

## **Reconceptualising vulnerability and its value for managerial identity and learning**

### **Abstract**

Dominant, masculinised constructions of managerial identities are associated with expectations of being in control and strong, and not with vulnerability. Managers may conceal vulnerability and protect themselves through defensive identity work, and such responses may close down learning opportunities. We reconceptualise vulnerability and recognise its value for managerial identity and learning by drawing upon Butler's theory of vulnerability. Analysing interviews with middle and senior managers and presenting our own reflexive learning, we address a lack of empirical accounts of managerial vulnerability. We offer three processes of relational vulnerability: 1) recognising and claiming vulnerability; 2) developing social support to share vulnerability with trusted others and; 3) recognising alternative ways of conceptualising and responding to vulnerability. Rather than defensiveness in the face of vulnerability constructed as weakness, the value of vulnerability lies in its openness and its generative capacity for alternative ways of managerial being and learning.

### **Keywords**

Vulnerability, identity work, managerial identity, managerial learning, defensiveness, openness

## **Introduction**

Managerial learning entails developing knowledge and skills and incorporating, modifying or rejecting ‘notions of the manager’ (Watson, 2008:129) into one’s identity. We understand identity as social constructions of who we, and others, think we are and should be (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2008) in particular contexts. Social constructions of ourselves are formed, maintained, strengthened, revised and repaired (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) through identity work. In doing identity work, managers draw on ‘a multiplicity of socially available discourses’ including various managerial discourses (Watson, 2008:128). Discourses shaping social constructions of ‘the manager’ (Hay, 2014; Watson, 2008) tend to be dominated by masculinised notions of ‘strength’ (Deslandes, 2018:8) and being ‘in control, right and knowledgeable’ (Hay, 2014:512). Conceived as something to hide or overcome (Harrison, 2008; Hay, 2014), vulnerability does not fit with dominant managerial discourses. Not surprisingly, when managers experience vulnerability, they commonly adopt a mask of invulnerability to protect themselves. Furthermore, admitting vulnerability could itself render the manager exposed to identity threat (Petriglieri, 2011) and provoke defensive identity work. Such responses to dominant conceptualisations of vulnerability, we argue, inhibit its generative capacity for managerial identity and learning.

Current literature on management education and learning (Hay, 2014; Warhurst, 2011) is beginning to acknowledge the importance of vulnerability. Hay (2014) proposes that management education can support managers’ identity work by ‘provid[ing] alternative discursive resources’ (p.520) which recognise the realistic limits of available managerial identities and acknowledge ‘a greater degree of...vulnerability’ (p.521). Deslandes (2018:8) argues that mainstream management education pays ‘too little attention to...vulnerability’. Furthermore, empirical accounts of vulnerability, conceived as strength rather than weakness,

in a managerial context are lacking, as is consideration of the implications of such reconceptualisation for managerial identity and learning.

Our purpose then is, firstly, to reconceptualise vulnerability and recognise its value for managerial identity and learning by drawing upon Butler's theory of relational vulnerability. Secondly, we extend understandings of managers' experiences of vulnerability, and highlight its relational processes, through our empirical data and reflexive accounts. From this empirical analysis, thirdly, we offer three processes of relational vulnerability: 1) recognising and claiming vulnerability; 2) developing social support to share vulnerability with trusted others; and 3) recognising alternative ways of conceptualising and responding to vulnerability. Fourthly, we raise consciousness to the value of vulnerability for managerial identity and its implications for defensive identity work. By claiming vulnerability, and by recognising and accepting their limitations, managers may drop the mask of managerial control and strength, and the need to engage in defensive identity work is lessened. Rather than defensiveness in the face of vulnerability constructed as weakness, the strength and value of vulnerability lies its opportunity to open up alternative ways of managerial being and learning.

The paper is structured as follows. We outline our understandings of identity work and managerial learning, and review how existing identity work literature relates vulnerability, identity work and managerial learning. We then draw upon Butler's thesis of vulnerability to elaborate our reconceptualisation of vulnerability and its relational processes – risk of harm and loss *and* connection, through our relations to others; emotional expressions; power; and recognition – and consider its implications for identity work. Next, we outline the empirical study and analytical approach and present data illustrations to highlight the relational processes of vulnerability. Finally, we discuss the value of recognising vulnerability as strength and openness for managerial identity and learning.

It is important to note that the members of the research team have managerial responsibilities and, when working through the paper theory development, we became aware of our personal defensive identity work to protect ourselves in vulnerable situations. We are also conscious that confiding in each other, without fear of being misunderstood, has provided social support to respond to vulnerability in alternative ways. These conversations have woven around the data and analytic discussions over time, and our study of vulnerability has informed our own managerial learning. Later in the paper, we engage reflexively in how reconceptualising vulnerability has provided us opportunities for reforming managerial identity and learning.

### **Identity work and managerial learning**

Following Cunliffe (2008), we assume that we are ‘selves-in-relation-to-others’ (p.129). From this relational perspective, we conceive identity work as the dynamic processes through which meanings about how we understand ourselves and others are formed, maintained, revised or repaired (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) in particular social settings. A manager’s identity work involves constructing ‘notions of “manager”’ (Hay, 2014:511; Watson, 2008) and drawing on different and potentially competing ‘identity-making resources’ (Watson, 2008:129) including from ‘prevailing discourses and local ideational notions of who people are’ (McInnes & Corlett, 2012:27) and should be. We agree with Watson’s (2008) argument that the many discursive resources available to, and pressures upon, an individual make doing identity work unavoidable. However, we propose that, when vulnerability is reconceptualised as strength, pressures on managers to perform defensive identity work recede.

Conceptualising identity work as unavoidable is supported by the process view of “becoming” manager’ (Parker, 2004:46; Bryans & Mavin, 2003). Existing literature recognises identity work as an important part of managerial learning. Learning to become a manager entails constructing new meanings of and for the self (Bryans & Mavin, 2003) and

incorporating, or not, managerial social-identities into self-understandings (Watson, 2008). For example, in a formal managerial learning context of an MBA, Warhurst (2011) analyses student-managers' accounts of professional-to-manager transitions and illustrates how, for some, their 'elevation' (p.269) created concerns about meeting unachievable expectations and generated insecurities about their managerial identities that prompted identity work. Similarly, Hay (2014) was struck, in the interviews with her study's MBA alumni, by the tensions that managers experienced in learning to 'become managers' (p.514) which prompted her exploration of 'struggles' associated with negotiating self-identities and socially available managerial identities. Similarly, informal managerial learning involves identity work processes of taking on the habitus of managerial language and dress, and adhering (or appearing to adhere) to organisational values (Watson & Harris, 1999).

