'Dirty, Dirty Job. Not Good for Your Health': Working-Class Men and Their Experiences and Relationships with Employment

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Introduction

This chapter draws on data from qualitative research undertaken in Aber Valley, an ex-coalmining community in the South Wales Valleys, which previously had two coalmines providing significant source of employment for men locally. The area now suffers from high levels of deprivation across a number social and economic indices. Unemployment rates, especially for men, are significantly above the national average. Male unemployment in Aber Valley is currently 9.4% compared with the UK average of 5%, although female unemployment at 4.8% is only slightly above the UK average of 4.5% (ONS, 2021a, 2021b). The long-term sick or disabled rate in Aber Valley stands at 9.4% compared with 5.8% for Great Britain as a whole (Beatty et al., 2019;

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ONS, 2021a). Nearly 35% of Aber Valley residents have no academic qualifications (ONS, 2021a).

The study on which this chapter is based explores the employment experiences and relationships of a group of working-class men who had rejected school and education more broadly based on its perceived irrelevance. Using data from semi-structured interviews, combined with visual methods, findings indicate that participants' experiences and relationships with employment are influenced by community traditions and a working-class masculinity associated with attributes previously conducive to heavy industrial work including stoicism, risk-taking and toughness. This led them to favour some but not all forms of manual employment, whilst dismissing sedentary service sector work and emotional labour. The appeal of manual employment is attributed to its physical nature, perceived health-related benefits and participants' awareness of personal well-being. These findings contribute to contemporary understandings of working-class men, employment and masculinity within the context of industrial change. It identifies some adherence to the cultural values historically associated with working-class masculinity, whilst revealing some shift in the men's perspectives on work and employment-related gender practices.

Post-World War II employment-related literature identified the significance of social relations and the inheritance of a masculine identity associated with stoicism, risk-taking and toughness (Cheng, 1999; Connell, 1995; Tolson, 1977)—characteristics which helped colliers withstand the dangerous, physical nature of their work. The inheritance of this identity led some working-class men towards forms of manual employment supporting the expression of such characteristics, yet often led to monotonous, unrewarding jobs (Ashton & Field, 1976; Beynon, 1973; Carter, 1966; Veness, 1962). However, the UK's rapid deindustrialisation from the 1970s onwards led to a secular decline in such work and an increase in service sector employment, although much of the latter consists of low-skilled, poorly-paid jobs, especially for those from working-class backgrounds (Lindsay & McQuaid, 2004). Much service sector employment also requires traditionally 'feminine' attributes associated, for example, with customer service, interpersonal communication and the presentation of self.

Despite all this, much research continues to identify the importance of a traditional masculine identity in the UK, especially among sections of working-class youth in former industrial locales once reliant on coal, steel and manufacturing. Whilst such employment has been severely reduced, many scholars have sought to understand how young men attempt to cope with the demands of education and work in post-industrial Britain (see, for example, Jimenez & Walkerdine, 2011; McDowell, 2003; Nayak, 2006; Nixon, 2018; Ward, 2015). There is, alongside such work, research documenting the changing nature of masculinity, including the supposed emergence of certain hybrid and inclusive masculinities (Anderson, 2009; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). Roberts (2018) suggests there is also a 'missing middle' of working-class youth (who have not disengaged from school/employment, yet neither achieved degree-level education or a professional occupation), who no longer fully subscribe to traditional gender norms and are instead modelling more inclusive forms of masculinity more in tune with the demands of much service sector work.

The empirical part of this chapter is divided into three sections. The first part demonstrates participants' attraction to manual work, the significance of place and space, and its role in shaping the men's views on employment and masculinity. The second empirical section illustrates participants' rejection of service sector work due to a stated inability to manage their feelings, the demands of customer service and the sedentary nature of the work. The final empirical section explores participants' view of coalmining and their perhaps surprising notional rejection of such work as too 'dirty', 'risky' and 'hazardous'. These findings contribute to contemporary understanding of working-class men, employment and masculinity within the context of industrial change. It illustrates a degree of compliance to certain traditional cultural values associated with working-class masculinity, whilst also demonstrating something of a shift in orientations towards the most arduous forms of labour—as illustrated in their attitudes towards coalmining as a form of employment.

