" (p. 39).

However, Edward's position in his own family prior to his marriage is somewhat at odds with this traditional view on gender roles and how they play into family life. Despite expressing that pushing a stroller was not a man's job, implying that taking care of the family is a job reserved for women, he still contributes just as much as his younger twin sisters in taking care of his mother, Marjorie. Marjorie was, as Edward's father, Lionel, puts it, "brain-damaged", due to being hit in the head by the metal edge of a train door. Lionel describes Edward as having "been wonderful with his mother, always kind and helpful" (p. 73). In addition to helping out in the house ever since he was a child, Edward also expresses care for his mother by indulging in the make-believe world that Marjorie has set up, in order to refrain from stirring up any unpleasant memories or feelings in her. An example of this is that Edward, along with his sisters and his father, always thanked Marjorie for dinner even though it was always prepared by his father (pp. 67-68). By colluding in this fantasy, the Mayhew family also managed to retain a certain sense of normality despite their dysfunctional household:

> When Marjorie announced that she was making a shopping list for Watlington market, or that she had more sheets to iron than she could begin to count, a parallel world of bright normality appeared within reach of the whole family. (p. 68)

However, even if Edward cares deeply for his family, it is clear that growing up in the Mayhew cottage has taken a toll on him. Despite being a loving home, the fact that the children were forced to live in an alternative reality to provide a safe environment for their mother, as well as having to grow up faster than their peers to help out the one responsible parent they have, results in a dysfunctional family life and an unstable home. According to Dominic Head, Edward's upbringing is a determining factor in why his and Florence's relationship does not work. Head argues that his dysfunctional family life and lack of emotionally sustaining childhood provides him with an unstable foundation from which to build a healthy relationship with Florence, because he has no domestic model on which to model his future (2013, p. 119).

Angela Locatelli also discusses the importance of Edward's, but also Florence's, family background in their incapability to communicate. She argues that both households have developed what she refers to as "the language of reticence", where there is clearly a problem that is never addressed. In Edward's home, it is his mother's disability, and in Florence's home, it is her father's sexual abuse. They have thus been brought up in environments in which one does not discuss things that are difficult, but rather tiptoe around it (Locatelli, 2011, p. 236-237). In the case of Edward's family, not addressing these topics was a way to keep the illusion alive. The narrator describes that "the fantasy could be sustained only if it was not discussed. They grew up inside it, neutrally inhabiting its absurdities because they were never defined" (p. 68). Despite not being explicitly addressed, the same can be true of Florence's family: if the abuse was not addressed, they could pretend to be an ordinary, happy family.

One of the ways in which Edward's character conforms to the stereotypical definition of masculinity, is his fixation on sex and physical intimacy. Edward thinks a lot about sex, and constantly tries to cross new frontiers in his and Florence's relationship, much to Florence's frustration. Edward sees this process as a work in progress that acquires calculated movements on his part, as illustrated in the description of the unfolding of their relationship:

> Sudden moves or radical suggestions on his part could undo months of good work. The evening in the cinema at a showing of *The Taste of Honey* when he took her hand and plunged it between his legs set the process back weeks. (p. 22)

It thus seems as if Edward views their relationship as a journey in which the end destination is sex. This ties in with the strong link between masculinity and sexuality described by Kimmel, where men are expected to be more fixated on sex than women and tend to be more open about their sexualities (Kimmel, 2005, p. 7). He also argues that it is in sexual relationships that the greatest difference between genders is expressed, and that it is gender, not sexual orientation, that determines sexual experience (Kimmel, 2005, p. 3). Given the extreme contrast between Edward's and Florence's perceptions of sex and physical intimacy, their relationship as described in McEwan's novel illustrates this perfectly. Whereas Florence dreads physical intimacy and becomes nauseous at the thought of reproductive organs, having sex with Florence is Edward's biggest wish:

> if a genie had appeared at their table to grant Edward's most urgent request, he would not have asked for any beach in the world. All he wanted, all he could think of, was himself and Florence lying naked

> together on or in the bed next door, confronting at last that awesome experience that seemed as remote from daily life as a vision of religious ecstasy, or even death itself. (pp. 19-20)

Sexuality is brought up as an important topic already in the first sentence of the novel, stating that "they lived in a time when a conversation about sexual difficulties was plainly impossible" (p. 3). It is thus clear from the start that this novel will discuss sexuality and the difficulties that may come with it. These sexual difficulties stem not only from the lack of sex education and sexual experience, but also from their contrasting expectations to their wedding night and their lack of communication. Edward expects their wedding night to be the happiest time of their life, and the point from which they could be totally free with each other. Florence, by contrast, expects their wedding night to be a pain she must endure in order to be a good wife, which is clearly underlined as the narrator states that "Sex with Edward could not be the summation of her joy, but was the price she must pay for it" (p. 9). Instead of discussing their fears and expectations, both characters assume that they know what the other wants. In turn, they act according to these assumptions in an effort to please each other. Edward, who "mistook her turmoil for eagerness" (p. 85) continues to touch Florence because he thinks she likes it. Florence believes that Edward's love for her is dependent on her ability to feign interest in sex, and thus follows the advice she had gotten from the manual stating that "it was perfectly acceptable for the bride to 'guide the man in'" (p. 104), which ultimately causes Edward to ejaculate on Florence's thighs and stomach. The reason it becomes such a big problem is twofold: they do not know about each other's fears because they were not able to communicate beforehand, and they are still not able to communicate after the accident occurs. Instead, they start blaming each other for their flaws in order to keep up their own appearances: Edward blames Florence for being an inexperienced prude, and Florence blames Edward for never being satisfied and always pushing her boundaries.

Another side effect of this lack of communication is that both characters believe the other to be more sexually adventurous than they really are. Edward, who constantly misreads Florence's body language, reads her apprehension to being intimate as flirtatiousness. This becomes particularly visible as the narrator describes how Edward came to admire Florence's shyness, as he was "mistaking it for a form of coyness, a conventional veil for a richly sexual nature" (p. 21). He also assures himself that it is for the best that she pretends to be less interested, and that a woman with a larger sexual appetite might have terrified him due to his lack of sexual experience. However, even if the reader is faced with proof of his lack of experience, Florence is not. As they are not able to openly address the topic of sex, Florence

has come to believe that Edward has had several sexual partners before her, despite the fact that "They were young, educated, and both virgins on this, their wedding night" (p. 3). He has not corrected her on this either, as "He had always been reticent about the girls he had made love to, but she did not doubt the wealth of his experience" (p. 101). The expectations they have of each other thus contribute both to an even greater insecurity within themselves and to making communication even more difficult. Each feel as they have to live up to the imagined expectations of the other.

Edward's perception of his self-worth and his masculinity is closely connected to his ability to perform sexually. This mirrors Kimmel's statement about sexuality being where masculinity is most clearly expressed. Edward is terrified of disappointing Florence, and worries that if she perceives him as sexually inadequate, she will also think that he is not manly enough for her. His main concern, which is mentioned at several instances, is premature ejaculation. The first time it is addressed, the narrator describes that "his specific worry, based on one unfortunate experience, was of over-excitement, of what he had heard someone describe as 'arriving too soon'." (p. 7) A later description of an incident between them has a similar focus: Edward and Florence are lying in bed on their wedding night and Edward's thoughts drift off to oral sex, in which Edward realizes that "that was a thought he needed to scramble away from as fast as he could, for he was in real danger of arriving too soon" (p. 31). As a way to remedy this, Edward quickly starts thinking about something else:

> the Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, tall, stooping, walrus-like, war hero, an old buffer – he was everything that was not sex, and ideal for the purpose. Trade Gap, Pay Pause, Resale Price Maintenance. Some cursed him for giving away the Empire, but there was no choice really, with these winds of change blowing through Africa. No one would have taken that same message from a Labour man. And he had just sacked a third of his cabinet in the 'night of the long knives'. That took some nerve. Mac the Knife, was one headline. Macbeth! was another. Serious-minded people complained he was burying the nation in an avalanche of TVs, cars, supermarkets and other junk. He let the people have what they wanted. Bread and circuses. A new nation, and now he wanted us to join Europe, and who could say for sure that he was wrong? (pp. 31-32)

It is not until the end of this long train of thoughts that Edward trusts his strategy was successful, as he is "Steadied at last" (p. 32). In addition to providing humour to the issue discussed in this scene, this can also be seen in light of Kimmel's discussion of sex and masculinity, as he argues that this phenomenon, creating strategies for postponing ejaculation, is common among men. These strategies often involve emotional distancing similar to what Edward is doing, which he explains are connected to the fact that men are generally less emotionally attached to sexual intimacy than women (Kimmel, 2005, pp. 10-11). This lack of

emotional attachment resonates with Edward's general view on sex, as he mostly describes it in terms of physical pleasure rather than emotional connection.