### **Conceptualising vulnerability in relation to managerial identity/work**

Existing identity literature considers the relationship between vulnerability and identity/work with identity scholars tending to position vulnerability as negatively associated with fragility and insecurity (Knights & Clarke, 2014; Thomas & Linstead, 2002) and exposure to harm (Knights & Clarke, 2014), for instance to self-doubt and failure (Clarke & Knights, 2018). Such negative conceptualising of vulnerability as weakness is often related to defensive identity work and the counter perspective we highlight remains under-appreciated. As literature relating vulnerability specifically to managerial identity/work is limited (for exceptions see Hay, 2014; Sims, 2003; Thomas & Linstead, 2002; Warhurst, 2011), we draw on wider Management and Organisation Studies (MOS) literature to discuss how vulnerability is currently conceptualised in three ways: firstly, as an existential, psychological and/or emotional condition which is often referred to simultaneously with or related to identity insecurity (e.g., Collinson, 2003:531; Knights & Clarke, 2014:337-8; Warhurst, 2011:269-270); secondly, as an occupational and/or structural condition giving rise to precarious identities (e.g. Clarke et al., 2012; Collinson,

2003; Kitay & Wright, 2007; Thomas & Linstead, 2002:80) and; thirdly, as an effect of identity-regulation processes (Clarke et al., 2012; Warhurst, 2011). Explaining the relationship between vulnerability and identity/work often incorporates multiple conceptualisations. For example, Storey, Salaman and Platman's (2005:1051) study highlights how the media freelance workers were 'acutely aware of their vulnerability in the labour market', which we interpret as vulnerability as occupational condition. As well as difficulties in maintaining work, Storey et al. (2005) explain the freelance workers' vulnerability as related also to potential rejection of work which, given its creative nature, could be perceived as personal rejection, thereby threatening self-esteem and psychological security, which we interpret as vulnerability conceived as psychological condition. Kitay and Wright (2007) also conceive vulnerability as a structural condition, for management consultants, and illustrate the relationship between identity and the 'structural constraint of vulnerability' arising from the threat of lack of demand for consulting work (pp.1634-5).

More specifically to our study of managerial identity work, existing identity research considers middle managers' 'uniquely vulnerable' position (Sims, 2003:1209), as an occupational or structural condition. For instance, Sims (2003:1195) explores the 'peculiar loneliness, precariousness and vulnerability' that characterise middle managers' lives, and Thomas and Linstead (2002:85) explain that middle managers may 'feel particularly vulnerable' during organisational restructuring because they are 'an easy target'. Finally, vulnerability conceived as a power effect of identity-regulation includes Warhurst's (2011) analysis of MBA students' 'insecurity with management identities' (p.269) and his questioning about whether 'such respondents were vulnerable people...[who] have been willing dupes of identity-regulation?' (p.270).

The managerial identity work literature has tended to associate vulnerability with insecurity and identity threat and to investigate how managers protect themselves against

vulnerability, for instance by doing defensive identity work. Vulnerability is not normally associated with ‘available’ managerial social-identities due to expectations of the manager being ‘in control, right and knowledgeable’ (Hay, 2014:512). Such expectations, which construct not only available but we argue, ‘acceptable’ managerial social-identities, are culturally associated with masculinity (Hay, 2014; Kerfoot & Knights, 1998; Simpson, 2007) and contrast with vulnerability, which is ‘culturally coded feminine’ (Butler & Gambetti, 2013:np) and associated with weakness. However, according to Deslandes (2018), modern post-Taylorian management science notions of the ‘manager’ and connotations of strength and power are very different from ancient and medieval theological understandings which have ‘almost completely disappeared from today’s analysis of management – to the detriment of managers themselves’ (p.2-3):

what we are told by the theologians who wrote about management...is that it is first characterized by a dose of negativity, weakness, struggle and the difficulties inherent in the task... Although managerial strength often appears to be omnipotent, flawless, effective, even irresistible, the reality is, in fact, less cut and dried. Managers are capable, but they are also fallible and vulnerable. (Deslandes, 2018:2)

Given the dominant masculinised managerial discourses shaping constructions of management, manager, and management education (Simpson, 2007), *not* displaying vulnerability is likely to be valued. Although Hay (2014) argues that recognising the limits of ‘available’ managerial identities, for example managerial impossibilities of being in total control and knowing everything, offers opportunities for more helpful forms of identity work, associations with ‘femininity’ may close down displays of vulnerability. Unsurprisingly then, managers experiencing vulnerability are likely to adopt a mask of invulnerability to defend themselves (Hay, 2014; Watson, 2008). We question whether such defensive responses to vulnerability support managerial identity or, indeed, as Raab (2004) argues, learning. Vulnerability, we propose, involves not seeking to protect oneself by engaging in defensive identity work but rather being open in acknowledging that it is human and ‘acceptable’ to, for

instance, lack knowledge sometimes. Indeed, Deslandes (2018:11) argues ‘[w]hen a manager...shows that they are strong enough to take off their mask of ‘glory’ that is when they become vulnerable, but at the same time capable’. Paradoxically, then, when vulnerability is reconceptualised as strength, more realistic managerial identities may be constructed (Hay, 2014), the need for managers to engage in defensive identity work is lessened, and opportunities for alternative ways of managerial being and learning are provided.

In further reconceptualising vulnerability, we draw on Judith Butler’s political theory of vulnerability (Butler 2003, 2004), complemented by Brené Brown’s (2012) extensive research on vulnerability. Butler’s interest in vulnerability, developed as an anti-war response to 9/11, primarily concerns a global politics perspective on social change. Butler’s ideas provoked us to think differently about vulnerability as experienced by managers in organisational settings. For example, Butler’s belief that understanding ‘something about the general state of fragility and vulnerability that people – as humans – live in’ might lead to ‘an entirely different politics’ (Stauffer, 2003:np) resonated with our aim to challenge notions and norms of managerial invulnerability<sup>1</sup>. We extrapolate Butler’s theory of vulnerability – involving: interdependency; risk of harm and loss *and* connection, through our relations to others; emotional expressions; power; and recognition – and consider its implications for managerial identity/work. Next, we summarise Butler’s theory, relating it, where relevant, to existing MOS identity literature.

### **Butler’s theory of relational vulnerability**

Our theoretical position that we are ‘selves-in-relation-to-others’ (Cunliffe, 2008:129) aligns with Butler’s social ontology that ‘dependency...defines us as social beings’ (Hark & Villa, 2011:204), and, like Butler, our conceptualisation of vulnerability is underpinned by interdependency (Hark & Villa, 2011). In MOS identity research, Knights and Clarke’s

(2014:337-8) discussion of 'the vulnerable self' emphasises the interdependent, and relational, nature of vulnerability:

Fragility (or the vulnerable self) is...closely intertwined with our sense of who we are...the self is fragile in that the confirmation of others necessary to our identity is uncertain, unpredictable and uncontrollable (Knights & Willmott, 1999).

Their discussion aligns with Butler's argument that 'vulnerability to others and susceptibility to being wounded' (Stauffer, 2003:np) originate from our attachment and exposure to others, and from being at risk of losing attachments and of being harmed from that exposure (Butler, 2003, 2004). Identity research acknowledges that individuals may experience harm and loss, for instance of a valued identity (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008), and engage in defensive identity work. For example, McInnes and Corlett (2012) interpret their case study manager's identity work as an attempt 'to repair his vulnerability in the face of the implied attack' (p.34) that he had failed in his managerial duties.