Literature Review

Post-World War Two Studies

Traditionally, for many working-class men, employment decisions were largely influenced by local conditions and the types of employment available. Most important, however, was the importance of kin and community, which Veness (1962) explains through the use of her traditional-direction model. This model refers to the situation whereby a working-class young man's choice of employment is substantially influenced by friends and family, with fathers being especially influential. Walker and Hunt (1988) argue that in working-class families, notions of physical masculine toughness were often emphasised to the extent that non-manual employment was viewed as demeaning. Willis (1977) suggests that such views were often compounded by a masculine working-class culture, whereby practical skills were generally deemed superior to theoretical knowledge based on their perceived functional purpose. The following section discusses the employment experience of working-class men in post-war Britain.

Experience of Work

For thirty years after the end of World War II, the transition into work was relatively straightforward for many young working-class men. Willis (1977) suggests that some of 'the lads' in his study inherited and honed a masculine identity associated with stoicism, risk-taking and toughness imbued through social connections including family and peer group. Willis also suggests that much manual work has an intrinsic link to masculinity. Such employment often enabled young men to express aspects of a certain cultural identity, characterised by resistance to authority, banter and distrust of theoretical work. The often difficult and uncomfortable conditions associated with industrial employment were commonly associated with prestige rooted in assumptions that others

could not cope with the demands of such labour. Mental work or 'pen-pushing' was, in contrast, often viewed as effeminate or as not 'real work' (Harvey, 1990).

The notion that traditional forms of manual employment are 'dead-end' and offer little enjoyment due to the limited room for independence, judgement or autonomy, is a central theme across much early literature relating to working-class jobs (see, for example, Carter, 1966; Veness, 1962; Walker & Hunt, 1988). Such research relates to a period of relatively high rates of manual employment, with many working-class men employed in manufacturing and forms of heavy industry constructed as inherently masculine due to their physical and dangerous nature (Nixon, 2018). However, as subsequent sections of this chapter demonstrate, mass deindustrialisation has significantly decreased working-class men's access to jobs considered 'appropriately manly for their social class' (Harris, 2018, p. 29).

The Shift from Manual to Service Sector Work

Structural changes in the labour market and economy have led to a move away from industrial work towards service sector employment across much of the Global North, although this is particularly apparent in the UK. This shift has been detrimental to many coalfield areas, most of which have failed to effectively replace work lost with the demise of the coal industry. Employment in such locales now consists mainly of low-skilled, poorly-paid work in sectors traditionally dominated by feminised forms of labour (Beatty et al., 2019).

Service sector employment ranges from well-paid high-tech and professional occupations to low-status, insecure jobs in retail, leisure, hotel and catering, and similar forms of labour. Particular forms of low-skill, poorly-paid service sector work including protective services; warehousing; and distribution are frequently performed by working-class men (Roberts, 2018). Nixon (2006) argues that this is often determined by the nature of the work and the subsequent ability of working-class men to express a masculine identity, together with the inability to attain more prestigious, better-paid service jobs due to minimal educational

attainment. Lindsay and McQuaid (2004), however, report that unemployed men's refusal to engage in much service sector work, including customer service, and sales and hospitality, is also due to low pay and their aversion to aesthetic and emotional labour. For Nixon (2018), such forms of work may be "particularly challenging for [working-class] men, whose embodied masculinity seems particularly at odds with the kinds of skills, attributes and dispositions required" (p. 64). But, as the following discussion illustrates, some working-class young men seem to have found ways to refashion a form of masculine identity within the confines of service sector work.

Contemporary Studies

Some contemporary research demonstrates a degree of continuity with Veness' (1962) traditional-directional model. This includes Nayak's (2003, 2006) work in the North East of England which identified low-skilled, poorly-educated working-class young men who expressed elements of an industrial heritage embodied in an appreciation of skilled physical labour. Many of Nayak's participants were reluctant to engage in 'feminine' service sector employment. Others did, however, undertake such work, although this was largely influenced by the threat of unemployment. There are nevertheless certain continuities between Nayak's participants and 'the lads' in Willis' (1977) study, including significant commitment to the traditional working-class masculine ideal of 'hard graft' and a feeling that school was of little importance to their future. Resistance to service sector work was also identified by Jimenez and Walkerdine's study (2011) in South Wales. Their research identified working-class young men who were reluctant to engage in low-paid, low-status service sector work due to the negative connotations associated with 'feminine' forms of labour.