By describing Edward's fear of premature ejaculation, McEwan makes Edward an illustration of a concern that many men have had for decades. This fear is rooted in the ridicule that men often face when they experience this problem, as it is perceived as a lack of stamina or an incapability to control themselves. This can in turn be connected to how masculinity often is equated to being *an adult man*, the opposite of a being child. Since lack of self-control is something that is often connected to children and childish behaviour, not being able to control one's own bodily functions is perceived as being unmanly. This ties in with the point Judith K. Gardiner makes about how masculinity can be defined as the process male children go through as they transition from childish boys to mature men (2005, p. 38). The narrator makes a comment about this connection between the masculine ideal and being perceived as an adult during the dinner scene, stating that being childish was not yet in fashion, and that a thousand unspoken rules still applied (p. 18). The unspoken rules may allude to the several stereotypes to which both genders were supposed to adhere, and in this case especially to what is expected of a married man: to be rational and in control of both his body and his feelings.

Premature ejaculation is thus often seen as being emasculating, as good stamina and self-control are seen as desirable, 'manly' traits. Additionally, it can be tied to Kimmel's comment about phallocentric tendencies (Kimmel, 2005, p. 6). If a man connects sexuality to the penis and being able to get and keep an erection, experiencing what Edward clearly thinks of as a type of erectile dysfunction could be experienced as being "bad at sex". In turn, since masculinity and sexuality are so closely intertwined, it can be perceived as damaging to their masculinity. Edward's fears of premature ejaculation illustrate this tendency well, as he believes that if he ejaculates prematurely it means that he lacks self-control and is thus not manly enough. He connects his worth as a man to his sexual performance, which again is linked to his ability to exercise control over his own bodily functions. As Kimmel puts it, sex becomes more about hydraulic functioning than about pleasure (Kimmel, 2005, p. 11).

Another traditional masculine stereotype that Edward can be seen to illustrate is the way many men feel entitled to sex. According to Kimmel, this attitude is quite common, especially when it comes to men in relationships (Kimmel, 2005, p. 14). This sense of entitlement is best depicted during the fight at the beach, in which Florence makes it clear to Edward that she

does not, and is not going to, want to have sex with him. She even suggests that he can have sex with other women as long as it makes him happy (which some scholars have interpreted as Florence revealing she is of a "Sapphic orientation", rather than a sacrifice she makes out of her love for Edward (Ndiaye, 2019, p. 370)). To this, Edward responds by reciting their wedding vows, "With my body I thee worship" (p. 156), claiming that she by that vow promised to have sex with him, and that she is therefore now breaking that promise. He does not, at any point, ask her why she does not want to be intimate with him. After the argument is over and Edward is left to his own thoughts, he claims that it is monstrous for Florence to deny him sex (pp. 158-159). These statements, combined with the lack of interest in why she does not want to have sex, can thus be seen to indicate that Edward feels that he is entitled to having sex with Florence regardless of whether she wants to or not. Shou-Nan Hsu argues that this is a shortcoming of Edward's understanding of sexual love, since he "sticks to his idea of sexual love, cares only for what he believes he, as a husband, deserves, and fails to understand his wife properly, wrongly seeing her as a frigid woman, which she is too frustrated to deny" (Hsu, 2014, p. 104). However, it is significant that this is a shortcoming shared by both parties, not just Edward, thus illustrating that gendered stereotypes themselves can cause problems between men and women: Edward and Florence's contrasting attitudes to sex exacerbates their communication problems and contributes to creating distance between them.

Even Edward's proposal to Florence is connected to this sense of entitlement. The narrator describes the proposal as the culmination of a long process of Edward trying to advance their relationship, which is going to slow for his liking, and his realization that the relationship is not going to go any further until they are married. His patience is worn thin at the time when Florence had rested her hand near his penis, and when she pulls her hand away "he knew he could bear it no more" and asks her to marry him (p.22). It thus seems as if the main reason behind the proposal is that he will be able to have sex with her as soon as they are married, rather than the fact that he wants to spend the rest of his life with her.

Despite not being openly criticized, this attitude is still questioned through the way the narrator reflects on both Edward and Florence's thoughts. Florence's love for Edward appears genuine, as she is willing to do her utmost to go through with their wedding night in order to please him, despite the trauma she has been through with being sexually abused by her father. She also immediately takes the blame for what happens, stating that it had been the result of her "overconfident meddling" (p.105). In addition to this, she is also willing to let him have

sex with other women, stating that she would indeed want him to, as long as it would please him. According to Hsu, this proposal is important because, while being a fundamentally unselfish proposal, it is also an attempt at convincing Edward to think about the both of them, not just himself. Florence believes the reason their wedding night was such a disaster is that by rigidly following the social conventions of their time, they have overlooked each other, and she tries to make Edward realize this trough this proposal (Hsu, 2014, p. 104). In other words, through this proposal Florence both shows what she is willing to accept because she loves him, but also what she needs him to accept if he really wants them to stay together.

The emphasis Edward puts on his sexual performance, along with how closely it is linked to his perception of his own masculinity, creates a vicious cycle that he is not able to get himself out of. When Florence overstimulates him and he does 'arrive too soon', he feels both humiliated and emasculated. In order to save himself from the humiliation of not being able to control himself, Edward places all the blame on Florence for what had happened. Suddenly, the calm and rational Edward that has been presented previously in the novel is nowhere to be found, and is replaced by an angry, aggressive and entitled man who seems to overcompensate for his own failures by yelling at Florence for *her* failures. This is somewhat ironic, as Edward's fear of premature ejaculation was rooted in his wish to please Florence. When he is not able to do that, he tries to save himself from embarrassment by making her feel as if she were the problem. He ridicules her for being inexperienced and puts the blame of his actions on her not knowing what she was supposed to do, as well as yelling at her for not letting him touch her until their wedding night (p. 144). He continues to yell at her until she is too tired to resist and admits that she did everything on purpose, even though Florence's thoughts indicate that it really was an accident. When she does admit it, he responds by calling her a bitch (p. 149). Wanting to protect his pride, he ends up doing the one thing he was afraid of: disappointing Florence by hurting her.

Edward's masculinity crisis is likely also connected to Florence's reaction when he ejaculates on her skin. Her initial reaction, triggered by the memories of her abuse, is to grab a pillow and frantically try to rub it off and followed by her storming out of the room. In addition to being embarrassed by his own lack of control, this reaction further worsens his humiliation and makes Edward feel emasculated, which exacerbates his masculinity crisis. Issaga Ndiaye underlines an important point in relation to this, namely that Edward interprets her reaction as disappointment at his sexual performance and the prospect of spending the rest of her life

with a man with an erectile dysfunction (2019, p. 369). This misunderstanding is accentuated by Edward's thoughts after Florence had run off:

> if, at the end of a year of straining to contain himself, he was not able to hold himself back and had failed at the crucial moment, then he refused to take the blame. That was it. He rejected this humiliation, he did not recognise it. It was outrageous of her to cry out in disappointment, to flounce from the room, when the fault was hers. (p. 134)

Since Edward connects his masculinity to his sexual performance, the fact that Florence expresses such clear disgust hurts him deeply. If one also takes into account his phallocentric view of sexuality, and the connection between pride and sexuality, it becomes even clearer that Florence's reaction contributes to his masculinity crisis. This is accentuated on page 106, where the narrator describes "how it must add to his misery to see her so desperate to remove this part of himself from her skin" (p. 106). In fact, their argument escalates as Florence describes the incident as being 'bloody unpleasant' and 'absolutely revolting' (p. 144), to which Edward responds by accusing Florence of having no knowledge about sex. This scene shows how damaging their inability to communicate truly is, as Florence regrets her actions because she knows they will hurt his pride even before he starts accusing her. This makes Edward's anger and accusations seem even more unwarranted.