Whilst involving 'the capacity to be wounded', relational vulnerability also includes 'all the various ways in which we are moved, entered, touched' (Hark & Villa, 2011:200) and, therefore, is the 'birthplace' of, amongst other emotions, joy, empathy and belonging (Brown, 2012:34). Understanding vulnerability in this way surfaces both defensiveness and openness to enriching connections with, and support from, others. By attending to emotions which may, for instance, acknowledge loss, harm or connection, vulnerability can serve as 'one of the most important resources from which we must take our bearings and find our way' (Butler, 2003:19, 2004:30). However, social constructions of managerial identity typically exclude emotions expressing loss, anxiety, self-doubt and distress (Ybema et al, 2009; Beech, 2017) or, as Hay (2014) notes, 'available social identities of managers ensure these emotions are typically silenced' (p.512). Brown (2012) argues that we are losing our tolerance for emotions and hence for vulnerability. Articulating vulnerability through expressing emotions, if rendered possible, may offer alternative understandings of managerial ways of being.

Although a common condition, Butler (2003, 2004) argues that vulnerability is distributed differently with some people being more precarious than others (Butler, 2003, 2004; Hark & Villa, 2011). This aligns with our previous discussion of how the identity literature conceptualises vulnerability as occupational or structural condition. In making her points about the unequal distribution of vulnerability, and in/vulnerability as effects of power, Butler proposes a corollary differential distribution of grievability, depending on whether particular populations are considered ‘more or less dispensable’ (Hark & Villa, 2011:196). She continues that effects of power produce gender differences in that ‘certain populations are effectively “feminized” by being designated as vulnerable, and others are declared “masculine” through laying claim to impermeability’ (Hark & Villa, 2011:197). In other words, ‘the masculine position is effectively built through a denial of its own constitutive vulnerability’ (Hark & Villa, 2011:197). Identity regulation research mentions, but does not conceptualise, vulnerability as an effect of power. For example, Thornborrow and Brown’s (2009) study of disciplinary practices within the British Parachute Regiment illustrates how the constant process of self- and other-evaluation against the idealised identities produced by the Regiment rendered individuals vulnerable and ‘left many with an uncomfortable and lingering sense of falseness and insecurity’ (p.369).

To be mobilised as a resource for political agency (Butler & Gambetti, 2013), vulnerability has to be claimed and ‘recognised’ (Butler, 2003:30, 2004:43). Recognition is ‘perform[ed]...by making the claim...our utterance enacts the very recognition of vulnerability and shows the importance of recognition itself for sustaining vulnerability’ (Butler, 2003:30, 2004:43). Claiming vulnerability requires intersubjective recognition, or mutuality (Brown, 2012). However, culturally-prevalent norms (Butler, 2003:30, 2004:43) produce ‘no guarantee that this [recognition] will happen’. Nevertheless

when a vulnerability *is* recognized, that recognition has the power to change the meaning and structure of the vulnerability itself. ...Vulnerability takes on another meaning at the moment it is recognized, and recognition wields the power to reconstitute vulnerability (Butler, 2003:30, 2004:43).

By combining Butler's theory with MOS literature, we reconceptualise vulnerability and its relation to managerial identity/work as:

Relational processes, involving: interdependency; risk of harm and loss *and* connection, through our relations to others; emotional expressions; power; and recognition. When vulnerability is reconceptualised and recognised, conceptually and practically, as strength rather than weakness, more realistic and acceptable managerial identities may be constructed, and the need for managers to engage in defensive identity work is lessened.

We propose that when managers experience vulnerability, rather than engaging in defensive identity work, our reconceptualising may enable relational openness of their fragilities and limitations, and provide alternative ways of managerial being and learning. We return to this proposal in the findings and discussion, and next present the research approach.

## **Research Approach**

To illustrate our reconceptualisation of vulnerability, we draw upon data from a wider identity study on public-sector professionals' experiences of making a transition into, and progressing within, management (Author<sup>1</sup>, date). The four men and four women, who were drawn from three organisations (a UK local authority and two social housing organisations), were middle or senior managers (according to their self-descriptions). They were selected because of their significant managerial and professional experience, which reflected under-researched professional backgrounds, including library services, social work, architecture, chartered surveying, performing arts, teaching, youth service and social housing (Table 1). The number of years' professional and managerial experience, at the time of the first interview, ranged from

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<sup>1</sup> Author details withheld for anonymity purposes

14 to 30 years, with specific middle or senior management experience ranging from 1 to 15 years.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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In two stages of semi-structured interviews, held 12 months apart, the participants discussed their early and later career professional-managerial experiences. The participants' ongoing experiences of becoming manager were explored with questions in the first eight interviews, which lasted between 40-70 minutes, focussing on the individuals' professional backgrounds, how they had 'ended up' in their current managerial roles, and what 'being' a professional and a manager meant to them. Participants gave examples of professional and managerial 'critical incidents' (Chell, 2004) they had experienced. In the second eight interviews (conducted 12 months after the first round and lasting between 90-155 minutes) participants gave accounts of managerial incidents that had happened *since* the first interview, were reminded of the professional and managerial incidents discussed in the first interview, and elaborated upon one self-selected experience. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

Participants were not asked directly about vulnerability in either the first or the second interview. The focus on vulnerability emerged, in the wider study, through an iterative process of data interpretation and synthesis with existing research. An example of this process follows. During the first interview, Wendy observed: 'I've talked about being vulnerable an awful lot, haven't I?, and I don't think I'm particularly vulnerable but you know when you're out of your comfort [zone] that's when you start feeling vulnerable again'. In the original study report

(Author, date), the first author<sup>2</sup> reflected on a personal incident of vulnerability which occurred during Norman's first interview:

In response to my final question, asking him whether he'd like to say anything else, Norman discussed his lack of formal management training. Prior to the interview, Norman had participated in a management development workshop which I had facilitated and his comment about 'that management course is a bit of a worry though' prompted a defensive response from me. My initial question of 'why' was in anticipation of a possible criticism about the management development programme... (Author, Date:270)

At the time, the incident was theorised in terms of self-other positioning. However, we now interpret the first author's response as defensive identity work in the face of vulnerability experienced as perceived criticism and potential risk of harm to her professional and managerial reputation both as workshop facilitator and the development programme manager. The first author's previous management development relationship with six of the research participants, and the two-stage interview design, seemed to generate trust for participants to talk in depth about their experiences of managerial incidents and to open up the 'dangerous' topic of vulnerability.

Interpreting the combined first and second interview data, the first author was alerted to accounts of potential vulnerability. All participant transcripts were then reviewed and accounts were coded where participants used the term 'vulnerability/vulnerable' or related expressions (such as weakness, difficulty, powerless, exposed) and antonymous ones (for instance fight, battle, struggle, challenge, power). With hindsight, the detailed analysis appeared to support Butler's assertion that 'vulnerability can be shown or not shown' and that announcing impermeability may mask actual vulnerability (Hark & Villa, 2011:200).