Nixon (2009) demonstrates how some low-skilled, poorly-educated working-class men are able to refashion traditional forms of masculine identity within the confines of service sector work. Those who took

part in Nixon's research gravitated towards a narrow range of 'masculine' service sector jobs including distribution, transportation and warehousing—forms of labour where customer interaction and emotional labour are minimal. Such employment allows a greater sense of freedom and provides at least some opportunities to engage in typical forms of industrial masculinity including 'piss-taking', winding-up and practical joking—forms of expression deemed unacceptable in public-facing service sector environments (Nixon, 2009). Such studies demonstrate a degree of continuity in traditional working-class masculinity and young men's employment relationships and experiences (Connell, 1995). However, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that "masculinities are configurations of practice that are constructed, unfold, and change through time", with hegemonic masculinity being malleable and susceptible to change (p. 852). This is evident in recent literature concerning masculinities and research regarding working-class young men and employment.

Anderson's (2009) notion of inclusive masculinity suggests that some heterosexual young men exhibit a 'softer' version of masculinity consisting of "increased peer tactility, emotional openness and close friendship based on emotional disclosure" (Anderson & McCormack, 2016, p. 547). Such assertions have, however, been critiqued due to its focus on a predominantly white, middle-class sample and their relatively privileged position which arguably enables them to "engage in traditionally feminised practices without having their masculinity diminished" (Gough, 2018, p. 10). Additional developments in contemporary masculinity theory include Bridges and Pascoe's (2014) notion of hybrid masculinities which refers to the "selective incorporation of elements of identity typically associated with various marginalised and subordinated masculinities and – at times – femininities into privileged men's gender performances and identities" (p. 246). Essentially, hybrid masculinities suggest that some men (particularly those occupying privileged social categories) display softer masculine characteristics in an attempt to distance themselves from a hegemonic masculine position. Gough (2018), however, argues that some men are engaging in traditionally associated feminine practices including 'diet, grooming, substance

use, and make-up application' (p. 19). However, rather than demonstrating a decline in conventional masculinity, these behaviours are, arguably, a reworking and repackaged form of traditional masculinity that corresponds with a more image-conscious, consumer-orientated society.

Roberts (2018) suggests that the 'missing middle' embraces retail and similar service sector employment. He argues that this can be explained through the contemporary nature of his research and participants' detachment from previous ways of being due to the decline in heavy industry, and the coinciding rise in service sector work. In other words, Roberts' participants are not tied to traditional predispositions but have developed a form of inclusive masculinity more in tune with the emotional demands of retail. There is, however, an important distinction between Roberts' (2018) participants and much previous research inasmuch as they had all possessed at least Level 2 National Vocational Qualifications, or equivalent. This level of educational attainment is generally associated with written and verbal skills, and other attributes, which help facilitate the expression of a softer, inclusive masculine identity, attuned to the requirements of retail work (Nixon, 2018). In contrast, Nixon's (2009) participants had no academic qualifications which hindered "the reflexive reconstruction of their masculine occupational identities" and their subsequent ability to engage in retail-related service sector work (Nixon, 2018, p. 64).

Contextual Information and Methodology

Data presented below derives from a two-stage hypothesis-generating case study used to generate questions for a larger study on the changing nature of masculinity in a post-industrial locale. The first stage was inspired by the studies discussed above and explored the relationship between place and identity, men, and their active rejection of education. The research was conducted in the Aber Valley, a location which previously had two coalmines: the Windsor and Universal Collieries. Their opening in the 1890s transformed the Aber Valley from a rural farming area with a population of 86 to an industrial community of 11,000

people and, at their peak, the two pits employed almost 5,000 men (Llwelyn, 2013; Phillips, 1991).[1] The Aber Valley has, however, failed to replace the jobs lost with the demise of the coal industry, especially in terms of male employment. Nowadays, many locals seek work in neighbouring areas. Currently, the three most significant forms of employment for Aber Valley residents are manufacturing (21%), wholesale and retail (14%) and human health and social work activities (12.3%) (ONS, 2021b).

The Aber Valley is the place where I was born and continue to reside. Despite the challenges associated with 'insider' research (see, for example, DeLyser, 2001), my familiarity with the local area enabled me to recruit five working-class men with whom I had a good rapport, and whose anti-school history was known to me. These participants were prepared to talk on an informal basis and helped to inform the direction of future research. Mutual trust and a degree of rapport created a relaxed and open environment.

Initial findings established that all participants were employed in manual work and favoured active, physical jobs. This fed into the second stage of the research, which was based on the following research questions:

1. How did the men initially become involved in manual labour?
2. Why do the men favour active, physical manual jobs?
3. What influences the men's preference for active, physical manual work?