In addition to connecting his masculinity to sexuality, Edward is also described as being aggressive and sometimes violent, two characteristics that are considered masculine stereotypes (Franklin, 1984, p. 5). Despite being portrayed as rather calm and rational in the scenes with Florence, there are instances where his sudden outbursts frighten her, such as when he tries to take off her dress but is unable to pull down the zipper. Annoyed, Edward sternly instructs her to keep still, and she is "horrified by the agitation in his voice" (p. 82). This impatience is further underlined later in the scene, where he chooses to leave her dress on and just remove her underwear (p. 97). There are also several indicators that he had been an impulsive and aggressive man before he met Florence. It is explained early on in the novel that he, in his younger days, had a taste for bar brawls (p. 38), but that he grew out of such childish behaviour. His last fight had been in January 1961, when he punched a man who hit his friend as he passed by, seemingly because Edward's friend was Jewish. After this, Edward's friend was so embarrassed by his brutish behaviour that he distanced himself from him, and Edward started to realize that he would rather be judged by other values than his ability to fight (p. 92-95). However, he still displays both an aggressive disposition and an inclination towards violence, especially during their fight on the beach, during which he is

"kicking at the shingle with unashamed violence, sending up a spray of small stones, some of which landed near her feet" (p. 148). Later, after Florence had made her suggestion about a sexless marriage, "he took a step towards her, with the hand gripping the stone raised, then he spun around and in his frustration hurled it towards the sea" (p. 156). In both of these instances, his aggression is directed towards Florence, and the fact that he "almost" hits her with both the shingles and the stone in his hand makes him seem violent as well as aggressive.

Adding to this, Edward is also portrayed as a jealous boyfriend. Florence does not seem to have many male friends, but Edward expresses particular concern about the fact that the cellist in Florence's quartet is a man. Therefore, when he is invited to sit in on one of their rehearsals:

> He was ready to accept – of course, he wanted to watch her at work, but more importantly, he was curious to find out whether this cellist, Charles, she had mentioned rather too many times was a rival in any sense. If he was, Edward thought that he needed to demonstrate his presence. (p. 124)

When Edward arrived at the rehearsal, however, he realized that Charles was indeed enamoured by Florence, but posed no threat to him due to his stammer and unfortunate skin condition (p. 125). Since jealousy is often linked to the feeling of ownership, one can thus interpret this as Edward seeing Florence as his property. This is sense of ownership is highlighted when Edward tells Florence that "You have a lovely face and a beautiful nature, and sexy elbows and ankles, and a clavicle, a putamen and a vibrato all men must adore, but you belong entirely to be and I am very glad and proud" (p. 103). In addition to largely being said as a romantic gesture, this can also be seen as an example of another tendency pointed out by Kimmel: that many men see their partners as their own sexual property (Kimmel, 2005, p. 31). By stating that Florence belongs to him, despite other men finding her attractive, Edward indicates that he owns Florence. However, this possessiveness can also be seen as a confession of love: Edward loves Florence so much that he needs to establish that she is *his* and is not going to leave him for anyone else.

Lastly, the notion of social class, particularly work and money, is an interesting factor when it comes to Edward's perception of his own masculinity. Mina Abbasiyannejad and Rosli Talif point out that the class difference between Edward and Florence is visible in every aspect of their lives, from taste in music and food to their hotel experiences. Florence, who comes from an upper class, relatively wealthy family, listens to and plays classical music, eats foreign

food and has been to several hotels prior to their wedding night. Edward, by contrast, comes from a middle-class family and listens mostly to rock, experiences something akin to a culture shock by eating at the Ponting's house, and has never visited a hotel before. They also argue that Edward dislikes being socially and economically inferior to Florence, which is made worse by the fact that he works for her father (Abbasiyannejad & Talif, 2012, p. 31). However, how much this bothers him does not become clear until their fight on the beach. As Florence accuses Edward of always wanting to wheedle something out of her, by which *she* is referring to physical intimacy, he interprets this accusation as her thinking he is trying to coax money from her. He is deeply offended by this, thinking that she believes he is dependent on her father for a stable income. Taking into consideration that one of the stereotypical traits of masculinity is being the breadwinner of a family, especially during the 1960s, it is likely that Edward feels that his masculinity is being threatened by the perceived accusation of him not being "man enough" to find a job for himself.

While the trigger for Edward's masculinity crisis was ejaculating prematurely on his wedding night, this crisis was exacerbated by his and Florence's inability to communicate. Edward goes through this crisis alone because he is not able to confide in Florence, and Florence aggravates the situation by not explaining herself. The combination of these two, Edward's masculinity crisis and their lack of communication, is fatal to their relationship: they get an annulment due to lack of marriage consummation. However, the story does not end here – the narrator also describes Edward's life after the annulment. This part is also interesting in regard to masculinity, because it describes the life of a man who let himself be immensely affected by the masculinity crisis that he experienced in his twenties. In the years following the annulment, the sexual revolution arrived with full force in Britain. Edward spends those years working in a record shop in Camden and engages in various chaotic and overlapping love affairs – ironically living the sexual life he could be living whilst married to Florence, if he had accepted her offer. He marries a woman whom he divorces after three and a half years, and eventually becomes a part-owner of the Camden record shop. Only then, after several sexual encounters, a failed marriage and getting a stable job was he able to look back on her proposal and realize that it had indeed been a selfless sacrifice. As he starts imagining what it would be like to meet her again, he realizes how little he has achieved. Both his sisters were married with children, while he, childless at the age of 40, had one annulled marriage and one divorce behind him. His parents eventually died, and he moved into the old cottage, of which his sisters were the legal owners, to live away from the busy streets of Camden. While it is

difficult to determine what Edward's life would have looked like if he had not chosen to protect his pride rather than keep Florence by his side, it is likely that he would not end up like this: a childless divorcee who does not own the roof above his head.

By approaching this novel through the framework of masculinity studies, an important connection is brought to the fore, namely the link between Edward's masculinity crisis and his and Florence's dwindling relationship. The focus of this analysis has been how Edward's struggle to conform to stereotypical masculinity, and the subsequent failure to do so, has had a very damaging effect on his self-perception. However, while masculinity studies traditionally discusses how the individual man relates to masculinity crises, this analysis also shows how these crises can be relational, as Florence both contributes to and is affected by Edward's masculinity crisis. While Edward's concerns about not being good enough, as well as his inability to communicate these concerns to Florence, creates a foundation for his masculinity crisis, Florence exacerbates this through her disgusted reactions and her inability to confide in Edward about her traumatic past.

Chapter 4: Enduring Love

Enduring Love was first published in 1997 and is a novel about the lives of several characters that cross paths during a tragic balloon accident. The main characters, Joe Rose and Clarissa Mellon, are out on a picnic date when a hot-air balloon rips from its moorings. It carries a little boy up into the air with his grandfather hanging behind it on a rope. Joe, together with Jed Parry and three others, run to try to save the boy by gripping the ropes tied to the basket and pulling it down by their combined weight. After one of the men lets go of his rope and the balloon lurches upwards, the remaining men all release their ropes, except from John Logan, who eventually falls to his death. Jed Parry, who suffers from de Clérambault's syndrome, ends up becoming obsessed with Joe Rose in the aftermath of this accident. It starts with a phone call in which he tells Joe he loves him, and develops into stalking and a murder attempt. It culminates as Parry takes Clarissa hostage and tries to kill himself, before Joe shoots him in the elbow and he is taken to the hospital. Naturally, Jed's pursuit of Joe ends up taking an extreme toll on Joe and his relationship with Clarissa, and after this incident Clarissa decides they need to spend some time apart and moves out.