From the combined sets of interviews between four and 12 accounts of vulnerability incidents for each participant were selected. Participants' accounts of vulnerability, when first

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<sup>2</sup> Formal passive form used for anonymity purposes but our preference is to use author's first name

becoming manager and on progressing within management, involved feeling responsible, feeling the weight of managing, needing to 'have the answers', challenges to authority, concerns about knowledge and ability, and lack of support. For this current research, we selected an account relating to vulnerability from each participant based on apparent significance. Significance was gauged by expressions such as: 'very angry' (Nina); 'a bit concern[ed]...worried' (Norman); 'vulnerable' and 'worrying' (Wendy); 'completely torn' (Barbara); 'anxious' (Tracy); 'not very sure' and 'uncomfortable' (Felicity); 'vulnerable' (John); 'incredibly vulnerable' (Edward). The first author analysed the selected accounts following narrative analysis methods that focussed on content, structure and form (Elliott, 2005; Riessman, 1993). All authors reviewed the analysis and, drawing iteratively on Butler's theory of relational vulnerability, debated how the accounts informed a reconceptualisation of vulnerability for managerial identity and learning. We re-read each account for content to illustrate the relational processes of vulnerability and interpreted the account's performative effect (Elliott, 2005) by focussing on how it was 'produced, recounted, and consumed' within the 'interactional' context (p.38) of the interview. This involved us paying attention, for instance, to how participants used direct speech, repetition, or 'asides' and switched personal pronoun to give the account a performative quality (Riessman, 1993).

Patterns within and across the eight participants' accounts began to emerge and we developed explanations for these, by moving iteratively between the data and existing literature. We refined our interpretations by engaging in 'negative case analysis' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) which involved revising our theorising through insights gained from 'negative evidence' (p.323), that is data which do not seem to fit with existing or our own emergent theoretical propositions. Norman's account stood out as a 'negative case', in recognising vulnerability in terms of positive self-regard. Interpreting this account more closely in relation

to the others influenced our contention that vulnerability has value for managerial identity and learning.

From our analysis across the data, we surfaced three interrelated processes of relational vulnerability: 1) recognising and claiming vulnerability; 2) developing social support to share vulnerability with trusted others, and; 3) recognising alternative ways of reconceptualising and responding to vulnerability. As we aim to provide empirical illustrations of our reconceptualization of vulnerability for managerial identity and learning, we present three accounts from John, Nina and Norman. We have selected these accounts because they provide men and women's experiences, and offer 'compelling bits of data...that effectively illustrate' (Pratt, 2009:860), we believe, the three processes of relational vulnerability. For conceptual clarity, each account focuses on one identified process. However, the three interrelated processes of our reconceptualisation of vulnerability, together with those identified from Butler's work – of: risk of harm and loss *and* connection, through our relations to others; emotional expressions; power; and recognition – can be seen in all three accounts. Table 2 summarises the interrelated processes of relational vulnerability drawing upon additional empirical accounts. Next, we turn to the data illustrations and consider the implications for managerial identity, identity work and learning.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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### **Processes of relational vulnerability**

#### ***Recognising and claiming vulnerability***

To mobilise the generative capacity of vulnerability for managerial identity and learning, it has to be recognised and claimed. During the interviews, participants recognised and claimed vulnerability through emotional expressions of, for example, anxiety, distress, foolishness, and

marginalisation (Table 2). Participants also expressed claims of vulnerability as (risk of) harm, for instance to one's 'good' name, professional reputation, or relationship with others, and as loss of, for instance, a valued social identity, such as manager through reorganisation, and of one's rights (Table 2). Participants acknowledged vulnerability as related to power relative to others and considered acts of perceived discrimination as effects of power (Table 2).

Participants may have made claims of vulnerability only in the 'safe' interview space. For example, John closed the second interview by saying: 'Thank you once again [first author name]...cos as I say it's not typical [to talk like this]...I don't do this very often, I don't do it at all to be honest so it's nice to be able to get things off my chest and talk about that'. However, the accounts suggest that some participants' attempts at claiming vulnerability in the workplace were not recognised by others. For example, when defending her service area and, therefore, her managerial identity from being cut in a strategic review, Tracy explained how she 'did say to him [her line manager] "you know that service has saved this Authority thousands"...[but] I didn't get a strong message of the service being valued' (Tracy) (Table 2). Across the accounts, participants recognised and claimed vulnerability through expressions of lack of recognition or mis-recognition by others. Others' lack of or mis-recognition, which seemed to exacerbate a manager's sense of vulnerability, included lack of interest in or contempt towards self by others (as illustrated by Barbara's claim of being 'just completely ignor[ed]' by the 'men in a group'), mis-recognition of one's actions, and being perceived negatively by others (Table 2).

We now illustrate the relational processes of recognising and claiming vulnerability with John's account. We have selected this account as providing compelling data (Pratt, 2009) of recognising and claiming vulnerability, and also of the other relational processes of vulnerability, in his case of the absence of social support and a lack of alternative ways of responding. John claims vulnerability through expressing: emotions, for example of isolation

and marginalisation; harm to his 'good' name; hierarchical power differentials and; mis-recognition of his actions and in being perceived negatively by others. To provide contextual background to the account, John, who had joined the Council as a librarian 17 years prior to the first interview, had been a middle manager for five years, managing the Council's externally-funded education service. John described how 'I'm a little bit marginalised within [my] service' and how this marginalisation had been exaggerated by his line manager's long-term sickness absence. John gave an account of 'a big issue' relating to changes in Government funding for learning and in Council policy that 'I've largely had to pilot myself' and which was:

an area where I need some support...I feel sort of vulnerable...in that area

He elaborated:

I felt very isolated in having that battle because I realised I was up against people who in the Council hierarchy are higher than me (slight laughter) you know, and coming across as the bad guy when actually all I was doing was protecting the Council's interests by making sure there was a sense of probity in using [external funding] money...I feel in some ways unfairly castigated as the bad guy in this so I am seen as that and at times it just seems isolating, you know, you just feel in some ways it shouldn't be [John] that's doing this, it should be the [Service] in the name of the Council, that's the difference...it's cast me into that role of being the guardian or the watchdog of the money...and that's a bit of a difficult role...it's not a natural role for me but there again I think there's no choice, so I've got to do it...what I would like to happen is to be able to explain the situation...and feel there was a weight of support behind me but there isn't

John's reference to 'that battle' emphasises risk of harm and his self-positioning to others in 'the Council hierarchy' illustrates vulnerability as a power effect. John repeats others' positioning of him as 'the bad guy' which emphasises the loss of a valued 'good guy' social identity (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). Gabriel (2000:72) argues that 'individuals construct their identities...on the basis of the injustices done to them'. John expresses injustice by highlighting the mis-recognition of his actions, in being 'unfairly castigated' when 'actually all I was doing was protecting the Council's interests'.