Further interviews were conducted in a local pub which provided a familiar environment for participants and helped create a relaxed atmosphere and encourage open and honest discourse. The participants were Carl (age 37)—scaffolder; Geoff (age 21) and Mark (age 28)—labour-intensive factory workers; Steve (age 26)—window fitter; and William (age 21)—plasterboard fitter. Semi-structured interviews focused on their employment experiences and relationships at work. Participants were asked a range of questions about their workplace environment and job

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[1] Universal Colliery shut in 1923 but Windsor remained open until 1986.

roles. Visual methods were also used. Here, the men were presented with pictures of work in a call centre and in a coalmine. The rationale for this drew on the juxtaposition between the sedentary, stereotypically feminine nature of call centre work and the more active, physical and masculine characteristics of coalmining. Visual methods allowed me to distance myself from my insider status and any taken-for-granted assumptions about the participants and data collected (Sikes, 2006). The two pictures were displayed separately, and participants were asked to express their thoughts and feelings about the nature of work depicted. Their responses were probed and followed up with further questions where necessary. Interviews, on average, lasted one hour, were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data was then analysed and coded using inductive thematic analysis.

Findings

'Most Men I Know Are in Construction and That Stuff'

Data revealed that the men's employment histories almost exclusively comprised of manual labour, apart from one participant who had worked as a bartender at the local rugby union club. Participants were asked how they became involved in their employment, and their responses suggested a continuing influence of family, friends, prominent male figures and community traditions more broadly, as previously highlighted by Veness (1962):

> I just thought that was basically what everyone does. Men do don't they? Most men I know are in construction and that stuff. I just wanted to not follow the crowd but go in that direction like. (Geoff)

> I wanted to go into construction because I thought, when I was growing up that it was a lot of money you could be made in it. My bamp (grandfather) is a site manager, and he told me the amount of money plumbers and electricians earn. (William)

> I remember everyone telling me when I was younger to always get a trade behind you. My parents, my family, everyone…I have always liked being hands-on, and at the time when I was looking to do work experience, I went with my father for the week and ever since then I have just stuck to it. (Steve)

Steve demonstrates that his preference for manual labour was heavily influenced by a period of work experience with his father. He frequently used the term 'hands-on' throughout the interview process:

> It's work I like doing – hands-on work. I like making stuff, fitting a brand-new window for someone. (Steve)

When asked to explain what he meant by 'hands-on', Steve replied:

> There's not much paperwork or writing. You haven't got to think a lot. Once you've done the work you're done, it's something you've made. (Steve)

This is illustrative of a traditional class-based dichotomy between manual and mental work, including an aversion to 'pen-pushing' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994) and an inclination towards employment that provides material worth often valued by working-class males, especially in the former industrial heartlands (Nixon, 2018). All participants saw their job as enjoyable, even those employed as labour-intensive factory workers. Mark gained personal reward by achieving targets and knowing that he was providing financial security for his family. Geoff and Steve gained intrinsic reward by completing work tasks, and Carl achieved satisfaction in the knowledge that he was delivering a safe working environment. All participants highlighted the importance of movement and physical activity. The next section explores the men's views about the call centre picture.

'I'm Just an Active Guy and Want to Keep Moving'

All participants stated that they would be reluctant to work in a call centre. One of the overriding deterrents was the need to interact on a telephone: "I am not very good on the phone talking to people so I wouldn't be good at that job" (Mark). Mark's response acknowledges underdeveloped communication skills—a problem faced by many young men with low-level educational attainment (Nixon, 2006). Other participants demonstrated traditional working-class masculine qualities and an unwillingness to be submissive, whilst recognising their inability to control and manage their feelings and responses:

> I am not very good on the phone talking to people. You gotta have good patience see for talking on the phone to people, and they're screaming down to you, sometimes it's hard to control your emotion down the phone like. (William)

> You're stuck in a place all day…having people abuse you down the phone. I don't think I could handle that just sat down. I would end up eating a lot and being fat and lazy. And I just don't like jobs like that. (Steve)

Steve's response presents a further reason for his aversion to call centre work—its sedentary nature. Throughout the interviews, participants frequently referred to an overwhelming need to be physically active. Carl and Mark commented:

> I'm not one to sit down and go on the computer typing all day. I would rather be physically doing something for hours and hours in my day than sat there. (Carl)