However, even if the main story ends here, McEwan has provided two appendices in which he provides a kind of epilogue to this story. In Appendix 1, in which McEwan has fabricated a clinical study of Jed Parry's case of de Clérambault's syndrome, it is stated that Joe and Clarissa reconcile and adopt a child together. Appendix 2, which is a letter from Parry to Joe, lets us know that Parry is now in a mental hospital and is still infatuated with Joe.

Enduring Love has a first-person narrator. In 21 out of the 24 regular chapters, the narrator is Joe Rose. The remaining three are letters written to Joe: two from Parry, one from Clarissa. Appendix 2 is also a letter from Parry to Joe. Appendix 1 is written as a scientific paper, and thus has a third-person narrator. Whereas the omniscient third-person narrator in *On Chesil Beach* ensures insight and credibility, the use of a first-person narrator can make the audience question the narrator's reliability. As the narrator, Joe can choose which thoughts and experiences to highlight and which to conceal, and the reader may doubt whether or not the narrator is telling the truth. This is especially true in the beginning of the novel, as the story of

Parry's sudden obsession with Joe can seem so unbelievable that they could easily be figments of his imagination. The question of Joe's reliability is even further complicated by the fact that none of the other characters seem to believe him as he tells the stories of Parry's persistent torment of him; even Clarissa is starting to think that Jed Parry is just a figment of Joe's imagination. However, Joe's reliability as a narrator is restored in the scene where Clarissa is held hostage and her letter to Joe following this incident, as it becomes clear that he has indeed been telling the truth and she finally believes him.

Joe is very different from Edward when it comes to the notion of masculinity, and these two novels therefore illustrate Hosseini's claim about the nature of McEwan's male characters: the word *filiarchy* is the only word descriptive enough to account for the plethora of personalities and characteristics they inhabit (2015, pp. 192-193). Whereas Edward conforms to several masculine stereotypes, Joe's masculinity is more on the margins of the concept. He is also in a relationship that does not conform to traditional gender roles. He describes himself as "a large, clumsy, balding fellow" (p. 7) who is married to Clarissa, an attractive woman he still considers to be out of his league. He works from home as a freelancing science journalist, and Clarissa is a professor of literature teaching at a local college. She is therefore the one with the more stable income, as Joe's wages are dependent on how many pieces he writes. Joe and Clarissa thus challenge both the traditional pattern of the woman as the one staying at home and the man being away at work, and the man's role as the breadwinner. This is also emphasized by the fact that Joe is the one who cleans up after breakfast, as Clarissa leaves for work. In other words, Clarissa is described as an active character who is often moving around, whereas Joe is described as passive, mostly being at home, thus contradicting the stereotypical structure of a heterosexual relationship, in which the man is the active provider and the woman is the passive carer (Santore, 2009, p. 374). Jago Morrison argues that this combination of being a privileged, white, cis-gendered male and being the less attractive, less earning and passive part of a heterosexual relationship places Joe somewhere between the orthodox and marginal masculinities (2001, p. 257). Despite all this, Joe seems fairly secure in himself as a man, until he experiences a masculinity crisis.

There are two factors in this novel that can be interpreted as the starting points of Joe's masculinity crisis: one is the death of John Logan, and the other is Jed Parry's obsession with Joe. The former factor is commonly considered the trigger of the series of unfortunate conditions Joe has to navigate in the novel. This view is supported by Jago Morrison, who

states that “the novel opens with the symbolic emasculation of its protagonist, his heroic impulses immediately revealed as banal and redundant in a bungled attempt to save a child from a ballooning accident” (2001, p. 254). As the five men are hanging from the basket underneath the balloon, one man lets go first. However, no one is prepared to admit that is was them, and Joe is not able to recall who it was. He spends a lot of time trying to reason with himself that it was not him, for instance by stating that “I know that had I been uncontested leader the tragedy would not have happened” (p.11). Even if he does not admit to being the first who let go, however, he acknowledges the fact that he “had helped kill John Logan” (p. 32). It is after this incident that Joe’s behaviour starts to change, and he starts showing signs of paranoia. This interpretation is thus based on the fact that Joe sees his inability to hold on to that rope, and ultimately being part of the reason that John Logan died, as a result of his lack of masculinity. This can be connected to two different factors relating to masculinity, namely physical strength and morality. Being strong and athletic is one of the most enduring stereotypes connected to masculinity (Davies, 2009, p. 58-59), and letting go of the rope as a result of not being physically strong enough to hold on may therefore be damaging his self-worth as a man. This focus on physical strength is also underlined by how Joe explains that John Logan, the man who refused to let go and ultimately fell to his death, was stronger and more athletic than him: “He was not the youngest of our group, but he was the fittest. He played tennis to county level, and belonged to a mountaineering club. He had done a stint with a mountain rescue team in the Western Highlands” (p. 12).

The other factor, morality, relates to how Joe sees it as his moral obligation as a man to try his best to save the child in the basket, stating that “It was my duty to hang on, and I thought we would all do the same” (p. 13). Therefore, when he eventually lets go of the rope, it makes him feel as if he has not fulfilled these moral obligations. By explaining that the man who held on the longest was the fittest out of the group, it may seem like Joe places part of the blame for letting go himself on his own lack of physical strength. However, in Joe’s discussion of the moral aspect of this situation, he admits to making a conscious choice to let go of the rope:

> Hanging a few feet above the Chilterns escarpment, our crew enacted morality’s ancient, irresolvable dilemma: us, or me. Someone said *me*, and then there was nothing to be gained by saying *us*. Mostly, we are good when it makes sense. A good society is one that makes sense of being good. Suddenly, hanging there below the basket, we were a bad society, we were disintegrating. Suddenly the sensible choice was to look out for yourself. The child was not my child, and I was not going to die for it. The moment I glimpsed a body fall away – but whose? – and I felt the balloon lurch upwards, the matter

> was settled: altruism had no place. Being good made no sense. I let go and fell, I reckon, about twelve feet. (p. 15)

Here, Joe tries to excuse his choice by stating that after someone else had already let go of their rope, it was not possible for the rest of them to bring down the balloon. He knows that holding on means that not only will the child possibly die, but he will also die if they hit the electrical wires towards which the balloon is headed. In other words, he only lets go because he knows that he is not going to be able to save the child anyway, so he might as well save himself. The connection between moral obligation and masculinity is highlighted by the fact that Clarissa, despite being present on the scene, does not run for the balloon. When Joe recalls the incident, he explains that: "What was Clarissa doing? She said she walked quickly towards the centre of the field. I don't know how she resisted the urge to run" (p. 2). The fact that she only walks quickly towards the scene hints towards that she had no intention to help try to save the boy but intended to stay a spectator. This can thus be interpreted as Clarissa thinking that this, a mission to save a child which requires both courage and immense strength, is a man's job, unconsciously partaking in maintaining the stereotype.

It is clear to see that this accident has a large impact on Joe, and that this has contributed to his masculinity crisis. However, the most important trigger is not the accident itself, but what it unleashes: Jed Parry's infatuation with him. As mentioned previously, Parry suffers from a condition called de Clérambault's syndrome, a delusional disorder in which the affected person is convinced that a person is in love with them, often despite having minimal contact with them prior to falling in love (McEwan, 2016, p. 234; Jordan & Howe, 1980, p. 979). After meeting Joe next to John Logan's dead body, he starts believing that Joe is in love with him. This becomes evident already the same night, when Parry calls Joe to tell him that "I just wanted to let you know, I understand what you're feeling. I feel it too. I love you" (p. 37). Joe hangs up, and when Clarissa asks who it was, he tells her it was someone who had the wrong number. After this, Parry believes Joe is sending him various signs to tell him he loves him. How he touches the leaves of a hedge, for instance, is given special significance by Parry, who claims that the leaves that Joe touched "were different from the ones you hadn't touched. There was a glow, a kind of burning on my fingers along the edges of those wet leaves" (p. 96). Parry therefore interprets this as a declaration of love.