John's account illustrates how "when we are vulnerable to others, and we say so, we are...letting them know...that we are at risk" (Hark & Villa, 2011, p. 201). However, the 'petition' for intersubjective recognition (Butler; 2003, 2004), or mutuality (Brown, 2012), of his vulnerability seems to go unrecognised in the workplace context, as does his expressed need for support. Without either intersubjective recognition of his claim or social support to share his vulnerability with others, we interpret John's response as normatively expected, in that he engages in defensive identity work. For instance, his statement 'there's no choice' enables him to reposition himself from 'the baddy' to the victim (Gabriel, 2000). 'Taking on' the victim positioning, and stating that 'it should be the [Service] in the name of the Council' that is seen to be 'doing this' enables John to re-construct the situation as one where he has been 'wronged' (Garcia & Hardy, 2007:381) and, thereby, to repair his loss of integrity.

Within John's account we see possibilities for recognising alternative ways of conceptualising and responding to vulnerability which may have been frustrated in this particular situation because of lack of mutuality and social support. John's defensive self-positioning as victim may also be interpreted as resistance to an alternative positioning as 'the guardian' which, as an invulnerable 'Viking' (Brown, 2012:155), reinforces dominant masculine expectations and about which John expresses limitations in that it is 'a bit of a difficult role'. John recognises that the 'available' managerial identity as 'the guardian or watchdog of the money' is 'not a natural role for me'. Through this statement John acknowledges his limitations and is claiming that he is 'fallible and vulnerable' (Deslandes, 2018:2). Had John felt 'a weight of support behind me', he might have expressed openly his weakness. In such a supportive social situation, the need for defensive identity work in response to the perceived 'unrealistic demands' (Hay, 2014:521) expressed by 'it's cast me into that role', and the need to demonstrate 'strength' communicated through 'I've got to do it', may have been lessened. Recognising and claiming vulnerability, and having it recognised by

others, may have offered possibilities for the ‘limits of available managerial identities’ (Hay, 2014: 521) to be acknowledged, and supportive learning to be enabled.

A lack of social support seemed to exacerbate John’s vulnerability, as illustrated by his observation (Table 2) that ‘it would be nice sometimes to have someone take an interest in what you’re doing and I don’t get a lot of that’. We now consider developing social support as the second relational process of our reconceptualisation of vulnerability.

### *Developing social support to share vulnerability with trusted others*

A further relational process of vulnerability across the accounts was how participants talked to others about the particular incident or expressed an unfulfilled desire for social support. In talking to their manager, colleague, peer or mentor, participants sought support for their perception of the situation and for considering alternative or future actions (Table 2). Such social support provided comfort in dealing with the emotional and power effects of the experienced vulnerability. For example, Barbara explained how ‘I had to talk to my mentor about it, cos it had such an impact on me...the mentor said I think a lot of people in your situation would feel the same way’ (Table 2).

We have selected an extract from Nina’s account to illustrate developing social support to share vulnerability with trusted others. Like John who had unfulfilled social support needs, Nina explicitly referred to a lack of social support at the time of the incident: ‘when that incident happened I felt a bit isolated because I would have liked to have thought I had a colleague who I could have talked about that to, you know, at my level’. However, Nina did share her vulnerability with the peer who was involved in the incident. Before we turn to the account, for contextual background, Nina had 25 years’ experience as a ‘field worker’, including 11 years as a senior worker, within the youth service of the same UK local authority. Three years prior to the first interview, Nina became one of three senior managers within the council’s youth service. In the context of ‘settling-in’ to the new senior management team,

Nina gave an account of a service-area decision that ‘should have involved’ her. In recognising her vulnerability, Nina expresses feelings of anger, disappointment, frustration and resentment (her emphasis underlined):

there was a meeting where a decision was made, that should have involved me in a tri-partite discussion and didn’t, a decision was made I felt over my head and I’d never questioned that anyone would question the equality of our roles in terms of being decision makers, I got very angry about that situation and it took me back to (slight laughter) when I first started out in my first professional post feeling that anger disappointment frustration like (slight sigh in voice) I couldn’t find a way out and I was thinking then (low voice) I started thinking just a minute (slight laughter) I didn’t get to here to feel like this...it would have been easier just to let the situation carry on but I refused to do that and I did challenge the person and...when I questioned the person I do not think it was anything to do with that person feeling that they were more senior than me at all, I think it was to do with the fact that they had been told that they had to get the situation sorted out, do you know what I mean? It was a pressure on that person to sort the situation out and they’d just made this decision...I am a member of this team, I’m not an invisible member of this team...when that incident happened I felt a bit isolated because I would have liked to have thought I had a colleague who I could have talked about that to, you know, at my level

For us the managerial identity being worked on here was Nina’s equal role as a senior manager and decision maker. Nina recognises her marginalisation through dis-claiming her positioning as an ‘invisible member of this team’, an identity threat that provoked strong emotions of anger. Brown (2012) explains how anger serves as a socially-acceptable mask for more difficult underlying emotions, and Gabriel (2000) suggests that anger is commonly an emotional response to injustice and unfairness. Nina expresses vulnerability by articulating anger and claiming ‘I didn’t get to here to feel like this’. ‘Here’ could reflect her current position in the organisational hierarchy or her life/career stage but, in either case, she conveys shock at being exposed to such a feeling. Relating her current vulnerability to ‘when I first started out in my first professional post’ suggests a lingering sense of vulnerability associated with the (then) anxiety and powerlessness in being able ‘to find a way out’ and a current disorientation of self which, according to Butler (2003:19, 2004:30), may provide a ‘resource from which [to] take [one’s] bearings and find [one’s] way’.

Nina denies that her peer's actions resulted from their perceived seniority. However, the potential status and associated power differential seem to have heightened her sense of relational vulnerability. Nina considered two ways of responding of 'letting the situation carry on' or to 'challenge the person'. By choosing the second way, although Nina recognises and claims vulnerability, she responds to it by engaging in defensive identity work. For instance, challenging and questioning her colleague enabled Nina to propose an alternative interpretation of the cause of the problem, by expressing a changed perception about her colleague's motives and behaviour. Therefore, sharing her vulnerability opened up new understanding about the colleague's situation, including appreciating the 'demanding expectations' (Hay, 2014; 510) and 'pressure on that colleague to sort the situation out', which we interpret as dominant masculine-coded discourses of being decisive and taking action. The value of vulnerability, as openness about limitations, for managerial identity is apparent in how Nina reframes the situation as not being about self-other positioning but a pressure on the colleague to act. Such reframing may enable Nina to appreciate 'the violence inherent to the discourse of 'strength', particularly with its masculine associations' (Deslandes, 2018:8) and to support her colleague and herself in the future, in resisting the 'pressure' generated by unrealistic managerial social-identities (Hay, 2014). We see further opportunities for recognising alternative ways of conceptualising and responding to vulnerability in Nina's account. Her first considered option, of 'letting the situation carry on', may have allowed her both to be open to the attack on her managerial identity, as a decision maker, and to not be attached to it. Such a response to vulnerability might have lessened the need for defensive identity work.

Although Nina talked to her colleague, she expressed an unfulfilled desire to share her vulnerability with a trusted other person. Developing social support with trusted others enabled managers both to reflect on their responses to vulnerability and to recognise alternative ways of conceptualising and responding to it, which we now discuss.