> I think it's better because, like I said, I like to be on my feet and occupied. I don't want to sit down on my arse all day! I'm happy being on my feet. I'm just an active guy and want to keep moving. (Mark)

Geoff, William and Steve added:

I don't know. I just think everyone would rather be on their feet instead of sitting down all day. I like to move about. I like to be on my feet all the time. Keeps you fit don't it – constantly active as well. (Geoff)

It's constantly busy, you're carrying boards all day. It's kind of like going to the gym in a way because you're constantly lifting, you're getting good exercise which keeps you physically fit. (William)

I couldn't work in an office job. I don't mind doing a bit of grafting. There's some weight on those windows. I don't go to the gym; I don't have time to go to the gym…so it does something for tha. It's fitness at the end of the day. (Steve)

Within both William and Steve's responses, there is reference to a gym and an associated manufactured form of fitness and health awareness, as opposed to a consequential masculine embodied fitness related to heavy industrial labour (Walkerdine & Jimenez, 2012). This arguably begins to challenge notions of traditional masculine orientations to employment evident in much previous research. In other words, their responses demonstrate that the significance of movement and being active is closely associated with being physically fit and healthy. Conversely, Sloan et al. (2015) argue that the traditional marker of hegemonic masculinity 'stoicism'—a desire to be self-sufficient and strong—prevents many men from "caring for their physical and psychological health since displaying a concern for one's wellbeing may be deemed feminine or weak" (p. 206). The following section relates to the coalmining image.

'Dirty, Dirty Job Like. Not Good for Your Health'

It was initially expected that the participants would comment positively on the coalmining image as it is a stereotypically hyper-masculine form of employment. However, all but one of them responded negatively to the photograph. This related largely to concerns about personal health, dirt and the hazardous nature of coalmining:

There's not the most health and safety down there. Plus, there's a lot of work to be done down there. They've probably got good friendships down there like, but it's just the environment like. They're probably breathing all types of shit into them and whatever like. It's just unhealthy. (William)

Dark, messy, sweatbox – it's got to be about 50 degrees down there. They've all got their tops off, pitch black and you're proper swinging back – they are heavy as fuck! (Geoff)

I wouldn't enjoy coalmining. Confined space, chucking at some coal, pickaxe, no health and safety, when that hits you, you're fucking dust. Stinking dirty, long hours. I wouldn't want to get down there. (Mark)

If someone said to me now, 'stop your job and go down there', I would say, 'no'. Dirty, dirty job like. Not good for your health. I wouldn't feel safe down there. Anything could fall on you couldn't it, collapse. I wouldn't like to do it. (Steve)

Such responses demonstrate particular concerns about the dirty, dangerous nature of coalmining. The identification of such aversive characteristics reveals a fragmentation of the historical link between masculinity, hard labour and dirt (McElhinny, 1994; Walkerdine & Jimenez 2012). It also demonstrates a shift away from findings of previous research in South Wales with redundant steel workers which highlights participants' nostalgic recollections: "You come home, there's no dirt under your nails, your hands are completely clean, it's not proper work" (Walkerdine & Jimenez, 2012, p. 92). The disparity between such findings from earlier research and data presented in this chapter may be partly explained by the fact that my participants had not previously been directly employed in heavy industry, and by the fact that they were substantially younger than those who took part in Walkerdine and Jimenez's study. Interestingly, Carl, my oldest participant, was the most positive in his attitude towards coalmining:

It's a bit of graft which is what I like – this guy would 100 percent be on-site if this was 2018. If you're a grafter, you're a grafter. These guys

with dirty faces, they don't give a fuck about the dirt. They're not doing their hair – they're just there to graft boy. (Carl)

Carl's response contains revealing terminology. Through the comment, "These guys with dirty faces, they don't give a fuck about the dirt. They're not doing their hair", he distances miners from contemporary practices of male grooming and a focus on image consciousness sometimes described as metrosexuality (Hall, 2014). More generally, however, participants' aversion to coalmining was related to concerns about risk to their personal health and safety. Combined concerns about dirt and danger provide evidence about the changing nature of young men's masculinity, particularly in relation to forms of work traditionally associated with certain forms of machismo, prestige and hyper-masculinity.