The role Parry's infatuation plays in prompting Joe's masculinity crisis is emphasized on several instances in the novel. When Joe is writing a piece on the Hubble telescope the day

after the accident, for instance, he suddenly gets a bad feeling that he cannot shake off. He initially thinks it is guilt about the accident, but realizes as he is typing that "guilt wasn't it at all. I shook my head, and typed faster. I don't know how I was able to push back all thought of that late-night phone call" (p. 39). This suggests that what is causing him turmoil is not the guilt he feels in connection to Logan's death, but his unease connected to Parry's confession and the fact that he has kept it from Clarissa. Additionally, when Joe and Clarissa are lying in bed together later that same day, Joe states that "John Logan's ghost was still in the room, but it no longer threatened us. Parry was for tomorrow" (p.53), indicating that Joe had found peace regarding Logan's death, whereas Jed Parry would continue to be a worry the next day. This is further underlined by the last line of the scene: "By our bedside in the dark, the phone remained silent. I had unplugged it many hours before" (p. 53), suggesting that Joe was worried that Parry was going to call again, and had therefore taken measures to prevent it.

A possible explanation as to why Parry's obsession with Joe triggers his masculinity crisis is that being the object of another man's attraction makes him question his masculinity. This illustrates a point made by Todd W. Reeser, namely that many men fear that if another man is attracted to them, it will make them appear less masculine to both peers and potential partners (2010, pp. 57-60). This fear is probably even further exacerbated by the fact that Parry is not only in love with Joe, but also believes that Joe is in love with him too. For many men, heteronormativity is tightly linked to masculinity, and the notion of being a real man is therefore often constricted to heterosexuality. Being perceived as homosexual thus equates not being a real man (Swain, 2005, p. 223). In addition to the fear of being perceived as homosexual in itself, one can also see this as a fear of appearing feminine: since being feminine is the most enduring stereotype about homosexual men (Hilton-Morrow & Battles, 2015, p. 81), Joe may believe that if someone thinks he is attracted to men, it means that he appears feminine to others. Since femininity is the antithesis of masculinity (Kimmel, 2005, p. 25), he will therefore be perceived as not being masculine enough.

An interesting point here is that Joe's unease starts already at the phone call, before Parry had done anything other than confess his feelings for Joe. This can be interpreted both as Joe foreshadowing what will happen later on as Parry's actions become more drastic, but also as a homophobic undertone, raising the question of whether he would have reacted like this if the call came from a woman. In fact, there is a homophobic undertone present in several scenes of this novel, for instance in Clarissa's mocking tone when Joe tells her about the phone call: "A

secret gay love affair with a Jesus freak, I can't wait to tell your science friends!" (p.57). Clarissa also asks Joe if he withheld this information from her out of embarrassment. Joe's response to this indicates that this was the case, as he does not deny his embarrassment, but rather states that "It was just one more thing" (p. 56). It appears that his fear of coming across as feminine is connected to wishing to be good enough for Clarissa: he is scared that she will not think he is man enough if she perceives him as feminine. However, one can also argue that this internalized homophobia is an expression of latent homosexual tension. Kiernan Ryan discusses this possibility, stating that "The character of Jed conflates the psychotic personification of enduring love with the inward threat of homosexual desire that haunts the heterosexual male mind" (Ryan, 2007, p. 51). In other words, Joe is bothered by being the object of Parry's attraction because it forces him to entertain the possibility that he too might be attracted to men. This is highlighted in the feeling Joe describes of being in an alternative reality as he speaks to Parry:

> How extraordinary I was, to be standing on my own street in my coat, this cold Tuesday morning in May, talking to a stranger in terms more appropriate to an affair, or a marriage on the rocks. It was as if I had fallen through a crack in my own existence, down into another life, another set of sexual preferences, another past history and future. I had fallen into a life in which another man could be saying to me, *We can't talk about it like this,* and *My own feelings are not important.*

Ryan also argues that this scene is Joe's way of imagining "the different course things might have taken to clinch his freedom from Clarissa" (2007, p. 52), thus suggesting that Joe envisions that in an another life, he might be have been open to having an affair with a man.

Going back to the conversation in which Joe reveals the phone call to Clarissa, there is also another factor that exacerbates Joe's masculinity crisis, namely that Clarissa belittles him and his worries. After Joe confides that he saw Parry's shoes following him in the library, Clarissa states that she does not understand what it is that he is worrying about, and that "it's a joke, Joe! It's a funny story you'll be telling your friends" (p.58). Despite Joe telling her that he finds this situation scary, she still trivializes his worries. When he later tells Clarissa about the numerous messages Parry left on the answering machine after their meeting in the street, Clarissa asks why he deleted them, stating that "*I* could listen to them. They'd be evidence for me." (p.85). She thus suggests that she is going to need proof if Joe wants her to believe this story about Parry. In order to provide her with evidence, he shows her the letters he has been receiving from Parry, but this does not have the intended effect: she becomes even more

sceptical of whether the story is true, and even subtly accuses Joe of faking the letters by stating that "His writing's rather like yours" (p.100).

As Clarissa explains why she is doubting Joe – that he is overreacting, he deleted the voicemails, and that their writing looks the same – even the reader may become convinced that Joe is imagining things. It is not until Parry takes Clarissa hostage that the extent of his obsession becomes a clear fact. However, Clarissa's tendency to criticize Joe does not stop even after she realizes that he had been telling her the truth all along. After Joe shoots Parry in the elbow and he is taken to the hospital, Joe and Clarissa get into a fight, after which Clarissa decides that they need to spend some time apart. She writes him a letter explaining this, in which she also blames Joe for handling the situation badly and pushing Parry towards desperation. She states that "You saved my life, but perhaps you put my life in jeopardy – by drawing Parry in, by overreacting along the way, by guessing his every move as if you were pushing him towards it" (p.218). By saying this, Clarissa indicates that she believes Joe's reaction to Parry's obsession pushed Parry to more drastic actions, and that he would not have gone to such lengths if Joe had not overreacted. In this letter, she also states that Joe did not share enough with her, and that if he had been more open about what was happening, they might have been able to "[deflect] him from the course he took" (p. 218).

This creates an interesting parallel to *On Chesil Beach*, in its focus on the possible damages of bad communication. In both cases, communication errors end up aggravating an already existing masculinity crisis, which in turn ends up taking an extreme toll on all four of the characters' relationships. However, while the problem in *On Chesil Beach* is the lack of communication, *Enduring Love* shows an example of what can happen when communication is there, but unsuccessful. When Joe confides in Clarissa, tells her about the voice messages and shows her the letters, she responds with laughter, disbelief and accusations. This intensifies his masculinity crisis because it makes him feel belittled, like a child, and at one point even insane (p. 58). By criticizing the way Joe reacts to the situation, Clarissa enforces the stereotype addressed by Alishia Huntoon (2009, p. 379) that men are supposed to be "sturdy oaks" and be able to handle whatever is thrown their way without much emotional response. It also mirrors a tendency pointed out by Michael Kimmel: that many emotional problems men experience derive from being criticized by their partners (Kimmel, 2005, pp. 139-141). Joe then feels the need to defend himself, resulting in aggressive and manic behaviour that makes Clarissa criticize him even more. It leaves them in a cycle where the

harder Joe tries to make Clarissa believe him, the more she criticizes him. Eventually, he realizes that he is in this alone, and stops sharing what happens with Clarissa.