### ***Recognising alternative ways of conceptualising and responding to vulnerability***

Norman's account stood out as an exception in how he emphasised the importance of having social support for responding to vulnerability differently and contrary to normative expectations: 'it was the opposite of that, as you move through to [current service area] that you realise that sometimes it doesn't matter if you don't quite know what you want, it doesn't lessen you as a professional'. Norman, a middle manager with responsibility for managing multi-professional building projects, has worked in the same Council for 30 years. A 'quite powerful' director managed Norman in his early career as an architect. Norman referred to this director in the selected account of a then recent meeting with stakeholders, to discuss a new building design, where Norman felt confident that 'I don't have to have the vision all the time'. Norman reflects:

some time ago that [not having a vision] would have been a bit of a concern cos I'd felt I've got to be strong here...I'd be worried that I'd have a room of people who didn't know where they were going and I'm meant to be guiding them...since the last five or six years...I have the confidence that...I don't have to, myself, know where we are going...it might have concerned me earlier because you felt that you were the professional and you were therefore meant to be in control...and I think it goes back to probably Architectural Services, and our Director of Architectural Services was quite powerful, or what he said was what people wanted and therefore the rest of his staff took on this same sort of arrogance...and it was the opposite of that, as you move through to [current service area] that you realise that sometimes it doesn't matter if you don't quite know what you want, it doesn't lessen you as a professional...the arrogance of saying what you want, that isn't professionalism at all, it's actually the skills in achieving that vision to fruition, that's what your professionalism is about...it's a different way of operating.

For us, the identity work here concerned what being a professional architect-manager means. Focussing on Norman's professional identity may seem irrelevant to our purposes of considering managerial identity and learning. However, 'a degree of managerial social capital would seem to attach automatically to strong professional identities' (Warhurst, 2011:269). Therefore, constructing a managerial identity for professionals becoming managers, as in our study, is linked inextricably with professional identity constructions.

We interpreted Norman's account as a negative case as the emotions expressing vulnerability are not extreme nor imply weakness. Norman did not talk of being exposed presently to harm and he has a positive self-understanding. In shaping his construction of an architect-manager, Norman reflected on now-resolved situations and he may have downplayed, as 'a bit of a concern', the previously-experienced emotions of anxiety when he could not visualise client need. We interpret this as Norman's recognition of past vulnerability, associated normatively with negative emotions, in a previous context *and* as vulnerability, associated with positive emotions, in his current context. His repetition of 'concern'/'concerned' and expression of being 'worried' illustrate that previous experiences were associated with anxiety. Sources of anxiety relate to his and others' (including his director's) expectations of his behaviour in meetings: 'I've got to be strong here', 'I'm meant to be guiding them' and 'you felt that you were the professional and you were therefore meant to be in control'. Such expectations fit with normative masculinised understandings of managerial identity (Hay, 2014) and of vulnerability as 'culturally coded feminine' (Butler & Gambetti, 2013:np). Through the defensive identity work tactic of pejoratively constructing the director and 'the rest of his staff', Norman differentiated himself (Garcia & Hardy, 2007).

We selected Norman's account to illustrate alternative ways of conceptualising and responding to vulnerability – as strength rather than weakness, and as relational and emotional openness rather than defensiveness – and to appreciate the learning possibilities that vulnerability offers. Norman's previous experiences of vulnerability, involving differentiated power and masculinised expectations of control, provide 'a point of identification' (Butler, 2003:10, 2004:30) for his current understanding of self 'as a professional' within the changed relational context of his current service area that is the 'opposite of that'. Recognising and claiming vulnerability, by admitting to 'not quite knowing what you want', enabled Norman to practise a 'different way of operating'. Norman's 'confidence that...I don't have to, myself,

know where we are going' directly resonates with the notion of managers' 'negative capabilities', which Deslandes (2018:8) advocates, in that Norman acknowledges 'the impossibility of knowing everything' (Deslandes, 2018:9). Vulnerability expressed in this way no longer has perceived negative associations and the form of 'weak' management (Deslandes, 2018) which Norman practised in this situation was itself a strength that enabled him to respond differently and openly to alternative notions of managerial identity, and new ways of knowing and behaving.

### **Valuing vulnerability for managerial identity and learning**

Having illustrated our reconceptualisation of vulnerability and its relational processes, we discuss the value of recognising vulnerability as strength and openness for re-constructing acceptable managerial identities, and consider its practical utility for managerial learning. We close with an author reflexive account, which exemplifies further the practical value of vulnerability for managerial identity and learning.

#### *Valuing vulnerability for managerial identity*

As a discourse for managerial identity, our reconceptualising of vulnerability is not about weakness and self-defence, but about strength and openness with trusted and supportive others so that alternative ways of responding can be fostered. Culturally, given that dominant masculinised discourses associate vulnerability with, for instance, strength, control and being knowledgeable, alternative ways of conceptualising and responding to vulnerability need to become established as part of 'appropriate' (Hay, 2014) and, we propose, 'acceptable' managerial social identities. For instance, Norman dissociated from normative expectations of 'being strong' and 'in control' by consciously allowing the design vision to emerge in the meeting. Our reading of Norman's account is that his confident acceptance of not-knowing enabled him to appreciate that 'ideals of expertise' are unrealistic (Clarke & Knights, 2018:1). Such a reconceptualising and response to vulnerability aligns with Deslandes' (2018:8)

advocacy of notions of ‘negative capabilities’ and the ‘good enough manager’. Recognising that he was ‘enough’ (Brown, 2012:115) enabled Norman to ‘take off the mask’ (p.115), and disengage from defensive identity work. Rather, with recognition and openness, he embraced vulnerability and *rested a while* to allow the situation to unfold. Raab (2004) talks about the ‘courage to remain vulnerable’, to work with, for instance, the anxiety of one’s unknowingness, ‘to harness its energy, rather than to flee from it’ and to practise ‘passive alertness’ (p.269). We propose that such responses to vulnerability need to be recognised conceptually as acceptable managerial social identities. Embracing vulnerability reconceptualised in this way will enable managers to reject the unrealistic expectations of normatively understood ‘acceptable’ managerial social identities. As the need to mask vulnerability as weakness diminishes so does the need to perform defensive identity work, enabling the manager to be open, including to learning.

Our reconceptualisation of vulnerability presents a constructive challenge to MOS literature, in opposing dominant, masculinised notions of managerial social identities as comprising ‘being-able-to’ (Harrison, 2008). Indeed, Harrison (2008:424) argues ‘such a predisposition toward meaning bestowing intentional action...[means] that vulnerability remains largely un-thought in the current theoretical lexicon’ within Anglo-American social science. Responding alternatively to vulnerability may be particularly challenging in certain hegemonic structural conditions and power relations, and may be inappropriate in some contexts. For instance, as one reviewer questioned, would we want the surgeon who is about to operate on us to disclose how vulnerable they feel about doing the operation? Such openness might undermine patient trust in the surgeon’s technical competence. However, when the surgeon is *managing* the operation (alongside performing the technical aspects) vulnerability is vitally important. For instance allowing lower status team members to point out an error becomes possible when a surgeon shares vulnerability with colleagues. The consequences of

making managerial errors might be less dramatic but no less significant for managerial identity in other workplace contexts. Our argument is that managerial identity can be more creative and constructive when conceptualising and practising vulnerability as strength and openness become the norm.