Courtenay et al. (2002) argue that men's construction and demonstration of masculinity include embracing risk, acting fearlessly and projecting such characteristics. The exhibition of such behaviours demonstrates the appearance of being strong and a denial of weakness and vulnerability, which historically helped reinforce a distinction between male behaviours and traditional female practices such as caring for one's appearance, health and well-being. Moreover, men who reject this demonstration and fail to engage in risky behaviour may be seen as less masculine (Courtenay, 2000). Participants' aversion to risk, awareness of personal health and a rejection of work that threatens these aspects demonstrate a deviation from the traditional masculine markers of risk-taking and stoicism (Connell, 1995). Contrary to much research on working-class masculinity, my participants are more equivocal about hegemonic forms of masculinity often associated with coalmining.

Discussion and Conclusion

Data presented in this chapter highlights that, despite a decline in manual employment and the concomitant rise in service sector work, the men in this research were still generally drawn towards traditional masculine forms of employment. This can arguably be traced back to the

influence of long-standing community traditions and of friends, family and other prominent male figures (Veness, 1962). This, it is argued, led the men to view manual work as a natural and desirable choice. Contrary to the notion that unskilled and semi-skilled jobs constitute 'dead-end' work offering little enjoyment, those who took part in my research appear to gain a sense of personal satisfaction and seem to have relatively positive workplace experiences.

Participants articulated a traditional masculine desire for 'hands-on' work and emphasised the importance of physically active employment as opposed to mental or emotional labour. Through the use of visual methods, it was possible to identify particular aspects of service sector work which discouraged the men from pursuing such employment. One of the most prominent features that deterred participants from call centre work was the necessity to engage with a telephone, an aversion influenced by their unwillingness to be submissive, whilst also recognising their inability to manage their feelings and responses.

The call centre image also developed a discussion that established participants' dislike for sedentary work. But rather than reconfirming their traditional masculine identity, this dialogue was related partly to their conscious recognition of personal health and the notion that the physicality of their current employment provided them with fitness-related benefits. This concern for personal health appears to deviate, to some extent, from the health-averse and 'unhealthy' practices often associated with certain traditional discourses of masculinity (Courtenay, 2000; Garfield et al., 2008). Discussions about the coalmining image also revealed some deviation from traditional discourses and performances of masculinity based on the validation of self-worth and durability in harsh, dangerous working environments. Participants actively rejected the dirty, unsafe conditions associated with coalmining.

The notion of hybrid masculinities may go some way towards explaining participants' views and opinions. The men's attraction to manual labour demonstrates an affiliation with protest masculinity and values including toughness and stoicism (Connell, 1995; McDowell, 2003). Whereas concern for personal health may be understood as incorporating "elements associated with…subordinated masculinities and femininities" (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, p. 246). Collectively, the men's

views and opinions, which include toughness together with an admittance of vulnerability, arguably provide some support for the notion of hybrid masculinities (Messner, 2007).

Further complexity was evident in participants' focus on physical fitness which apparently contradicts the health-averse practices often associated with traditional forms of masculinity (Courtenay, 2000; Garfield et al., 2008). However, contemporary society has become more consumerist and individualistic; the body has, for many, become a crucial source of identity; and personal health has been recast as the responsibility of the individual (Gill et al., 2005). Arguably, the men's apparent concern for personal health reflects such changes, especially given an increased awareness of issues around men's health. The coalmining image adds a further complication. My participants are employed in relatively dirty and possibly dangerous forms of work. Subsequently, one could argue that their negative response to mining is somewhat surprising, given the hyper-masculine nature of that industry. The extreme danger associated with coalmining was, however, far greater than that which is experienced by those who took part in research reported in this chapter. Carl, however, the oldest participant, notably viewed coalmining in a more positive light than the younger men who took part in the study.

Following Roberts (2018), the findings of my own research suggest that traditional forms of masculinity are undergoing some form of transition. The data also demonstrates that this transition is constrained and complex due to the influence of place-based cultural traditions linked to historical factors, including the strong association with heavy industry and an enduring legacy of traditional masculinity (Connell, 1995). The complexity of this data, coupled with the multiple potential interpretations and the narrow focus of the research, makes a precise explanation difficult. Nevertheless, the findings identify a degree of continuity in the men's gendered practices and elements related to protest masculinity were evident, including an attraction to manual work and an inability or unwillingness to engage in emotional labour. Yet, there also seems to be a possible reconfiguration in the men's view of employment, which displays an unconventional work-related health interest, aversion to extreme risk and some admittance to vulnerability.

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