Another effect that this masculinity crisis has had on Joe is how he feels about his job. When it comes to occupational stereotypes, Joe both conforms to and contrasts with the stereotypes connected to masculinity and professions. According to Susan M. Hinze, men and women traditionally enter into respectively male- and female-dominated professions, and male-dominated professions are on average better paid than female-dominated professions (2009, p. 617). Clarissa, who teaches English Literature, follows this stereotype by teaching a female-dominated discipline (Gender Distribution of Degrees in English Language and Literature, n.d.). Education wise, Joe also fits this stereotype, as he has both a physics degree and a doctorate in quantum electrodynamics. However, after a failed patent application, Joe was not able to get another job within the physics field and started writing popularized books and articles explaining scientific breakthroughs to people outside the field. Therefore, Joe's actual occupation contrasts with rather than conforms to the stereotype. Save for a few instances, Joe has been content with his line of work up until now. As a part of questioning his masculinity, however, he starts questioning the quality of his work: he believes that his writing is parasitical because it consists of rewriting the discoveries made by other physicists rather than contributing directly to the field of physics. He sees being outside the academic field as proof that he is an academic failure, which in turn leads him to question his self-worth. This feeling of being a failed academic might also be worsened by Clarissa's academic success, as she still loves and contributes to her own academic field.

This feeling of not being good enough also affects his relationship with Clarissa. As she is looking at him and complains about him shutting himself away from her, he contemplates their relationship instead of thinking about the sentiment of her speech:

> My thought was one I used to have when I first knew her: how did such an oversized average-looking lump like myself land this pale beauty? And a new bad thought: was she beginning to think she had a poor deal? (p.103)

The first part of this thought mirrors how he describes their relationship in the beginning, in which he states that it "seemed miraculous enough to me: a beautiful woman loved and wanted to be loved by a large, clumsy, balding fellow who could hardly believe his luck" (p.7). He clearly used to put Clarissa on a pedestal, but by stating that it was a thought he *used*

to have, he indicates that he had not been thinking about his inferiority for a while. It is the current situation that is causing the thought that she is out of his league to resurface, along with his general feeling of inadequacy. With this resurging feeling of not being good enough comes the doubt of whether Clarissa is beginning to regret being with him, and the fear that she too has realized that he is not good enough for her. Following this thought, he starts analysing her reaction to the situation with Parry, eventually believing she uses her reaction to hide that she had been cheating on him. He then proceeds to go into her office and look through her letters for signs of an affair, but finds nothing (pp. 104-106). Clarissa realizes this when she comes home, and it is this action that ultimately changes their relationship: they start drifting further and further apart while living under the same roof: "We were loveless, or we had lost the trick of love, and we didn't know how to begin talking about it" (p. 140).

However, Kiernan Ryan proposes a different reading of their relationship, arguing that the story of how the accident and Jed's following obsession with Joe almost ruined Joe and Clarissa's relationship was just a cover story: their relationship was already dwindling prior to this. He argues that the background for this is the fact that the couple is unable to conceive a child, and points out the uncanny coincidence that the accident which sets everything in motion includes trying to save a child: "The unspoken crisis in the couple's 'childless marriage of love' converges with an appalling tragedy in which Joe's deepest fears and darkest longings are brought to life and end in death" (Ryan, 2007, p. 50). To emphasize this interpretation of their relationship being unstable prior to the accident, Ryan also underlines how Clarissa's obsession with Keats' hypothetical letters to Fanny Brawne relates to Clarissa and Joe's own relationship – she believed that people who experience true love will be compelled to put it in writing (Ryan, 2007, p. 49). Joe himself addresses this in the novel:

> Lately I'd had the idea that Clarissa's interest in these hypothetical letters had something to do with our own situation, and with her conviction that love that did not find its expression in a letter was not perfect. In the months after we met, and before we bought the apartment, she had written me some beauties, passionately abstract in their exploration of the ways our love was different from and superior to any that had ever existed. (p. 7)

Ryan interprets this as a sign that their relationship is not as strong as Joe paints it out to be: Clarissa already believed that their love was not perfect because Joe was not able to put it into words on paper (Ryan, 2007, pp. 49-50). However, in my opinion, this comment says less about a dwindling relationship than about the feeling of inadequacy that Joe has come to develop as a product of his masculinity crisis. Clarissa has always been the romantic and Joe

the rationalist, and they have lived happily together for seven years without this being a problem. It is not until he starts questioning his masculinity that these worries enter his head, and one can thus interpret this as being a part of the larger issue in which he feels that he is not man enough for Clarissa because he is not able to fulfil her wish of putting his love into words.

It is also interesting to note that Joe's masculinity crisis and the subsequent feeling of inadequacy leads to a shift in the power dynamic in their relationship. As mentioned above, Joe describes himself as Clarissa's inferior. He also describes how Clarissa used to write him love letters in which she declared that their love was greater than any, and that he sometimes feels bad for not being able to reciprocate this gesture as he was a rationalist rather than a romantic (p. 7). Clarissa, then, is clearly the driving force in their relationship. However, as Joe is more and more affected by this masculinity crisis, this starts to change. As Clarissa's doubts about Parry grow, she retracts further and further away from Joe. He, however, is not ready to give up on them. This contrast becomes very clear in one of the scenes after Joe has gone through her letters. They are lying in bed together, and Joe interprets their interaction as them being about to make love and reconcile. Clarissa, however, states that "Joe, it's all over. It's best to admit it now. I think we're finished, don't you?" (p. 145). After this, Joe realizes that if they are going to be able to go back to where they were, it was his job to get them there, and he was going to have to do it by himself (p. 161). Clarissa, whom Joe has always stated is out of his league but has never had to fight for, is now suddenly *actually* out of his league and out of his reach as he has to carry the burden of saving their relationship alone.

In addition to this shift in the power dynamic, a power struggle also arises that was not there until Parry entered their lives. Before Joe's masculinity crisis, he inhabited a sort of self-confidence associated with the modern, white, middle-class man that allowed him to be unfazed by the fact that neither he nor his marriage conformed to traditional ideals of masculinity and gender roles. However, when this masculinity crisis strikes, the fact that he is not realizing his full potential, while Clarissa does, becomes a problem. Also, previous to his masculinity crisis, Clarissa had had the more active role in their relationship, and Joe did not seem to mind. However, when Clarissa does not believe him, and tries her hardest to make Joe believe that he is overthinking the situation with Parry, Joe puts all his effort into making Clarissa realize that what he is experiencing is real, thus creating a struggle in which both parts try to exert influence over the other. This shift in the power dynamic between them can

also be related to the fact that Clarissa, who had previously been the scaffold of his self-esteem, is no longer there to support him. When his usual support is being withdrawn, he tries even harder to gain acceptance from her in order to make up for the loss of this scaffold.

Just like Edward in *On Chesil Beach,* Joe considers sex to be an important part of a relationship. However, physical intimacy has a more emotional meaning to Joe than it has to Edward. The evening after the accident, for instance, Joe states that they had sex as a way to comfort each other, "heightened by all the emotional rawness of a reconciliation" (p. 35). The following day, when Clarissa comes home after meeting her brother, he states that "There are times when fatigue is a great aphrodisiac, annihilating all other thoughts, granting sensuous slow motion to heavy limbs, urging generosity, acceptance, infinite abandonment" (p. 53). This indicates that he has a strong emotional attachment to sex, which is a trait most often associated with women (Kimmel, 2005, p. 9). This emotional attachment is so strong, in fact, that Joe equates love with sex. This is underlined by how he sees their lack of physical intimacy as a sign that they are becoming "loveless" (p. 140). It is even further highlighted by his first conversation with Parry after the phone call, in which he asks Parry "You keep using the word love. Are we talking about sex? Is that what you want?" (p. 66), thus assuming that when Parry says he loves him, what he is trying to say is that he wants to have sex with him.