### *Valuing vulnerability for managerial learning*

Reconceptualising vulnerability as relational highlights how sharing vulnerability with trusted others is important for managerial learning for a number of reasons. First, learning occurs through relational processes, such as reflexive conversations (Cunliffe, 2008; Corlett, 2013), and sharing vulnerability enables meaning making, critical self-reflexivity, and becoming aware of and changing one's language use (Corlett, 2013). Changing the language of vulnerability, away from weakness to strength, will enable managers to be more reflexive.

Second, sharing vulnerability with others provides a safe environment where managers can engage in non-defensive identity work. Coaching and mentoring conversations, learning sets, and classroom-based discussions provide such environments. Learning sets with managers from different sectors, for example nursing and education, might be particularly valuable for sharing vulnerability, as alternative conceptualisations might be more culturally-acceptable in such contexts. Accounts of teaching practices (such as Mazen, Jones & Sergenian, 2000; Raab, 2004; Sinclair, 2007) support our proposal to develop 'a different understanding of the role of vulnerability in the learning process' (Mazen et al. 2000:147), for instance in accepting vulnerability as a 'necessary condition to learn' (p.159). Understanding that '[i]t's what you do about your own vulnerability, and how you react to others' vulnerability that is really important' enabled student-leaders to engage with deeper personal learning (Sinclair, 2007:467). Future research might utilise non-research contexts where managers may be open about their vulnerability, such as coaching conversations and learning sets, to explore further the implications of recognising and claiming vulnerability for managerial identity and learning.

Third, whilst we advocate managers being open about their vulnerabilities in supportive contexts, sharing ‘our feelings and experiences with people who have earned the right to hear them’ (Brown, 2012:45) is important. Furthermore, that ‘we need to feel trust to be vulnerable and we need to be vulnerable in order to trust’ (Brown, 2012:47) reinforces the relational processes of vulnerability. Such mutuality of vulnerability (Brown, 2012) builds connection with others, and managers may develop social support to share vulnerability with trusted others, *and* offer such support to those they manage. For Butler, vulnerability ‘can make us sensitive to the needs of the other but equally, under conditions of psychological defence, the denial of our own vulnerability can blind us to the vulnerability of the other’ (Kenny, 2015:628). Therefore, managers need to recognise and claim their own vulnerabilities before they can acknowledge them in others. Future research might explore how recognising, claiming and responding to vulnerability, as strength and openness, might become ‘embedded in the everyday relationally-responsive dialogical practices of leaders’ (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011:1425). As managers share vulnerability and practise compassion for others, then culturally-coded discourses of vulnerability and local work cultures may be challenged and changed.

*Practising vulnerability for managerial identity and learning: Author reflexivity*

Before concluding, we offer below the first author’s reflections on a recent experience to illustrate how reconceptualising vulnerability, as strength and openness, has provided opportunities for re-constructing ‘acceptable’ managerial identity, for responding differently and for learning.

The concept of vulnerability featured in my doctorate and, since then, I have developed my understanding of its relationship to identity/work through academic research and my experiences as a yoga practitioner. For example, my guided meditations include letting go of attachment to thoughts and feelings.

Whilst I believe theoretically in vulnerability, practising it at work is another matter. I recently moved from a university, where I had worked for 23 years, to another to form a new team with four former-institution colleagues. I have a wealth of teaching,

research and managerial experience relevant to the new team, which is focussed on leadership development with external organisations, but do not have current business networks. Comparing my colleagues' practices of leading external networks with my own lack has been making me feel vulnerable. In an internal meeting, when my colleagues introduced themselves and referred to their networks, I described myself as 'very different'. I was aware of my defensive self-presentation, provoked by feelings of inadequacy.

A breakthrough in recognising and claiming vulnerability, as openness rather than defensiveness, occurred a week later. My manager and another team member asked if feeling 'different' bothered me. Initially I said no but, again recognising my defensive response, then admitted that it did. My colleagues had recently read this paper, which provided a language for talking alternatively about vulnerability. In our open conversation, my manager shared her own vulnerabilities, for instance in not having a 'fully worked-out' team strategy, which we all acknowledged as unrealistic at this stage. Within the team, then, we appreciate the reconceptualisation of vulnerability proposed here and have developed social support that allows us to claim and mutually recognise it.

## **Conclusion**

We have proposed that current conceptualisations of vulnerability are associated with weakness, due to normative masculine notions of the 'manager' as being strong, in control and knowledgeable. Such conceptualisations typically evoke defensive identity work that is unlikely to foster managerial learning. By translating Butler's (2003, 2004) macro-level political theory of vulnerability to micro-level managerial practice, we have reconceptualised vulnerability as relational processes, involving recognising and claiming vulnerability, developing social support to share vulnerability with trusted others, and recognising alternative ways of reconceptualising and responding to vulnerability. Whilst the data illustrations are drawn from a small sample of UK managers, our work offers rare glimpses into managers' experiences of vulnerability and we hope the accounts resonate, as they did with us, with managers in others contexts. Furthermore our work demonstrates the generative capacity of vulnerability, as strength and openness, for managerial identity and learning. Our reconceptualising of vulnerability challenges dominant masculinised notions of managerial social identities. As managers share vulnerability and practice compassion for others, then

culturally-coded discourses of vulnerability may be challenged and changed, and the need for defensive identity work will be lessened. Furthermore, the role of vulnerability for learning, as relational processes and human/managerial conditions, may be fully realised.

### **Endnote**

1. To provide further context, but without wanting to present ourselves as victims of journal publishing processes (Knights & Clarke, 2014), we started working with Butler's ideas in response to comments in an earlier review (to a different journal). As noted by the current reviewers, we have always tried to remain open and make 'very good use of referees' comments to improve the paper' (Reviewer 1). Although crafting our work has exposed our vulnerabilities, for instance in not always making our points coherently (Reviewer 3), the process of co-authoring, and of recognising, sharing and supporting our mutual vulnerabilities, has enabled us continue with the project to this point.