This connection between emotion and sex is also illustrative for Joe's general sentimental disposition. Throughout the novel, he comes across as an emotional and sentimental man, who thinks highly of others and will go out of his way to make others happy, traits that according to the BEM Sex Role Inventory are considered to be understood as feminine (Davies, 2009, p. 59). An example of this is how he describes Clarissa, for instance when she comes home from seeing her brother the day after the incident and he states that:

> Oh God I loved her. However much I thought about Clarissa, in memory or in anticipation, experiencing her again, the feel and sound of her, the precise quality of love that ran between us, the very animal presence, always brought, along with the familiarity, a jolt of surprise. (p. 52)

Another example is the gift he buys her for her birthday: a first edition of Keats' first collection, *Poems* from 1817 (p. 166). However, it is not only towards his partner that he is emotional and attentive. He also goes to great lengths to bring comfort to John Logan's widow, Jean, by driving to her house to tell her of her husband's bravery. When he gets there, she tells him that she thinks he was having an affair because the police found a scarf and a

picnic basket in his car. Joe then proceeds to hunt down the other men who witnessed the accident, and eventually finds out that John had given another couple a lift that day. The story ends as he and Clarissa tell Jean the news, and Joe entertains Jean's children by telling them about atoms as they hold his hands. This scene therefore underlines Joe's kindness and compassion, as he has done everything he can to bring peace to Logan's widow, and he is patient and caring with her children.

Overall, Joe is described as a character without much agency. He is not content with his job, he is not able to get Parry to stop bothering him despite how many times he has tried, and nobody listens to him when he tries to tell them what has happened. This changes towards the end of the novel, after it turns out that Parry has hired a hitman to try to kill him. Even if the police will not believe him, Joe knows that he and Clarissa are in danger, and consequently acquires a gun. The notion of having a weapon (however illicit), and being able to protect your family, is one of the more stereotypically masculine traits that Joe shows in this novel. It is also ironic to consider that this gun, which Joe acquired after Parry tried to have him killed, is what saves Parry's life as Joe shoots him in the elbow before he can slit his own throat. This is also a factor that speaks to Joe's compassion: even if Parry could have ruined, and potentially ended, his life, Joe still chooses to save him.

Fatemeh Hosseini points out that in the beginning of the novel, right after he describes the fall of John Logan, Joe states that "I've never seen such a terrible thing as that falling man" (p. 16). She argues that this imagery can be interpreted as a symbol of the fall of a certain kind of masculinity, namely the stereotypical masculinity. She further argues that it is the fall of this type of masculinity that allows the emergence of the filiarchal condition in which a plurality of masculinities can coexist (2015, p. 194). This is also mirrored by the characters in the novel: John Logan, the man who conformed to the masculine stereotype of being strong and heroic, falls down and dies. Joe, however, who does not conform to the stereotypical masculinity, lets go and survives. John Logan can therefore be seen to represent the stereotypical masculinity, while Joe represent the plurality of masculinities that characterize the filiarchal condition. However, the falling man can also be seen as a symbol of Joe's own downward spiral as his masculinity crisis continues to affect him.

Jago Morrison presents a different interpretation, namely that *Enduring Love* describes the triumph of what he terms *orthodox masculinity*, as it restores Joe's identity and his position

within the nuclear family (2001, p. 258). The evidence for this, he suggests, lies in the fact that Joe and Clarissa's relationship is eventually patched back together after Joe restores his own identity. This, he argues, Joe does through saving Clarissa from Parry, thus establishing himself as masculine, while at the same time restoring balance in their relationship: Joe is now the protector and is therefore more equal to Clarissa than he was prior to the crisis (2001, p. 257-258). However, I would suggest that Joe does not establish himself within the orthodox masculinity, but rather that he comes to terms with who he is, appreciating (and teaching Clarissa to appreciate) who he is as a man, whose masculinity is defined as being on the margins.

Similarly to *On Chesil Beach,* examining *Enduring Love* through the masculinity studies framework underlines the damages masculinity crises can create. Even if Joe is not a stereotypically masculine character, and is initially secure in his own skin, the masculinity crises he experiences is so consuming that it almost ruins his marriage to Clarissa. However, in *Enduring Love,* the relational aspect of masculinity crises is even more clear than in *On Chesil Beach*: even if it was Parry's infatuation with Joe that triggered his masculinity crisis, it is Clarissa's constant criticism of him that keeps it alive. Clarissa fails to see how her lack of support contributed to his developing crisis, and through her ridicule and disbelief she forces him to dig himself deeper into his mania rather than help him out of it.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Masculinity crises is an important topic of study that is discussed and examined by scholars across several academic fields, such as sociologist Michael Kimmel, Women's Studies professor Judith K. Gardiner, psychiatrist Anthony Clare and literary scholar Jago Morrison. Its importance stems from the fact that it concerns something that many men relate to, but are often not able to address freely without shame or guilt. The contribution of the field of literature is often based on literature's ability to illustrate such difficult concepts, for instance through making various literary characters go through what can be seen as masculinity crises, suggesting how different men may experience and navigate such a crisis. This is exactly what Ian McEwan does in these novels. In comparing the main characters in *On Chesil Beach* and *Enduring Love,* it becomes clear that Hosseini was correct in suggesting the term *filiarchy*, the reign of the sons, to account for the various gender identities expressed in McEwan's novels. This is one of the reasons that McEwan is such a highly acclaimed author: he demonstrates great knowledge of human nature through a wide variety of characters. These two novels are good examples of this because the main characters are so different, making it especially interesting to see that they are both facing the same struggle. This also illustrates a very important point: all men can experience masculinity crises, regardless of how stereotypically masculine or self-secure they are.

In *On Chesil Beach,* Edward comes across as a stereotypically masculine young man. He has traditional views on gender roles, and believes that the woman should stay at home and take care of the children while the man should be out working. However, he still helps take care of his disabled mother, indicating that he is also caring and compassionate. He is also described as aggressive, having had a taste for bar brawls before he met Florence, and has jealous tendencies when he feels that there are other men competing for Florence's attention. Despite being inexperienced, he is fixated on sex and physical intimacy. He has spent much of his time with Florence dreaming about the day he would be able to have sex with her, and has during their entire relationship he has been trying to coerce Florence into being intimate with him. He believes that Florence is just as excited about the prospect of sex as he is. Florence, on the other hand, could think of nothing worse. As a product of their times, they are incapable of talking about this prior to their wedding night, and their contradicting expectations combined with the lack of communication makes their wedding night a disaster.

Edward's biggest fear is disappointing Florence on their wedding night, and he has spent a lot of time worrying about his sexual performance. He believes that his self-worth is connected to his ability to perform sexually, and when he ends up ejaculating prematurely on their wedding night, it therefore triggers a masculinity crisis: if he is not able to control himself, it must mean that he is not man enough. Florence's subsequent reaction to this incident, wiping his semen off her skin and storming out of the room, only makes the situation worse. Through a frantic fight with Florence in which Edward tries to restore his masculinity and self-respect, he manages to hurt Florence's feelings so deeply that she leaves without him, and they end up getting an annulment. Edward's masculinity crisis, exacerbated by Florence's reaction and combined with their inability to communicate, is thus the reason their relationship falls apart.

In *Enduring Love,* Joe is a great contrast to Edward in that he is not a stereotypically masculine character: he is large, balding and average-looking, with a job that allows him to work from home while his partner, Clarissa, leaves for work every morning. He is an emotional and sensitive man, and he puts his partner on a pedestal. Despite not being stereotypically masculine, Joe seems self-secure and does not express any particular fears prior to this masculinity crisis. Joe's crisis is triggered by Parry's infatuation with him: being the object of desire of another man makes Joe believe he is perceived as feminine and homosexual, and therefore not man enough. This thought, that he is not enough, spreads to both his work and his relationship with Clarissa. He starts believing that he is not contributing enough to his academic field, and he starts doubting whether Clarissa is actually happy with him. These feelings are exacerbated by the fact that Clarissa belittles him when he tries to confide in her, making him feel small and driving him further into paranoia. Joe therefore stops sharing the developments with Clarissa, and faces it alone.