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**Table 1: Participant profiles**

<b>Participant (pseudonym)</b>	<b>Professional background</b>	<b>Number of years' experience as a professional/manager</b>	<b>Number of years' experience as a middle/senior manager (MM/SM) at time of 1<sup>st</sup> interview</b>
Nina	Youth worker	25	3 years (SM)
Edward	Social worker	25	5 years (SM)
Norman	Architect	30	1 year (MM)
Felicity	Professional performing artist and teacher	14	2 years (MM)
Wendy	Quantity surveyor	17	1 year (SM)
Tracy	Secondary school teacher and education specialist	28	15 years (SM)
Barbara	Housing manager	21	4 years (SM)
John	Librarian	17	5 years (MM)

**Table 2: Processes of relational vulnerability**

<b>Recognising and claiming vulnerability through expression of ...</b>			
<b>Emotions</b>	<b>Harm and loss</b>	<b>Power differentials</b>	<b>Lack of/mis-recognition</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anger (Nina)</li> <li>• Anxiety (Tracy), Concern (Norman, Wendy), (dis)comfort (Felicity), worry (Norman), fear (John)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ e.g. ‘I feel quite comfortable in the fact that it is [my] problem... and there is a solution...the uncomfortable feeling is that I’m not entirely certain about the ground rules, you know, have I got it right?’ (Felicity)</li> <li>○ e.g. ‘I was really chewed up about it’ (Tracy)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Discredit (Edward)</li> <li>• Disappointment (Nina)</li> <li>• Disgust (Barbara), sickness (Edward), nausea (Barbara)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ e.g. ‘[it] was just nauseating...I felt sick, I felt sick [for] weeks’ (Barbara)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Displeasure (Edward, Barbara, Felicity),</li> <li>• Distress (Edward, Felicity), pain (Edward, Barbara), agony (Edward, Barbara, Felicity)</li> <li>• Embarrassment (Edward)</li> <li>• Exposure (Edward, Wendy)</li> <li>• Foolishness (Edward)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Absence of) harm to professional reputation (Edward, Norman)</li> <li>• Harm to a relationship (Felicity)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ e.g. ‘I like there to be peace and harmony and...that person is going to end up...highly distressed and completely let down by this organisation’ (Felicity)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Harm to one’s ‘good’ name (John)</li> <li>• Loss of integrity (John, Edward, Barbara)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ e.g. ‘I was completely torn between my loyalties to the organization and my own integrity’ (Barbara)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Loss of managerial responsibility (Tracy)</li> <li>• Loss of one’s rights (e.g. of equality as a woman) (Barbara, Nina)</li> <li>• Loss of valued social identity (John, Barbara, Tracy)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ e.g. ‘I was becoming anxious that I couldn’t really see the service that I had</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived discrimination e.g. as a women (Barbara, Nina)</li> <li>• Powerlessness in relation to ‘powerful’ others (Tracy, Edward, Norman, Wendy)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ e.g. ‘my anxiety was [line manager] was quite powerful in all of this’ (Tracy)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Occupational norms and expectations (Felicity, Norman, Wendy)</li> <li>• Status in relation to others, e.g. hierarchical difference (John, Edward, Nina)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ e.g. ‘you know what these judge characters are like, they think they’re god and behave like god, so I was made to feel about an inch high’ (Edward)</li> <li>○ e.g. ‘the higher up the organization you go the more vulnerable you are in that role’ (Wendy)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of recognition by others, e.g. on grounds of equal status, self/service worth (Edward, Barbara, Nina, Norman, Tracy)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ e.g. ‘I didn’t get a strong message of the service being valued’ (Tracy)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Lack of recognition – lack of interest in self by others (John, Tracy)</li> <li>• Lack of recognition – contempt towards self by others (Barbara)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ e.g. ‘getting up as men in a group and getting a cup of coffee and you getting up with them and just completely ignoring you’ (Barbara)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Mis-recognition of one’s actions by others (John, Wendy)</li> <li>• Mis-recognition – being perceived negatively by others (John, Felicity)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ e.g. ‘I don’t want to be the baddy in that one’ (Felicity)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Recognition as positive self-regard               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ e.g. not knowing ‘doesn’t lessen you as a professional’ (Norman)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 'I'd been so belittled and, you know, been made [to look] so foolish and it was a horrible experience' (Edward)</li> <li>● Frustration (Nina)</li> <li>● Inadequacy (Barbara, Felicity, Norman, Wendy)</li> <li>● Isolation (John)</li> <li>● Loss (Tracy)</li> <li>● Passion (Tracy)</li> <li>● Resentment (Nina)</li> <li>● Strength (Edward, Norman)</li> <li>● Marginalisation (John, Nina)</li> <li>● Uncertainty (Felicity)</li> <li>● Vulnerability (Edward, Wendy)</li> </ul>	<p>responsibility for anywhere' (Tracy)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Loss of 'visibility' as a team member (Nina)</li> </ul>		
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**Table 2: Processes of relational vulnerability (contd)**

<b>Developing social support to share vulnerability with trusted others ...</b>
<p><i>Social support un/available to share vulnerability</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support from one's manager/colleague/peer/mentor:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ 'it was good to hear that my Chief Exec would have disliked it as well' (Barbara)</li><li>○ 'I had to talk to my mentor about it, cos it had such an impact on me...the mentor said I think a lot of people in your situation would feel the same way' (Barbara)</li><li>○ 'I said to the other woman "that was just shit" and she said "tell me about it"' (Barbara)</li><li>○ 'the manager that I'd brought in, I had a previous working relationship with him, we had a very similar professional base and so we were able to talk about the situation' (Edward)</li><li>○ 'I do fly off the handle at the lads, at the moment, in the quantity surveying section but they know me and we get on so well...but there could be other people I react that [way] to and then suddenly I'm accused of bullying them' (Wendy)</li><li>○ 'I'll certainly have talked it over with somebody'(Wendy)</li></ul></li><li>• Lack of support from a manager/colleague/peer/mentor:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ 'I'm not very sure about this sickness dismissal, I need support for that one' (Felicity)</li><li>○ 'it would be nice sometimes to have someone take an interest in what you're doing and I don't get a lot of that' (John)</li><li>○ 'what I would like to happen is to be able to explain the situation...and feel there was a weight of support behind me but there isn't' (John)</li><li>○ 'when that incident happened I felt a bit isolated because I would have liked to have thought I had a colleague who I could have talked about that to, you know, at my level' (Nina)</li><li>○ 'my anxiety was [line manager] was quite powerful in all of this...I did say to him "you know that service has saved this Authority thousands"...[but] I didn't get a strong message of the service being valued' (Tracy)</li></ul></li></ul>

**Table 2: Processes of relational vulnerability (contd)**

<b>Recognising alternative ways of conceptualising and responding to vulnerability ...</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of recognition of alternative ways of responding<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ 'I don't think any of these men around this table would give me any time, they were just so full of themselves and so power mad and so power driven, I would have just been swept alongside...I would have a go at it but they would just gobble me up and spit me out' (Barbara)</li><li>○ 'it shouldn't be [me] that's doing this, it should be the [Service name] in the name of the Council' (John)</li></ul></li><li>• Recognition of alternative ways of responding<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ 'I then went up to be interviewed by the Coroner and I'd just decided there's no point trying to adopt a defensive position here, I'm just going to have to basically say it as it is...one part of me thought that I need to defend the organisation, another part of me realised that if I attempt to do I would be seen as defensive' (Edward)</li><li>○ 'it was the opposite of that, as you move through to [current service area] that you realize that sometimes it doesn't matter if you don't quite know what you want, it doesn't lessen you as a professional' (Norman)</li></ul></li></ul>