The fact that Joe seems so secure in himself prior to this makes his masculinity crisis particularly interesting: a modern man who does not conform to the stereotypical masculinity, without any apparent insecurities, becomes so threatened by his masculinity crisis that it almost ruins his relationship. However, it is important to note the impact Clarissa's treatment of Joe had on this crisis: even if it was Parry's infatuation with him that triggered the crisis, it was Clarissa's constant degrading that kept it developing.

Another common denominator in these two novels is the role of communication. *On Chesil Beach* shows what can happen if communication is lacking, allowing negative feelings to

brew unsaid and undiscussed until they explode in a desperate attempt to save oneself from ridicule. *Enduring Love*, on the other hand, illustrates a possible outcome if the will and capability to communicate is unequal between partners, as a relationship where it is supposed to be safe to express your worries and concerns will quickly start to crack if confessions are met with judgement and disbelief rather than compassion and understanding.

The analysis of the two main characters in McEwan's novels *On Chesil Beach* and *Enduring Love* demonstrates that these are characters that show emotional complexity. While Edward can be perceived as stereotypically masculine, and Joe's masculinity is more on the margins, both characters experience a wide variety of emotions in how they deal with the issues they are presented with. They experience sadness, shame, anger and regret, all connected to feeling inadequate as men. Additionally, Edward and Joe have completely different starting points, but deal with their crises in surprisingly similar ways: they both try to prove to their significant others that what is happening to them is not their fault. However, whereas Joe blames an external source, Parry, for his misery, Edward blames Florence. This might also be the reason that Joe's relationship survives this crisis and Edward's does not: while Joe tries to make Clarissa understand that Parry is ruining them both, Edward accuses Florence of ruining *him* and does not appear to think of the consequences these actions might have on *her*.

Male literary characters are most often described in light of being human, not in light of being male. This also applies to how male literary characters navigate difficult situations they have to face – their choices are most often based on the notion of humanity rather than the notion of masculinity. McEwan challenges this norm in these novels, focusing on Edward and Joe in the light of being *men* and how they perceive their own masculinities. By doing this, McEwan introduces gender as an important constituent in male behaviour, a constituent that has previously mostly been used to explain female behaviour. In other words, he is gendering his male characters. It is important, however, to underline that Edward and Joe are in no way presented as perfect men. Quite the contrary, McEwan encourages a sympathetic reading of two characters whose flaws are made apparent by showing how they go through a masculinity crisis. Edward and Joe are not examples of how to handle these crises perfectly but rather illustrate how men *may* experience and navigate such a crisis. Their experiences underline that, despite living in a world in which men still hold a privileged position compared to women, the individual man may not experience the same feeling of being powerful.

Chapter 7: Bibliography

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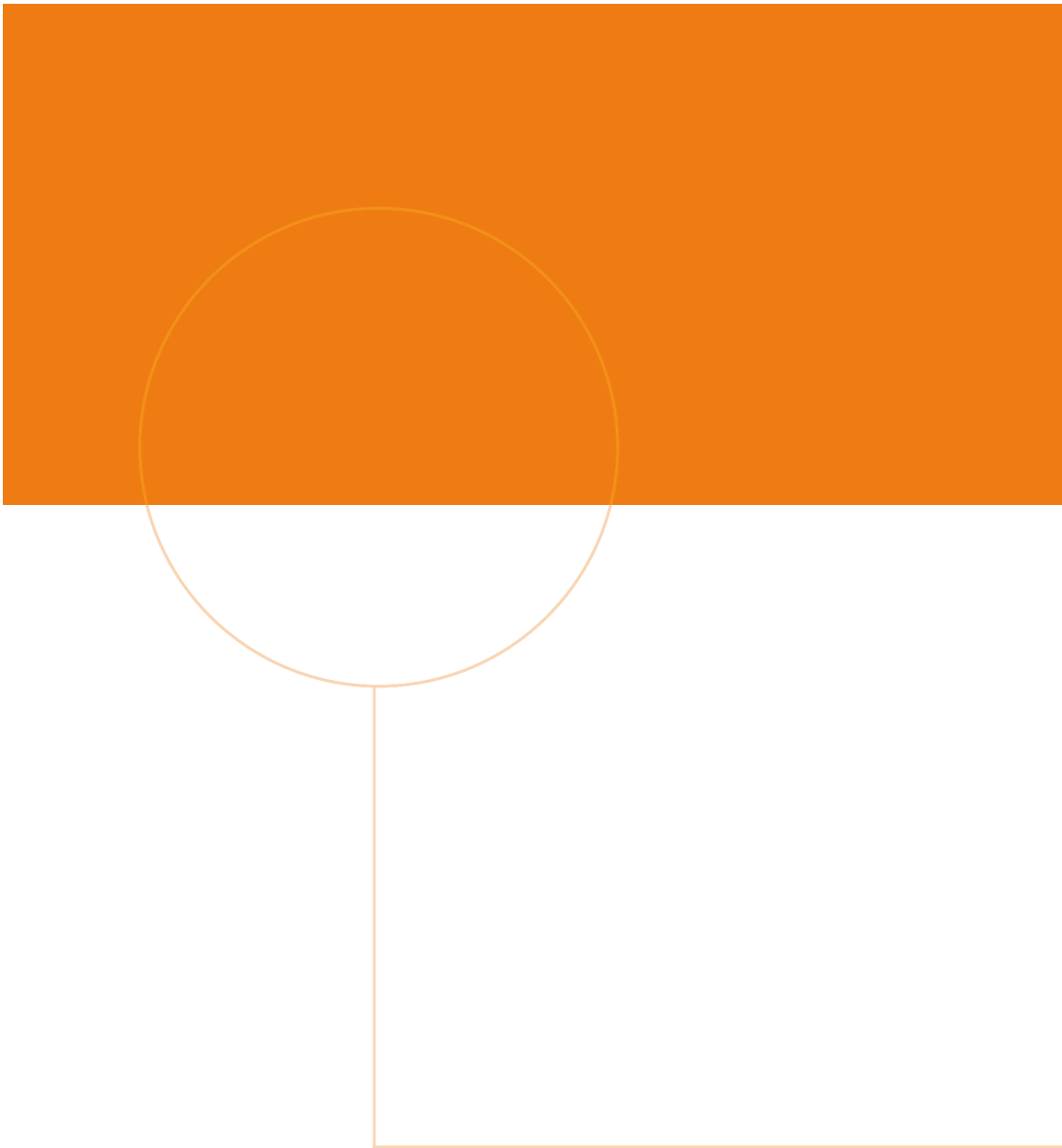
Appendix: Relevance for teaching

In the new core curriculum, three new interdisciplinary topics have been introduced. One of these topics is that of health and life skills, intended to promote physical and mental health and focusing on self-image and identity. In this curriculum, gender is listed as one of the relevant areas within this topic (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 13). This is indicative of the fact that gender and gender identity are seen as increasingly important topics, and being educated on the topic of gender is important both in order to approach this topic correctly with students, but also in order to meet students with as much respect as possible.

What makes the topic of masculinity especially important for future teachers is the fact that the Norwegian school system has been optimized for girls. The curriculum has had an increased focus on personal development, metacognitive competence and responsibility for one's own learning, all areas in which girls generally do better than boys (Henningsen & Nielsen, 2018, p. 19). This might be one of the reasons that boys are more likely than girls to drop out of upper secondary school (Henningsen & Nielsen, 2018, p. 12) Since we as teachers have to follow the curriculum, it is especially important that we create an environment in which boys are encouraged to participate, and find their needs and interests met, to ensure that they too feel that they belong in the classroom.

As a language teacher, one of the ways we can do this is to familiarize ourselves with literature boys can relate to and engage with. It is therefore important to have an overview over literature that tackles challenging topics such as masculinity crises in order to guide students into choosing literature that is relevant to them. In the new English curriculum there are competence aims addressing that students should be able to analyse, reflect on and/or interpret various literary texts, both after tenth grade, as well as first grade of programmes for general study and second grade of vocational education programmes (Ministry of Education, 2019, pp. 8-12), and this will be easier for students who read texts that resonate with them.



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